

United States Senate

June 27, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Thank you for your leadership advancing critical rail priorities in New Jersey and throughout the Northeast Corridor. The progress we are making today on the Gateway Program, in particular, promises to deliver fast, safe, and reliable service to commuters and passengers throughout New Jersey and the entire region, while also boosting the economic competitiveness of the entire country.

While I am pleased about the ongoing investments in and construction on the Northeast Corridor, we must do more to improve the experience of rail passengers on the Corridor this summer, including the tens of thousands of New Jerseyans who rely on NJ TRANSIT each day to commute to work.

In the latest of a string of shutdowns in just over one month, trains in New Jersey and New York came to a halt this past Thursday evening—effectively shutting down a 150-mile stretch of the Northeast Corridor. This event stemmed from a failure of the electrical systems powering the trains on the hottest day of the year thus far, disrupting Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT service during peak hours. Following those mass delays, a series of related shutdowns severely impacted commuters on Friday morning and into this week. While I understand that investigations into each particular incident are ongoing, it is apparent that the nearly century-old wire infrastructure that expands, sags, and falters under extreme heat is the primary cause of many of these shutdowns.

The resulting economic losses for businesses, and the frustrating loss of time for tens of thousands of our constituents, cannot be recovered. These serious impacts necessitate immediate action to avoid ongoing disruptions throughout the rest of the busy and ever-hotter summer months.

I urge you to act now to address the electrical infrastructure needs that will help to mitigate further disruptions. The USDOT should direct funding, including grants or available transit funds, to support work to maintain and rehabilitate the aging infrastructure, including upkeep, repair, and replacement of the overhead catenary wires.

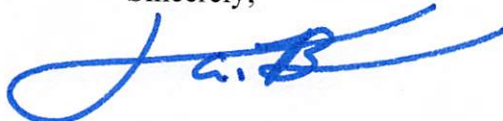
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Keeping the aging and sagging overhead wires that are being battered by extreme heat working throughout the summer is an urgent priority to which USDOT, in coordination with Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT, should direct considerable focus and resources. As Amtrak continues to ramp up its investments in the corridor, I ask that USDOT also conduct an assessment of the workforce needs, including any potential training, hiring, and recruiting that would help address the electrical challenges facing the Northeast Corridor.

These disruptions have taken place during an early-summer brutal heat wave across the Northeast that has led to active heat warnings and advisories, just as experts warn that New Jersey is warming faster than any other state in the region and that extreme heat events will continue to become longer and more frequent. This extreme heat, driven by climate change, will continue to increasingly strain our transportation systems further and for longer durations, and we must have a plan to address this issue.

Thank you in advance for your prompt reply to this letter, and I look forward to working with you to address these urgent challenges facing the Northeast Corridor.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator