

Monday, April 27, 2020

Dear Governor Murphy,

As we trust you are aware, it is clear that the Covid-19 crisis is disproportionately affecting low-income workers, immigrants and people-of-color. These are the very same people who are also impacted first and worst by the climate crisis and unhealthy air. These two crises are intertwined. As reported recently in the [Star Ledger](#), a [Harvard study](#) has found that poor air quality in urban neighborhoods is currently leading to more deaths from COVID-19 in vulnerable communities.

We applaud your leadership and decisive governance in dealing with the Covid-19 emergency and appreciate that you have established the ambitious goal of reaching 100% clean energy by 2050.

It is also clear that the pandemic threatens to drive the state into the worst financial crisis experienced in generations. At risk of being caught in the economic carnage are numerous programs working families rely on including the chronically underfunded NJ Transit.

Unfortunately, at a time that calls for bold and inclusive thinking from all areas of state government, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority (NJTA) appears to have misread the moment by forging ahead with a **narrowly focused \$24 billion spending plan that was developed with no meaningful opportunity for public input and provides scant details**. Released in March, just as the spread of COVID-19 was accelerating, and open to public comment for only two weeks, the plan confines its scope of proposed investments to Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike projects, including \$16 billion dedicated solely to their expansion.

Further, the plan conflicts with your clean energy policies, the goals of the state's Energy Master Plan which includes the reduction of emissions from the transportation sector (the state's largest source of emissions) and the easing of environmental burdens on vulnerable communities. Crucial to achieving these goals are investments in the expansion of public transit and the electrification of public fleets.

Working class families are facing challenges right now of an unprecedented nature and scale. We need government to act in a coordinated and strategic manner to address the immediate threats to health and security and to provide hope of a better future on the other side of this crisis. A safe environment and improved public transit that allows all families to thrive must be part of this vision.

We ask that you intervene to extend the period of public review on NJTA's capital plan and direct the agency to take steps to engage with environmental justice communities when it is safe to do so. We also ask that you direct NJTA to coordinate with the Department of Transportation, NJ Transit, the BPU, DEP, and other relevant agencies, to ensure that these scarce resources are allocated in a way that best meets the state's transportation, climate and economic goals.

Sincerely,

Freeholder Germaine Ortiz, Bergen County
Freeholder Rebecca Williams, Union County

Kevin Brown, 32BJ SEIU
Uyen "Winn" Khuong, Action Together NJ
Renee Koubiadis, Anti-Poverty Network
Marcia Marley & John Reichman, BlueWaveNJ
Amy Goldsmith, Clean Water Action
Kate Delany, Collingswood Democrats
Doug O'Malley, Environment New Jersey

Mayor Timothy Dougherty, Morristown
Mayor Reed Gusciora, City of Trenton

Mara Novak & Judy Kelly, NJ11th for Change
Phyllis Salowe-Kaye, NJ Citizen Action
Brandon McKoy, NJ Policy Perspective
Jeff Tittel, NJ Sierra Club
Sue Altman, NJ Working Families Alliance
Janna Chernetz, Tri-State Transport. Campaign
Lauren Morse, Westfield 2020