

COMMITTEES:

APPROPRIATIONS

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION

ENVIRONMENT AND  
PUBLIC WORKS

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 28, 2009

The Honorable Ray LaHood  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

We are writing to express our strong support for New Jersey's High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail ("HSIPR") application for the Portal Bridge project. We are confident this application for \$38.5 million will meet the goals for achieving President Obama's vision of a new and efficient high-speed intercity passenger rail network while providing great benefits to the nation and New Jersey.

New Jersey's HSIPR application is for a critical project to replace and expand Portal Bridge, a nearly 100-year-old span that carries Amtrak Northeast Corridor train traffic over the Hackensack River between Newark and New York City. This bridge is located on the busiest section of the most active passenger railroad corridor in North America. This important bridge also serves NJ Transit. Nearly 500 NJ Transit and Amtrak trains — including the high-speed Acela service — use the existing two-track swing bridge on a daily basis. The bridge now operates very near capacity during peak periods, carrying 23 trains per hour in the peak direction.

The Portal Bridge project will enable the bridge to accommodate faster trains and reduce delays associated with the bridge's operation, which will have an immediate impact on thousands of Amtrak and NJ Transit customers. The project will also address a major chokepoint on the Northeast Corridor and provide the expanded capacity needed to realize the full potential of the Access to the Region's Core Mass Transit Tunnel. The proposed upgrades to Portal Bridge will cut trip times between major cities, improve service reliability, extend service to additional communities, and help fulfill President Obama's vision of making high-speed passenger rail an integral part of America's transportation system.

The State of New Jersey, through NJ Transit, has been advancing this project in partnership with Amtrak, owner of the existing bridge, the Federal Railroad Administration and the Federal Transit Administration. The HSIPR funding would leverage NJ Transit and Amtrak's preliminary engineering and final design efforts that are already underway, including a local share of \$16.5 million. If awarded, the HSIPR funds would accelerate job creation and the project delivery timeframe, making the new bridge operational as quickly as possible.

We want to thank you again for your leadership in making high-speed rail a reality and urge you to select the Portal Bridge project as an HSIPR project to help accomplish our collective goal of achieving true high-speed rail in New Jersey and across America. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Lautenberg Ralph Menendez

cc: Joseph Szabo, Administrator, Federal Railroad Administration