

Governor Phil Murphy

REMARKS: Governor Murphy Delivers Remarks at the New Jersey Alliance for Action Transportation Conference

09/20/2023

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good morning, everyone!

Tonio, thank you for that warm introduction. And let me thank you Jerry along with the entire New Jersey Alliance for Action team for bringing together this roster of rock stars in transportation.

It is an honor be here. Over the past 50 years, the Alliance has been an invaluable force in “building a better future” for every family in New Jersey.

And every step of the way, you have been grounded in the principle of partnership. You have strengthened relationships between lawmakers, business leaders, workers, educators, and more.

And, you have inspired to us to work together in pursuing our shared mission: Building a world-class transportation system to support a world-class economy.

As you all know well: This mission is right at the top of the list of priorities not just for our administration, but for every New Jerseyan.

Just ask any commuter. Whether you take the train into Newark Penn Station or drive to and from work on the Turnpike the fact is: a commute can make or break your day.

It can mean the difference between being able to sit down with the family for dinner or having the time to squeeze in a few extra minutes to help your kid out with their homework.

So, when we invest in our roads, bridges, and public transit systems—when we invest in helping our families get where they need to be, on time—what we are really investing in is our quality of life.

So with that in mind, I want to thank everyone here who has coordinated across departments, and across your various lanes of expertise, to improve our quality of life here in New Jersey.

And I want to recognize a few folks in particular, starting with our Commissioner of Transportation—and Chair of the NJ TRANSIT Board—Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti.

We are also joined by NJ TRANSIT President and CEO, Kevin Corbett Executive Director of the South Jersey Transportation Authority, Stephen Dougherty Executive Director of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, Jim Carone, Chief Executive Officer of the Gateway Development Commission, Kris Kolluri, Chief Engineer with the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey, Rizwan Baig and Executive Vice President of Capital Delivery for Amtrak, Laura Mason.

Thank you all for doing your part to strengthen our state’s transportation system. From upgrading our aging train



stations, to rebuilding our roads and highways, to moving forward with once-in-generation infrastructure projects—like the Gateway Program or the overhaul of the Walter Rand Transportation Center.

Honestly, it is not easy to keep track of all the progress we have made in the past nearly six years.

And I know today's conference is, really, an opportunity to learn more about where our most critical projects stand.

But while I have the podium this morning, I want to take a few moments to share how each of these projects are falling into place, to make our larger vision for transportation a reality.

And let me start with an example. Yesterday, I was in Newark with Mayor Ras Baraka to break ground on a new bridge: the Mulberry Commons Pedestrian Bridge.

Once completed, it will directly connect Penn Station to the Prudential Center, as well as the historic Ironbound neighborhood.

So, say you are traveling into Penn Station to see the Devils play. You can walk right across that bridge, while taking in the view of the Newark skyline, without worrying for a second about cars or trucks zooming by.

And after the game—when you want to celebrate another crushing victory by the Devils, you can head right across that bridge to your favorite restaurant in the Ironbound. This bridge will make navigating our state's largest city simpler, safer, and greener.

Now, on its own, this bridge may seem small. And when you consider it in the scope of our entire state—and the billions of dollars of infrastructure spending coming down the pike—it is.

But I share this example because I believe this little bridge in Mulberry Commons park speaks to our larger vision for the future of infrastructure in New Jersey.

A future in which our cities and communities are safer, more sustainable, and more accessible.

A future in which our businesses can reach more and more consumers—so they can grow and hire more workers.

And a future in which it is just plain easier for our families to get from Point A to point B, whether you are on your daily commute, or you are just enjoying a weekend on the town.

To put it simply: we are building a world with less traffic. Less pollution. And far fewer headaches in getting where you need to be.

And the Mulberry Commons Bridge is far from the only example of our vision for Newark's future. With the Newark Airport Station Access project, we are opening up the city's entire South Ward to the airport which will help create new job opportunities for residents and make it easier for our families catch their flights on time.

And of course, this not just a priority for our families—this is about strengthening New Jersey's competitiveness in a global economy.

It can never be said enough: We are the most densely populated state in the most densely populated region of the country. Our nation's economic lifeblood flows right through the heart of New Jersey.

So, I say this quite literally: we cannot afford for our infrastructure to crumble or fall into disrepair.

And that is why—and I do not say this to be partisan, it just a matter of fact—the last administration was such a disaster for us. Both in Trenton, and in Washington.

Think about it. Back then, New Jersey was on the backslide. For nearly a decade, we were caught in a cycle of decline and neglect.

The Christie Administration gutted state operating support, which pushed agencies—like NJ TRANSIT—to a breaking point. They also made the biggest policy mistake of the past 50 years: canceling the original version of the Gateway tunnel project.

But worst of all, the Christie Administration allowed our commuters and our families to suffer. Our leaders thought small. And, no surprise—we got small results. That is no way to build an economy that is built to last.

But here is the good news: together, with the help of everyone here today, we are turning things around for New Jersey. We are thinking big again.

During our past nearly six years of partnership, we have been investing in our fundamental pillars of success: Our talent, our technology, and of course, our transportation system. And those investments are paying off in spades.

And real quick, I want to mention a few data points. Not to pat ourselves on the back, but to—really—credit all the work you have been doing to improve the lives of New Jerseyans.

For instance, CNBC recently ranked New Jersey as the best improving state in which to do business. We were also recently ranked in the top three to both live and work.

And just last week, we were ranked one of the top five happiest states in America. Go figure!

So the point is: we need to keep all of these numbers moving in the right direction. We need to keep working together to cement New Jersey's status as the single-best state to raise a family.

And of course, all of our progress—from quality of life to economic competitiveness—rests on a single foundation: Our infrastructure.

Well, I think there is no better symbol for how far New Jersey has come, in terms of the quality of our infrastructure, than the fact that we will soon break ground on the most important infrastructure project in the entire country.

I mentioned it earlier: The Gateway Program. And Kris—along with the entire G-D-C—has been an absolute champion on this.

Just this month, the G-D-C Board approved the first contract to begin construction on our side of the river.

And with that major step, our entry to engineering means we—the collective we—have officially moved the Gateway Program further along than any Administration in history!

In fact, we are going to be breaking ground on the Tonelle Avenue project later this year. I hope to see you there!

And importantly, I also want to mention there is even more good news coming for the Gateway Program soon, in terms of federal funding. So stay tuned!

And to that point, I do have to give a massive shout out to the Biden Administration. As many of you know, their team—across the federal government—has been working with us, hand-in-hand, to rebuild New Jersey's transit system.

We are fortunate to have a President who is embarking on the most ambitious infrastructure agenda in a generation. Because that agenda is benefitting New Jersey in a big way.

Just two weeks ago, the Federal Highway Administration announced it was providing \$425 million to New Jersey to support both NJ Transit as well as D-O-T projects across our state.

That is the largest amount of funding New Jersey has ever received as part of the August redistribution process.

In fact, it was the fourth-largest amount of funding that any state received—even though we are the fourth-smallest state in the country.

That is a big deal. And that funding is going to support vital projects. Like building a new pedestrian tunnel in Long Branch, where I visited two weeks ago, to connect businesses and consumers downtown.

But what this funding really proves, in my view, is that the federal government understands that the future of America runs right through the heart of New Jersey.

I mean, in just the past two years alone, Congress has authorized hundreds of millions of dollars in new spending—with

laws like the I-R-A, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Chips and Science Act—that will directly benefit New Jerseyans.

And, for our part, our Administration is doing everything we possibly can to keep those federal dollars headed our way.

For instance, over the summer, I worked with our friends in the Legislature to deposit more money into “Debt Defeasance and Prevention Fund.” I know that is a bit of a word salad, but it is important.

Because that Fund includes more than \$130 million for the D-O-T, specifically set aside to ensure our state meets its statutory responsibility to match federal investments in infrastructure.

We are one of the few states in the entire country to create a state match fund of this kind.

And that, really, sends a strong, positive signal to our federal partners. It shows that we are ready to do our part in getting shovels in the ground and putting workers on the move.

So by creating this fund, we are helping pioneer a new model for investing in infrastructure.

And with each investment we make, we are bringing New Jersey closer to our larger vision for transportation.

It is like I said at the top. Safer, more sustainable communities.

New economic opportunities—for businesses and workers alike.

And most important of all: A better quality of life for every family in the Garden State.

So with all of your help, we are seizing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild the very foundation of our state—and our entire country.

We all know that the decisions we make today are going to define the next century for New Jersey. From building out our fleet of zero-emission buses, to completing construction on the Secaucus to Meadowlands Transitway, we are paving the way for the future.

And I believe that future will begin in 2026—with the FIFA World Cup! Honestly, there is no other place on the planet better prepared to host the world’s biggest sporting event.

Just look at what we accomplished this past summer! MetLife Stadium welcomed tens of thousands of fans for performances from superstars like Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, and Bruce Springsteen. I was actually there for all three nights of the Boss!

And let me tell you: each one of those shows was a smashing success, in no small part, because of the efficiency and accessibility of our public transit system.

So soon, with the World Cup, we will have a chance to show the world that the Garden State is the definitive destination for live entertainment.

And while we only have one shot to get this right, I am more confident than ever.

Because as the wise Frank Sinatra once observed, quote, “you only go around once... but if you play your cards right, once is enough.”

Well, with all of you, I am certain that we are playing New Jersey’s cards right when it comes to infrastructure and transportation.

Thank you! God bless you all. And may God bless the state of New Jersey and the United States of America.

Governor Phil Murphy

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