



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS RELEASE

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GOV. CHRISTIE WHITMAN CALLS ON PRESIDENT CLINTON TO HELP RESOLVE AMTRAK LABOR DISPUTE AND EXTEND COOLING OFF PERIOD BEYOND OCT. 29 STRIKE DEADLINE IF NECESSARY

Gov. Christie Whitman today called on President Clinton to use his authority to help bring about a settlement of the Amtrak labor dispute just as he did in the recent strike against United Parcel Service.

"Two weeks ago, I was the first governor to publicly call for an end to any a possible national railroad strike," the Governor said. "I urged the two sides, as well as Congress and the President, to settle the dispute before a strike crippled transportation in the Northeast and wreaked havoc with all the dock workers and businesses who rely on the rails for moving goods across the nation."

"This past weekend, President Clinton reacted," Whitman said. "He got the two sides to agree on a voluntary seven-day cooling off period, which will mean the strike would begin no sooner than October 29. I appreciate that as a start, but it's not enough. Frankly, anything short of a complete resolution is unacceptable."

"I call on President Clinton to get this thing done," the Governor said. "He got the UPS strike settled through the mediation of his labor secretary -- but not until millions of people suffered through many days of chaos and delays. I urge the President to use his authority to resolve this issue before it creates a commuting and economic nightmare for hundreds of thousands of Americans. And he should commit now to extending the cooling-off period if seven days isn't long enough."

Whitman said the conceptual agreement that has been reached with Amtrak would allow NJ TRANSIT lines to run on a full schedule in the event of a possible strike by the Brotherhood of Maintenance Way Employees against Amtrak on October 29.

"Let me stress that this is only an agreement between the management of NJ TRANSIT and Amtrak. We still need the cooperation and endorsement of the labor unions at Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT to make the agreement a

reality," Whitman said. "I urge them to give this agreement their immediate attention." We'll work hard to gain those approvals so that not one single NJ TRANSIT train rider will be knocked off his or her regular commute."

"I am also reiterating my call for Congress to step up to the plate," Whitman said. "Today, I reached out, by phone and by letter, to Senators Lautenberg and Torricelli, as well as to Representatives Roukema, Franks and Menendez. As I said to them, New Jersey commuters deserve to know that Congress is doing all it can to avoid a disaster."

Whitman said she will also continue urging the two sides in the dispute to reach an agreement.

"Whitman pointed out that the state announced a contingency plan last week which will be in place if a strike cannot be avoided.

The contingency plan includes the following:

- More than 500 buses to help commuters reach stations where they can take PATH train service into New York.
- Rail shuttles on NJ TRANSIT'S North Jersey Coast Line and Raritan Valley Line with bus shuttle service from Westfield station on the Raritan Valley Line to Newark or New York City.
- Operation of the Princeton Shuttle ("Dinky" service) during the morning rush hour between Princeton and Princeton Junction stations. Bus shuttle service is available at Princeton Junction to PATH which will carry passengers to New York.
- Distribution of information on the contingency plan at rail and bus stations by NJ TRANSIT to alert commuters of service options in the event of a strike and activation of a customer emergency hot line number, (973) 491-7400, for strike updates.
- Activation of a toll-free lines for information on the contingency plan. The number for North Jersey commuters is 1-800 772-2222 and for South Jersey the number is 1-800 582-5946.

The plan also urges businesses to consider telecommuting and other options for their employees in the event of a strike.

"We have to prepare for the worst," Whitman said. "We've done that, thanks to the Emergency Transportation Council I created two weeks ago. By combining the resources of the Commerce Department, the Attorney General's Office, and the National Guard, as well as the Department of Transportation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, we made sure that the contingency plan was more than just a transportation strategy."

"I am confident that we have the most thorough and comprehensive contingency plan in the region," she said. "We are doing everything we can and we'll continue to stay on top of this every day until it's resolved."

Amtrak, which owns, operates and maintains the Northeast Corridor, is a national railroad whose labor-management negotiations are guided by federal law. A strike against Amtrak would impact NJ TRANSIT'S Northeast Corridor, North Jersey Coast, Raritan Valley and Atlantic City lines, as well as its MIDTOWN DIRECT service. The lines carry over 65,000 NJ TRANSIT riders daily.

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