I am Talia Crawford, the Campaign Organizer for the Tri State Transportation Campaign. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a public comment before the Board this morning.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a 501(c)(3) non-profit policy advocacy organization dedicated to mobility, accessibility and livability in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut.

This past week, the Senate passed bill S2600, which was introduced by Senate Majority Leader, Loretta Weinberg. Tri-State Transportation Campaign applauds Senator Weinberg for career-long dedication to transportation matters in the Garden State, especially public transportation. We thank the Senate for passing S2600 and encourage the Assembly to move this bill along in an expeditious manner before the end of the legislative session. The bill contains sections which would establish an Office of Customer Advocate, and require greater detail for a capital program—all of which would increase the transparency and accountability of NJ Transit. The bill also requires that NJ Transit hold regular public hearings regarding the agency’s Strategic Plan and Capital Plan, which allows the agency to receive public input on an ongoing basis which is a key component in setting priorities for NJ Transit.

However, work still needs to be done to institute the agency changes set forth in S630, the first agency reform bill signed into law by Governor Murphy in December 2018; most notably filling the vacant board seats. To date, NJTransit has not had a full board under the new requirements despite the mandate to have all 11 members appointed within 90 days of the signing of the law.

I am looking forward to working with the Office of Customer Advocate in the future. The strengthening of this position will make communication between riders and the agency clearer. Adding Board members who are regular rail and bus riders must be a priority as it is a critical missing perspective and will serve as a vital asset as regular riders can provide a firsthand account of the transit landscape that they experience everyday. Their perspective and voices matter because they are customers who invest in the system.

The stabilization of NJTransit’s operating budget remains a significant priority. As it lacks a dedicated funding source, for decades, it is subject to the annual political budget process. This unpredictability provides indisputable challenges to long term planning for the agency. NJ Transit has been flexing its capital dollars to meet operating deficiencies since 1990 and has robbed the agency of over $10 billion in capital investments including updating rolling stock and...
bus fleet and completing much needed system capacity expansion projects. The emergency federal funding merely buys the administration and legislature limited time to address this critical issue. Eventually the emergency money will dry up leaving the agency in the same financial dire straits that it was in before COVID, if not worse.

Lastly, TSTC supports resilience projects that will increase mobility during power outages, extreme weather, or natural disasters, especially for those who are transit dependent and rely on transportation to get to work, essential services, etc.

Thank you again and looking forward to a continued dialog.