Talia Crawford  
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NJ TRANSIT Board of Directors Meeting  

My name is Talia Crawford, I am the Campaign Organizer for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in front of the Board at tonight's meeting.

With regards to the budget, it is almost identical to last year's budget and continues to put the agency on sound financial standing. While there is an expected and appreciated increase in contribution from the NJ Turnpike ($721M - although it was supposed to be $746M), this most debilitating funding practice remains largely unaddressed. NJ TRANSIT will still be transferring a hefty $360 million from its capital budget to operating. The practice of capital transfers to the operating budget to pursue preventative maintenance projects has resulted in the loss of 10 billion dollars for NJ TRANSIT to invest in capital projects like expanding service, redesign projects, and electrifying the bus fleet. While the COVID federal dollars are supplementing the agency in the meantime, once they are gone, the state will still be left with the problem of identifying a sustainable funding source for NJ TRANSIT's operating needs. And if ridership doesn’t return to pre-COVID levels, NJ will need to find the money to fill this farebox revenue gap or worse, cut service and raise fares. NJT needs a sustainable solution for the future and that starts now. We certainly appreciate the administration holding fares stable for a 5th year in a row, especially since the prices of many other necessities have increased, the state cannot leave riders vulnerable to future fare hikes and service cuts and riders, especially those who rely on NJT for all their mobility needs, cannot afford them either.

Two of the agenda items tonight are to authorize entering into a contract with Academy Express LLC to provide local service in Hudson County. NJ TRANSIT has previously contracted Academy Express LLC for their services in Hudson County and they did not meet the requirements—many of their buses did not show up which left riders stranded and Academy knowingly misreported this to NJ TRANSIT, committing fraud against a state agency. While we are aware that a settlement in this case has been reached (the state’s largest settlement ever outside of the healthcare sector), from the rider
perspective, it does not negate nor excuse what happened. Not only did Academy defraud the state, but they defrauded NJ TRANSIT customers too. And while the state was reimbursed and made whole by the actions of Academy, it is the many transit dependent riders who depended on their service who will not be able to recover in the same way. In 2019, 43% of residents relied on public transportation to get around, making dependable service a necessity for almost half of its residents. This agency and this board has a duty to put customers first. NJ TRANSIT promises accountability, transparency, and reliable service to its customers. We caution this body with moving forward with these action items this evening.

Thank you for your time and looking forward to the continued work ahead.