

INSTITUTE FOR RATIONAL URBAN MOBILITY, INC.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Transit Advocates urge NJ Governor Phil Murphy to Route New Hudson Tunnels by way of Hoboken, and halt plans for a new Hackensack River Bridge.

current plan call for billions of taxpayer dollars to be expended on a route that will not increase rail capacity any time soon, while not benefiting the cities of Hoboken and Jersey City

NEW YORK – In an open letter to NJ Governor Phil Murphy the Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, Inc. (IRUM) called for an immediate revision to NJ Transit’s badly flawed plan for the Hudson Tunnel project, advancing a much better plan that would route the new tunnel on state-owned property adjacent to the Hoboken Terminal. The new tunnel would then connect with NJ Transit’s existing three-track Hackensack River bridge, eliminating the need for a new bridge across the river. Given the extremely limited amount of marine traffic passing under Amtrak’s existing Portal Bridge, IRUM also urges the Governor to request that this movable bridge be permanently “fixed” in the closed position.

These actions would permit some \$3 billion of scarce taxpayer funds to be focused on the new tunnel, the state’s most urgent need. Rail capacity across the Hudson River has not been increased in over a century since the current Amtrak tunnels were completed. Unfortunately, as IRUM President George Haikalis pointed out in the letter, the current plan prepared during the Christie Administration would produce no increase in rail capacity across the Hudson River, even after spending \$11.2 billion of taxpayer funds. In contrast the Hoboken routing allows an immediate doubling of capacity, serves the Hoboken-Jersey City waterfront business district, the state’s largest in terms of Class A office space, and includes a transfer to the Hudson-Bergen light rail line.

Haikalis also noted in the letter that most of the analysis for NJ Transit was done by transportation consulting firms who have a stake in advancing costly options, since they are compensated as a percentage of the total cost of the proposal. Governor Murphy, who was a successful Wall Street investor before running for public office, should commission an independent panel of experts “to search out the facts.” The Governor should move forward with the Hoboken routing and halt the flawed Christie plan, which will cost billions of taxpayer funds, but not result in any increase in rail capacity across the Hudson

IRUM's position on the Hudson Tunnel project is contained in its comments submitted during the Hudson Tunnel's environmental process:

http://www.irus.org/20170815%20-%20Hudson_Tunnel_DEIS_IRUM_comments.pdf

IRUM seriously questions the wisdom of advancing disconnected projects like the Hudson Tunnel and Portal Bridge in a segmented way. Instead, the Governor should work with state and local agencies to develop a comprehensive vision for a regional rail system that would better serve the 23 million-person NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area, the nation's largest.

To better consider options east of the Hudson IRUM urges Governor Murphy to demand that all relevant information about the Penn Station-Grand Central connection described in the 31-page 2003 Summary Report of the Access to the Region's Core ARC Major Investment Study be made available to the public.

Many of these concerns are highlighted in the Attachment that accompanies this letter.

IRUM is a NYC-based non-profit that advocates for reduced motor vehicular traffic in densely developed urban areas by enhancing rail transit and advancing measures like road pricing.

A copy of the open letter appears below.

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Governor Phil Murphy
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy:

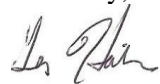
IRUM, a NYC-based nonprofit, urges New Jersey to **cancel its plan to seek a Federal loan to fund a new Portal Bridge replacement and immediately urge Amtrak to request that the existing swing bridge be permanently fixed in the “closed” position.** Because of the extremely limited amount of marine traffic passing under this bridge there is no business case to invest \$1.5 billion for a new high-level bridge. Instead, these funds should be directed toward a far better plan for the Hudson Tunnel, routing this much-needed tunnel by way of state-owned railway property just south of the Hoboken Terminal, connecting to NJ Transit’s existing three-track Morristown Line across the Hackensack River. This would result in an immediate doubling of train service across the Hudson River. In contrast, the plan developed by the Christie Administration would route the new tunnel on new embankments and bridges that would eventually be built adjacent to the existing Amtrak line via Secaucus. **The Christie plan would produce no increase in rail capacity across the Hudson, even after the expenditure of \$11.2 billion of taxpayer funds.** Since the current plan is still under environmental review, and with limited Federal funding in sight, now is a good time for the Murphy Administration to advance a far better plan.

The Hoboken routing would include an on-line station just south of the existing Hoboken Terminal, greatly benefiting the Hoboken-Jersey City waterfront business district, the state’s largest in terms of Class A office space, and would permit a transfer to the Hudson-Bergen light rail line. (The attachment to this letter provides more details.)

IRUM’s position is contained in its comments submitted during the Hudson Tunnel DEIS process:
http://www.irum.org/20170815%20-%20Hudson_Tunnel_DEIS_IRUM_comments.pdf

IRUM urges New Jersey to take the lead in developing a **comprehensive vision for a regional rail system** that would better serve the 23 million-person NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area. A starting point would be for New Jersey to demand the immediate release of all relevant information about the 1994-2003 Access to the Region’s Core (ARC) Major Investment Study, including its plan to connect Penn Station with Grand Central Terminal, This connection would greatly benefit New Jersey commuters and avoid Amtrak’s costly and disruptive plan to expand Penn Station to the south.

Sincerely,



George Haikalis, President, Institute for Rational Urban Mobility,

copies to Jersey City Mayor Steven M. Fulop, Hoboken Mayor Ravi S. Bhalla, Hudson County Executive Tom DeGise, U.S. Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker, and other interested parties

Attachment - Hudson Tunnel and Portal Bridge Issues

1. Unfair dismissal of Hoboken Alternative

Routing the new tunnels by way of Hoboken, using existing NJ Transit tracks and bridges west of that facility, was proposed by IRUM during the DEIS process. The scoping document for the Hudson Tunnel abruptly dismissed the Hoboken Alternative stating that “An alternative that passes near the Hoboken Terminal, would be substantially longer (with proportionately greater cost) than alternatives that go more directly between the NEC alignment near Secaucus and PSNY.”

This is clearly wrong. IRUM’s Hoboken Alternative would run directly to Newark, not via Secaucus. The distance between Penn Station-Newark and Penn Station-New York, is actually **slightly shorter by way of Hoboken** than by way of Secaucus, and because it would use existing NJ Transit rail infrastructure west of the Hoboken Terminal, **it would cost substantially less.**

Furthermore, the Hoboken routing would serve the Jersey City-Hoboken waterfront business district, the state’s largest in terms of “class A” office space and would permit a transfer station as it crosses the Hudson-Bergen light rail line. The light rail line is important to Hudson County’s economy and an extension rail north to Englewood, has strong support. The Hoboken routing would benefit the 300,000 persons who live in Hoboken and Jersey City, many of them persons of color. In contrast “the preferred” routing, as described in the DEIS, rejoins the existing Amtrak line east of Secaucus and serves no new communities.

The project sponsors declined to describe any favorable attributes of the Hoboken routing, clearly indicating that the scoping was not an even-handed appraisal of alternatives. Instead, the sponsors “created” eight new “shortcomings” that relate to the Hoboken routing. None of these concerns were described in the scoping documents, and were clearly a desperate, last-ditch effort to demean this routing. IRUM takes exception to each of them in its DEIS comments.

IRUM urges that an independent panel of experts be commissioned to search out the facts. Most of the analysis for NJ Transit was done by transportation consulting firms who have a stake in advancing costly options, since they are compensated as a percentage of the total cost of the proposal.

It is important to note that the Preferred Alternative, as described in the DEIS, will produce **no increase in rail capacity across the Hudson River** even after the projected expenditure of \$11.2 billion of taxpayer dollars. Other project elements, not included in the DEIS must be completed. This assures that engineering consultants will enjoy a continuing stream of new revenues while the riding public must wait decades before seeing any benefits. In contrast, the Hoboken Alternative will result in an immediate doubling of rail capacity, when completed. IRUM urges New Jersey officials to seriously consider this option, and reject the Preferred Alternative.

2. Developing a vision for regional rail

In the 1994-2003 period, NJ Transit, MTA and the Port Authority of NY and NJ conducted an extensive analysis of regional opportunities to significantly expand rail capacity across the Hudson River to Midtown Manhattan, which consumed some \$5 to 10 million of Federal and state funds. This effort, “Access to the Region’s Core” Major Investment Study (MIS), produced a “2003 Summary Report” that describes an attractive plan that would link Penn Station with Grand Central Terminal (Alternative G), thereby greatly increasing the utility of existing facilities.

In contrast, the Gateway Plan calls for an expansion of Penn Station to the south, requiring the condemnation of dozens of buildings that would displace thousands of employees. It would greatly increase the walking distance for rail users who transfer to the subway at this location. The Penn Station-Grand Central connection plan allows residents from West of Hudson origins to reach workplaces in East Midtown, the nation's densest concentration of office space, without the need to transfer to crowded subways at Penn Station. The details of this connection, paid with public funds, have been withheld by the state-owned commuter rail agencies. Apparently these agencies find these ideas threatening to their autonomy and are unwilling to cooperate with each other. The result is costly acquisition of excess rolling stock and duplication of facilities. The taxpayer is the big loser.

Another opportunity made possible by advancing a truly comprehensive regional rail system, would be to repurpose extensive real estate holdings that are now used for midday storage of rail cars in close-in locations like the Hoboken waterfront and the Sunnyside rail yards. With frequent service and through operation, a remade *regional rail system* would greatly reduce the need for these rail yards and would permit their release for new development as "raw real estate" without the costly construction of decks over the yards. Adding on-line regional rail stations at Hoboken and Sunnyside, adjacent to these released parcels, would further enhance their value. The proceeds from the sale of these properties would offset, in part, the public's cost of constructing the new tunnels.

As IRUM pointed out in its DEIS comments, this is essentially a multi-state "metropolitan" issue. Only some 5.1% of peak-hour, peak-direction passengers using the existing Amtrak Hudson River tunnels are on Amtrak trains. Amtrak claims that it can repair its tunnels without disrupting its service, by repairing them, one tunnel at a time. The need to preserve and expand tunnel capacity is to facilitate the growth of regional travel which is important to the economic well-being and environmental health of the NY-NJ-CT region. While this is an important national concern, it is far more essential to the region.

IRUM urges New Jersey to take the lead in advancing cooperation between the three commuter rail lines serving the 23 million-person NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area. A good place to start would be for New Jersey to urge the establishment of an "interstate regional rail working group" formed of representatives of the rail operating entities, elected leaders of local government and rail advocacy groups and other interested parties. This advisory body should meet on a regular basis with meetings open to the public. Instead of three-minute statements at a few public hearings, the working group could explore issues in more detail, putting rail agencies on the spot to back up their contentions with supporting data.

3. Dealing Rationally with Aging Infrastructure

The two projects are further mischaracterized by endless assertions that the Portal Bridge and the Amtrak tunnels are near collapse. As a Life Member of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), I personally find it very offensive to see the extent that state and Federal agencies engage in fear-mongering in discussing the condition of century-old railway structures and tunnels. The vast majority of rail facilities throughout the U.S. were built in the early 1900's, during the great expansion of the Industrial era.

A more targeted approach to determine the viability of these structures should be applied. There are established procedures for inspection and assessment of the condition of each individual structure and consideration of appropriate repair strategies. It would be foolish to attempt to replace all of them at once. IRUM urges the State agencies to undertake a careful assessment of each structure in a thoughtful, rational way.

4. “Fixing” the Portal Bridge in the Closed Position

Amtrak’s existing movable Portal Bridge can be maintained in a safe, operable condition indefinitely. The challenge is to develop an operating plan that meets maritime needs while minimizing disruption when the existing swing bridge is opened to permit passage of high-masted vessels. In the closed position, clearance is limited to 23 feet. Few, if any industrial sites needing this high-clearance access remain on this reach of the Hackensack River. If the Regional Plan Association succeeds in advancing an element of its Fourth Regional Plan, to designate a large portion of the Hackensack Meadowlands as a National Park, there would be even less need for a new high level bridge.

Given the extremely low level of maritime traffic in this reach, **IRUM urges state and Federal agencies to seriously consider permanently keeping the bridge in the closed position immediately.** The “business case” for taking this action - comparing the marginal operating and maintenance cost of keeping the bridge movable to the benefit of a very limited number of shippers that use high-masted vessels - should be quickly calculated. Many state officials have considerable experience in corporate finance and policy analysis, and should embrace this recommendation.

NJ could declare a “state of emergency” and demand that the Portal Bridge be permanently fixed in the closed position immediately, as an "administrative action", solving the problem for good, and avoiding the expenditure of scarce financial resources.

5. There is still time to advance a rational Hudson Tunnel plan

Since very few taxpayer dollars have been expended thus far in advancing the current, ill-advised plan, moving forward with the Hoboken Alternative will not leave the state with any significant “sunk costs”, except the bruised egos of a few bureaucrats. Instead, it will result in a useful and cost-effective investment that quickly doubles rail capacity across the Hudson River. A concise description of IRUM’s proposed “interstate trunk line” linking Hoboken, Penn Station and Grand Central is described in the attached NY Daily New Op-Ed piece. Also attached is a thumbnail that includes an illustration from IRUM’s *Making the Connection* exhibit.

IRUM welcomes an opportunity to discuss these concerns with appropriate New Jersey representatives at their earliest convenience.

George Haikalis, President, Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, Inc. (IRUM)

A better way to connect N.Y. & N.J.

Now's the time for New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, who took the oath of office this week, to take a fresh look at NJTransit's Hudson tunnel project — known as Gateway — and advance a more sensible plan that would make better use of existing state-owned assets.

Routing the new tunnel by way of Hoboken would double rail capacity across the Hudson River in just four short years, while cutting construction cost by 75% or more. A substantially less costly plan is critical, particularly in light of the recent exchange between the governors of New York and New Jersey and the U.S. Department of Transportation shooting down the 50-50 federal-state cost-sharing for this mega-project.

Clearly, doubling tunnel capacity is both a metropolitan and a national necessity; it is vital to both states to maintain their economic well-being. The existing century-old tunnels were damaged by Superstorm Sandy in 2012. While Amtrak can handle its passengers by repairing the tunnels one at a time, it is critical to build a second set of tunnels as quickly as possible to maintain adequate cross-Hudson rail capacity.

But there's a problem with the current blueprints: Doubling capacity of the existing route via Secaucus requires the construction of costly new bridges, expansion of embankments through valuable wet-

BE OUR GUEST

BY GEORGE HAIKALIS

lands in the Hackensack Meadowlands and the purchase of dozens of privately owned parcels in Hudson County.

This could be avoided by constructing a 2.3-mile tunnel between Hoboken and Penn Station, with an intermediate station adjacent to the Hoboken Terminal. There are additional benefits to this routing: All NJTransit railway facilities on the waterfront could be removed and this property could be sold to developers to offset much of the cost of doubling rail capacity across the Hudson.

The Hoboken routing would greatly improve access to the Hoboken/Jersey City waterfront business district — New Jersey's largest, and an important economic engine for Hudson County. It serves two cities with a combined population of nearly 300,000 people, a far larger number than the 16,000 people currently served by the route through Secaucus.

The routing would also connect with the Hudson-Bergen light rail line, linking other communities in Hudson County, extending from Bayonne to North Bergen, and eventually, as proposed by Murphy, to Englewood.

The new tunnels would be much more useful if a companion project in Manhattan — a new 1.2-mile, two-track tunnel un-

der 31st St. and Park Ave. — were also constructed, linking existing tracks and platforms at Penn Station with existing tracks in place in the lower level of Grand Central Terminal.

With this connection, residents who live west of the Hudson could reach East Midtown directly, avoiding overcrowded subways. Already the largest concentration of office buildings in the nation, East Midtown will grow even larger with recent rezoning adding another 6 million square feet of office space in this crowded district.

The connection works both ways: It would also make it easier for Bronx, Westchester County and Connecticut residents to reach the growing West Midtown development, as well as destinations in Hoboken, Jersey City, Newark and Newark Airport.

Moving forward with this connection would create an interconnected regional rail system rivaling London's soon-to-be-completed Cross-Rail Project, but at a fraction of the cost of that ambitious project.

The total cost of the two short tunnel segments outlined in this plan would be less than \$6 billion. In contrast, Amtrak's current Gateway Project is estimated to cost some \$25 to \$30 billion. Given the exorbitant cost of other recent mega-projects in

New York, rightsizing this one should be a first-order priority.

Even before the new tunnel is completed, the two governors should require their commuter rail agencies to quickly advance an interconnected regional rail system — with frequent service, joint fares and through-train operation at Penn Station. Trains from Jersey would continue to points in Long Island, or across the Hell Gate Bridge. This would avoid conflicts between arriving and departing

trains, increasing peak hour capacity at Penn Station by 25% or more.

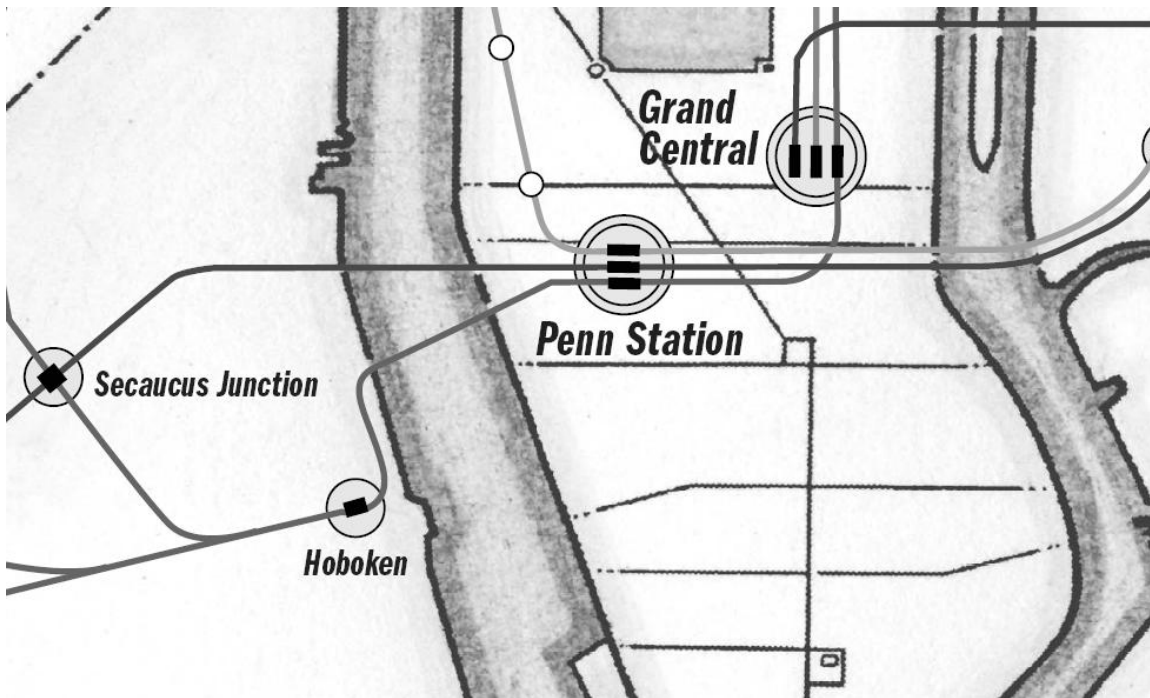
Advancing a coherent regional rail system focused on the Penn Station-Grand Central connection would greatly increase capacity and connectivity while avoiding the cost

and displacement of thousands of employees that would be needed if Amtrak's current Gateway Plan to expand Penn Station to the south were advanced.

There's a better way to connect New Jersey and New York via mass transit. It's time for New Jersey's new governor take the lead.

Haikalis, president of the Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, is a civil engineer and transportation planner, and was director of research at the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission.

**Do it smarter
for \$6 billion
instead of
\$25-\$30 billion**



Build new Hudson River Passenger Rail Tunnels via Hoboken/Jersey City/Penn Station and Grand Central

A simple and cost-effective way to remake the region's three commuter rail lines into a coordinated **Regional Rail System** is to route much-needed new Hudson River passenger rail tunnels by way of the Hoboken/Jersey City waterfront business district. A new on-line station would be constructed just south of the Hoboken Terminal and a new 2.3 mile two-track tunnel would connect with existing tracks and platforms at Penn Station, NY. A new 1.2 mile two-track tunnel would be constructed under 31st Street and Park Avenue to link with existing tracks and platforms in the Lower Level of Grand Central Terminal. New stairways and wider concourses are critical to rebuilding Penn Station into a suitable gateway to NYC. Thru-running increases capacity and connectivity while permitting removal of rail yards for new resilient waterfront development. It efficiently uses existing rail infrastructure, avoiding adverse environmental impacts of new rail trackage in the Hackensack Meadowlands.

The Penn Station-Grand Central connection allows west of Hudson residents to reach destinations in East Midtown, the largest concentration of office buildings in the nation and makes it easier for Bronx, Westchester and Connecticut residents to reach the growing West Midtown area as well as Hoboken/Jersey City, Newark and Newark Airport. An interconnected **Regional Rail System** -- with frequent service, integrated fares and through-running -- provides an attractive alternative to driving on crowded highways that cannot be expanded and increases the economic viability of the region in the face of growing global competition.