



November 2, 2018

The Honorable Karl L. Schultz
Commandant
United States Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20020

Dear Commandant Schultz:

We write to you concerning the ongoing management of maritime traffic around the Portal Bridge, which spans the Hackensack River near Kearny and Secaucus, New Jersey. Built in 1910, the Portal Bridge is an outdated swing bridge that frequently malfunctions when opened to permit marine traffic to pass below. These breakdowns are costly for our region--on October 30, a series of Portal Bridge malfunctions severely delayed 80,000 passengers, causing riders to be late for work, to miss time with family, and driving more commuters away from transit and on to already-crowded roadways.

In spite of the bridge's critical importance to our regional and national economy, plans for a modern replacement bridge that would fully accommodate both maritime and rail traffic have been needlessly stalled by the Trump Administration. The NJ TRANSIT Corporation has taken action to date and proposed a financial plan to the federal government that delivers a replacement bridge. Because we cannot wait, NJ TRANSIT has fulfilled all planning and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, as well as completed the project's design. The project is 100% designed, fully permitted, and has early work currently underway, thus well positioning it for construction that will provide increased reliability and capacity to rail passengers throughout the region and nation in the near-term.

We continue to fight to convince the Administration to provide the necessary federal funding for a new bridge, including through the release of more than \$250 million in federal rail funding the Administration has needlessly withheld. As we continue these efforts, we write to request that the Coast Guard work with us to explore short-term solutions to mitigate this ongoing commuter crisis.

Under current Coast Guard regulations, the Portal Bridge is generally barred from being opened between the hours of 6 am to 10 am and from 4 pm to 8 pm on Monday through Friday. While these are common-sense protections designed to minimize the impacts of Portal Bridge openings and malfunctions during rush hour, the current standard also includes a series of loopholes that


weaken its effectiveness. Under current law, maritime traffic can request that the Portal Bridge open during a two-hour period during the morning rush, and for a one hour and forty minute period during the evening rush, provided they give at least a one-hour advance notice of their intent to request a bridge opening.

These loopholes significantly degrade the effectiveness of the rush hour limitation. Given the problems posed to commuters by the frequent Portal Bridge malfunctions, we urge you to revise your regulations to eliminate these loopholes and to end the opening of the Portal Bridge during the morning and evening rush hours.

We recognize the importance of the region's maritime sector to our economy, and would note that the current problems with the Portal Bridge are not of the Coast Guard's making. We believe the only long-term solution is the new Portal Bridge, which is designed to serve both our maritime and rail sectors by allowing ships to pass underneath while rail traffic continues unimpeded above. That said, we ask that you help us find a short-term solution to mitigate the consequences of Portal's failures as we work to convince the Trump Administration of the clear and compelling need to replace the bridge immediately.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Phil Murphy
Governor of New Jersey