

NJTransit Board Meeting

Lackawanna Coalition Statement

12 June 2019

The logo for the Lackawanna Coalition, featuring the text "Lackawanna Coalition" in white serif font on a dark red rectangular background with a white border.

We are glad that the newly released rail timetables include the reduced fares for lines most disrupted by the service reductions this summer, but are distressed that the new M&E timetable does *not* show the connecting bus that replaces the last Dover train on weeknights. The bus leaves Dover at 11:30 Monday through Friday nights and makes all stops to Summit, unfortunately excepting Mount Tabor, allowing riders in Morris County to connect with the last eastbound Hoboken train at Summit. The Trip Planner can find service, which we note was put in place in response to an inquiry by the Lackawanna Coalition's chairperson, David Peter Alan. We commend NJ Transit for acting on the suggestion. However, we are concerned that an unpublicized service will not be used often, if at all. Low ridership would make some riders' commutes harder than necessary this summer and possibly justify an argument against providing similar service when needed in the future. We encourage NJ Transit's social-media staff to supplement the printed schedule with the missing information—we wonder about the motivation for not announcing this service widely. A well-publicized service is most efficient, assists riders immediately, and is a model for the future.

The Lackawanna Coalition passed a resolution last month, submitted today as an exhibit, calling for the separation of two roles that the commissioner now holds. We believe that anyone serving as both Commissioner of Transportation and NJ Transit Board Chairperson is forced into an inherent conflict of interest by heading both highway and transit agencies. This is particularly troubling in budget season, as the current Commissioner has made it clear that NJ Transit and the highways in the state compete for scarce funds, and that highways are more important. NJ Transit thus needs an advocate who is not constrained by concern for the needs of roadways and motorists, but can advocate exclusively for rail and bus passengers and the NJ Transit agency. Unfortunately, the Transportation Act of 1979, which established NJ Transit, created this issue, which has continued unabated until today. It is time to do resolve this now. Of course, this is certainly not directed at Ms Gutierrez-Scaccetti personally; it is a badly-designed structure.

For years, David Peter Alan and the Lackawanna Coalition have called for better preparedness both at NJ Transit and at Amtrak. This past week, en route back to New York City, Mr. Alan got caught up in a situation in which Amtrak's lack of preparedness caused a great deal of inconvenience for hundreds of passengers. He documented that mess in a *Railway Age* article that I am submitting as an exhibit. For years, the coalition and other advocates have offered to work with NJ Transit management to improve preparedness. This is not simply a matter of providing electric power though an expensive gas-fired generation plant and tiny microgrid. Now is the time to take the advocates' offer seriously.

A bright spot for NJT this week was the quick restoration of the RiverLine service after the wheel problem was noted—congratulations on that!

Sally Jane Gellert
Communications Director

