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July 17, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Sheena Collum, and I'm honored to serve as the Mayor of South Orange Village in Essex County, New Jersey. I'm contacting you with urgency and humility on behalf of the thousands of commuters and individuals who rely on our train stations to get to work.

As you are likely aware from ongoing news reports, our public transportation system is failing us, specifically, those who depend on it for their livelihood. Most notably, NJ TRANSIT trains are unreliable at best, and this has increasingly become an untenable and desperate situation for working families and individuals. Plagued by continuous service disruptions from Amtrak infrastructure and overhead wires to heat-related electrical system failures and outages, something must be done in the short term to provide relief.

The purpose of this letter is to ask you, as valued employers, for your partnership, grace, and compassion as your employees navigate the frustrating chaos of simply trying to get to and from work and perform their jobs. Some suggestions I urge you to consider include:

- Understanding your employees, who rely on NJ TRANSIT trains, may be late through absolutely no fault of their own.
- Allowing employees to work remotely if the job permits.
- Being flexible with employees to come in a little later or leave a little earlier to avoid the madness of rush hours.
- Showing care and concern, to the greatest extent possible, for hourly workers who disproportionately bear the financial brunt of being late and rely on their hourly wages to support themselves and their families.

Three weeks ago, our community and our sister town of Maplewood held a robust commuter forum and were joined by federal, state, county, and local elected officials. Our residents shared not only their general frustrations but how some have been stuck on trains without air conditioning during heat waves, the overcrowding due to lack of capacity when trains are diverted, the cost associated with finding alternatives - such as Uber, the struggles of parents and caretakers to pick up their children on time, and the overall decline in mental health navigating a stressful situation.



Communication was also a major theme as commuters emphasized how cancellations and delays were posted once they were already at a station and left with no alternatives. Even today, the NJ TRANSIT website and app have a generic banner notice stating:

"We are experiencing heat-related rail equipment issues to the air-conditioning/electronic components due to the extreme & excessive temps. As a result, customers may experience delays & it may be necessary to cancel/combine select trips for the next 48-72 hours."

I'm sorry to say that "waiting and hoping" for reliable service has been the only viable option for the past several months, as no immediate relief or contingency plan for this summer has been implemented.

Please also know that our local governing body has passed a resolution urging immediate action on this topic. Our commuters and community leaders have been letter-writing and reaching out to advocate for short-term solutions, and we also plan to attend the next NJ TRANSIT Board Meeting later this month. We are doing everything in our collective power to elevate the discussion and get real results that produce meaningful solutions.

While I am representing my constituents in this correspondence, these ongoing issues impact tens of thousands of riders daily. I desperately want to play whatever role I can to advocate for everyone who was promised an essential service they're not receiving.

Thank you so much in advance for your consideration. If you have any questions, I can be reached via email at scollum@southorange.org or 973.378.7715 x 2.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sheena Collum".

Sheena Collum
Mayor

cc: Governor Murphy
NJ TRANSIT President & CEO Kevin S. Corbett