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THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK
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January 4, 2021

William J. Flynn
Chief Executive Officer
Amtrak
1 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20001

Anthony R. Coscia
Chairman of the Board
Amtrak
1 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Messrs. Flynn and Coscia,

We represent millions of Long Island Railroad riders and are gravely concerned with the lack of progress regarding the rehabilitation of the East River Tunnels. We request that you immediately provide a detailed plan and timeline for addressing this issue, and explain why “in-service refurbishment,” which can resolve it faster and cheaper, cannot be implemented and undertaken now.

The East River Tunnels are critical pieces of infrastructure through which hundreds of trains and thousands of commuters pass each day. Hundreds of millions of gallons of water inundated the tunnels during superstorm Sandy and left them in a precarious state of disrepair. A 2017 report by Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli said the number of trains delayed or canceled because of problems with the tubes and their switches increased 72 percent since Sandy, and accounted for a significant number of the LIRR’s overall on-time problems. Indeed, that report is now over three years old, and as the corrosion inside the tunnels has worsened, so has its impact on the quality of the railroad’s service. It also poses a major safety threat, and in 2017 Newsday wrote, “[l]et’s not wait until there is a terrible accident or a system failure that renders the tunnel unusable and requires another emergency response. We’re sounding the alarm now so there is urgency at Amtrak...to schedule the repairs and upgrades.” Astoundingly, however, as we enter 2021 there is no operational plan to fix the tunnels and it clearly does not seem to be a priority for Amtrak.

Amtrak has stated in the past that it must wait for the completion of East Side Access before it can turn to the East River Tunnels, since a total shutdown of a tube is required for its repair. This position deserves reconsideration. The recent successful usage of “in-service refurbishment” on the NYC Transit L subway line demonstrates that a complete shutdown of an entire tube is unnecessary. Further, a recent study commissioned by the Gateway Program

Development Corporation and issued by London Bridge Associates recommended “in-service refurbishment” for the rehabilitation of the North River Tunnels in the Hudson River. These tubes, similarly-situated to the East River Tunnels, were also inundated during Sandy and the report found that only weeknight and weekend outages would be required. This method seems highly preferable to the danger attendant to waiting for the completion of East Side Access and the disruption that would result from congesting the East Side Access tubes. In fact, in 2019, Amtrak Chairman Coscia said that if Amtrak implemented this method, “it would be far less painful to our travelers.” Yet, inexplicably, it is unclear whether Amtrak ever studied this question or reached any conclusions. Considering the time and money that could be saved, and the convenience that could be gained, by getting to work on the tunnels immediately – especially now that ridership is low and any repairs would create less disruption – we think this question should take on the highest degree of urgency for Amtrak.

We stand ready to help in any way possible but are fearful that Amtrak is squandering a critical opportunity to use new technology to address a pressing problem that will only get more dire. We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

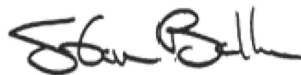
Sincerely,



Todd Kaminsky
Senator, 9th District



Laura Curran
Nassau County Executive



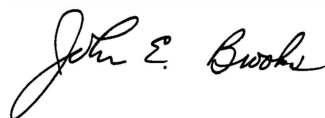
Steve Bellone
Suffolk County Executive



Leroy Comrie
Chair, Senate Commissions & Authorities Cmte.



Tim Kennedy
Chair, Senate Transportation Committee



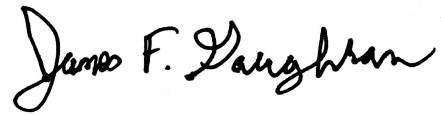
John Brooks
Senator, 8th District



Anna Kaplan
Senator, 7th District

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, sweeping 'K' followed by a smaller 'T'.

Kevin Thomas
Senator, 6th District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'James F. Gaughran' in a cursive script.

James Gaughran
Senator, 5th District