ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 82

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 3, 2020

Sponsored by:
Assemblyman JOHN F. MCKEON
District 27 (Essex and Morris)
Assemblywoman VALERIE VAINIERI HUTTLE
District 37 (Bergen)

Co-Sponsored by:
Assemblyman Caputo

SYNOPSIS

Urges President of United States to approve funding to complete Gateway Program, including Portal North Bridge.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/13/2020)

AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION urging the President of the United States to approve funding to complete the Gateway Program, including the program's Portal North Bridge.

WHEREAS, The Northeast Corridor (NEC) is the rail backbone of the Northeast region, serving 800,000 riders and various industries on 2,000 commuter, intercity, and freight trains each day; and

WHEREAS, In the "Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008," Congress improved coordination along the NEC by directing the Secretary of Transportation to establish the Northeast Corridor Commission (Commission) to promote cooperation and to advise Congress on NEC policy; and

WHEREAS, The Commission's work has allowed regional leadership to stabilize the NEC and to pursue future growth; and

WHEREAS, In 2011, plans for the Gateway Program were unveiled, which sought to provide strategic rail infrastructure improvements in order to improve existing services and increase passenger train capacity; and

WHEREAS, The Commission's April 2018 annual report noted that, although some progress has been made along the NEC, key investments are still needed, including advancement of various components of the Gateway Program, such as Portal North Bridge and the Hudson River Tunnel project; and

WHEREAS, The report also noted that without additional federal funding, these important repair and replacement projects cannot advance to the next stage of development and construction; and

WHEREAS, The current Portal Bridge is a 108-year-old swing span bridge over the Hackensack River near Secaucus Junction that was designed to accommodate the rail and maritime traffic that existed in the region over a century ago, and which is now prone to regular breakdowns; and

WHEREAS, The existing Portal Bridge, which is utilized by approximately 450 trains per day traveling between Newark, New Jersey and New York City, is a major bottleneck and source of delay for train traffic when the bridge's aging mechanical components malfunction during the openings and closings that accommodate maritime traffic; and

WHEREAS, The malfunctioning of the Portal Bridge caused 140 train cancellations during the first eight months of 2018; and

WHEREAS, The two-track replacement bridge, known as Portal North Bridge, is designed as a high-level, fixed-span bridge, eliminating the movable components and risk of malfunction; and

WHEREAS, Officials broke ground at the site of the Portal North Bridge in 2017, but the work stalled as the federal share of the project's funding has not been received; and

WHEREAS, A second, two-track Portal South Bridge span is proposed as part of the Gateway Program and when complete will double train capacity along this critical length of the NEC; and

WHEREAS, Workers who ride and rely on the NEC contribute $50 billion annually to the United States economy; and

WHEREAS, A loss of NEC transit service is estimated to cost the United States economy $100 million for just a single day; and

WHEREAS, Amtrak's former President and CEO, Joseph Boardman, stated that the "Gateway Program is essential to ensuring safe and reliable mobility for the region's rail passengers;" and

WHEREAS, In 2015, federal officials agreed to pay half the costs of funding the Gateway Program, including the Portal North Bridge; and

WHEREAS, The Gateway Program Development Corporation submitted an updated financial plan to the federal government in June 2018, reflecting changes to the local funding structure for the Portal North Bridge and addressing feedback received from the federal government, including a full commitment for the local share and a reduction in bridge construction costs; and

WHEREAS, Federal funding is required to proceed with the construction of the Portal North Bridge, but President Trump has personally intervened to block Congress from funding this crucial infrastructure project; and

WHEREAS, The federal government is obligated to meet its commitments to the State of New Jersey, the State of New York, and the passengers and industries that rely upon the seamless operation of rail lines along the Northeast Corridor; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED *by the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. The General Assembly respectfully urges the President of the United States to adhere to the federal government's commitment to improve the reliability of Northeast Corridor rail infrastructure by providing the previously committed federal funding that is required to complete the Gateway Program and the Portal North Bridge.

2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the President of the United States and the United States Secretary of Transportation.

STATEMENT

This resolution respectfully urges the President of the United States to adhere to the federal government's commitment to improve the reliability of Northeast Corridor rail infrastructure by providing the federal funding required to complete the Portal North Bridge and the broader Gateway Program.