



Written Testimony of  
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House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials

Hearing:  
Amtrak Operations: Examining the Challenges and Opportunities for Improving Efficiency  
and Service

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Good morning, **Chairman Nehls, Ranking Member Payne, Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen**, and members of the Committee.

I am Mitch Warren, Executive Director of the Northeast Corridor Commission. Congress created the Commission to bring together Amtrak, states, commuter rail operators, and the federal government. Kevin Corbett, President of New Jersey Transit, and Federal Rail Administrator Amit Bose are the Commission's Co-Chairs. My fellow witness, Stephen Gardner, serves as its Vice-Chair.

Thank you for inviting me to discuss our work and the future of America's busiest passenger rail system.

The Northeast Corridor brings hundreds of thousands of intercity and commuter passengers to work, business meetings, family visits, and leisure activities every day. However, these riders rely on infrastructure with tens of billions of dollars in state-of-good-repair needs, including 15 major bridges and tunnels that are over 100 years old, beyond their useful life, and in need of replacement or major rehabilitation.

Given these historic challenges, I cannot overstate what an exciting time it is for the Northeast Corridor. After decades of false starts, the NEC finally has the downpayment it needs to rebuild infrastructure that dates back to the period between the Civil War and World War II.

Thanks to the work of Congress and the Biden Administration on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the NEC has its first-ever source of dedicated, multi-year funding, providing exactly the kind of predictability needed to efficiently deliver a major capital program.

Part of what makes the NEC ready to invest this historic funding is the work the Commission has done over the last decade to lay a foundation of trust, transparency, collaboration, and accountability among its members.

The Commission held its first meeting in 2010 and has eighteen voting members: five representing USDOT, four from Amtrak, and nine from Northeast Corridor states and the District of Columbia. The Commission was authorized in recognition of the complexities of a corridor that has four different right-of-way owners, passes through eight states and the District of Columbia, has nine passenger rail operators, and supports over 2,000 trains a day including high-speed Acela trains, Northeast Regional and long-distance trains, commuter trains, and freight trains.

Our small staff pulls together these various stakeholders to help them row in the same direction and achieve outcomes greater than the sum of their parts.

Our first statutory mandate was to create a formula to allocate shared costs on the corridor. After four years of negotiations, the Commission approved the first Northeast Corridor Commuter and Intercity Rail Cost Allocation Policy in 2015. This Policy now allocates over \$1.3 billion per year in shared operating and normalized replacement capital costs. In addition, the Commission has a project-based cost allocation policy that provides guidance for allocating costs associated with individual projects.

The Policy also includes provisions to ensure more collaboration and accountability among Commission members on the planning and delivery of capital programs.

In 2019, the Commission initiated CONNECT NEC 2035, an intensely collaborative effort to define members' state of good repair and improvement needs, and stage and sequence those infrastructure investments over 15 years. CONNECT NEC is the plan to rebuild and grow the NEC for the future. The Commission unanimously approved this \$117 billion plan in June 2021.

Thanks to the funding provided to the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail program, Amtrak's NEC Account, and numerous other grant programs through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, these critical projects suddenly have a path forward, giving the workers, travelers, and businesses that depend on the corridor hope for a future that promises more reliable, more frequent, and faster service.

While continuing its work on cost sharing and collaborative planning, the Commission is now also turning its attention to the challenges our members face in delivering these critical projects.

To this end, we are developing an Implementation Coordination Program that will bring to project delivery the same kind of transparency, collaboration, and accountability that the Commission brings to cost sharing and planning.

This program will focus on improving the interagency coordination needed between our members as they partner on projects, a frequent occurrence on a corridor as complex as the NEC. We will track project progress and provide an early warning system when projects threaten to go off-schedule due to coordination issues such as delayed design reviews, stalled project agreements, and differences over resource allocation.

The challenges in front of us are formidable, but success is essential. In addition to the need for effective coordination between the corridor's owners, operators,

project sponsors, and funders, our members face workforce constraints, material and equipment needs, rising costs, and organizational changes.

An essential prerequisite to solving these challenges is what it took to build the Interstate Highway System and what IIJA delivered for passenger rail: a dedicated, multi-year funding source providing the predictability needed to efficiently deliver a major capital program.

The reality is that even more funding is required over the longer-term to address all of the corridor's state-of-good repair and improvement needs. The total cost of projects included in the Federal Railroad Administration's NEC Project Inventory exceeds \$100 billion, with \$40 billion of that for major backlog projects alone.

Despite these significant future funding needs, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is a game-changer for the corridor.

After decades of falling further behind when it comes to replacing aging infrastructure, a better future lies ahead. We thank Congress and President Biden for this historic investment that will benefit riders for generations to come. The Commission's members are eager to get to work to deliver these critical rail projects that will generate significant economic, transportation, and environmental benefits to the region and to the nation.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today on behalf of the Commission. I look forward to answering your questions.