

[NARP: Tunnel Debacle Betrays “Goldfish” Pathology Plaguing U.S. Infrastructure](#)

National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) President & CEO Jim Mathews issued a statement responding to the recent incidents that have affected intercity and commuter rail operations in the New York/New Jersey region of the Northeast Corridor:

Our Association is extremely dismayed at the series of incidents that have been troubling train operations along the Northeast Corridor.

Not simply because these problems, resulting from aging tunnel and electrical infrastructure, have been disrupting the daily lives of hundreds of thousands commuters and travelers. No, we are just as dismayed by the collective memory loss that seems to be sweeping the U.S. every few months. When it comes to our infrastructure problems, America has started displaying the retentive powers of your average goldfish.

Admittedly, NARP has a somewhat unique perspective on this issue, having worked for new Hudson River Tunnels for more than 20 years. We were there when the plan to build the Access to the Region’s Core (ARC) tunnels were drafted, supporting a project that even in 1995 was understood to be a critical priority.

We were there in 2007 when the ARC plan was crippled by removing the Amtrak intercity rail component of ARC—redesigned to instead dead-end a New Jersey Transit-only tunnel in a deep cavern terminal under Macy’s in Midtown Manhattan. We launched an education campaign to warn Congressional leaders that the tunnel was being neutered, and that this alteration would necessitate the construction of yet *another* new rail tunnel under the Hudson River to accommodate Amtrak’s growth.

We were there when this shortsighted decision helped contribute to the ARC tunnel’s demise, with incoming-Governor Chris Christie citing the absence of an Amtrak component—along with a less- substantiated fear of cost overruns—as the basis for his decision to kill the ARC tunnels.

We were there as the incident rate in the Hudson River tunnels slowly climbed higher, hindering operations and slowing the economic activity along the entire Northeast Corridor—a corridor that, while it only takes up two percent of the landmass in the U.S., accounts for 17 percent of the population and 20 percent of the GDP. We saw Hurricane Sandy strain that infrastructure almost to the breaking point, giving us a taste in the days after what a nightmare the region’s daily commute would become if the tunnels ever experienced a serious failure.

We’ve seen NJT commuters hit hardest, demonstrating that Governor Christie should’ve fought for the original ARC design, not just killed the tunnels and left it for someone else to fix.

NARP has all this perspective. However, we also understand something else: none of this history matters all that much. You don’t need to know it to understand that the busiest passenger rail corridor in the U.S. shouldn’t be depending on tunnels built over 100 years ago. That you shouldn’t let that corridor accumulate a \$52 billion backlog in state-of-good-repair capital projects. That if you don’t invest in infrastructure, it will stop functioning.

You don’t need to know all the history to understand the solution: build the new tunnels already. Amtrak has already begun work on the Gateway Project, which was launched amid the wreckage of ARC—they just need help in funding the project. Congress and the White House have agreed upon a method to pay for it with revenue that would flow out of repatriation and tax reform—they just need to pass a law to make it happen. For as little as \$3 billion to \$4 billion in dedicated funding per year—a tiny fraction of what we spend on roads—we could begin the work of transforming not just the Northeast Corridor, but the entire U.S. rail network.

Or we could just let Amtrak and NJT cobble the system back into a semblance of working order using spare parts and loose change, and act surprised again in a few months when this all happens again. The choice is ours.

About the National Association of Railroad Passengers

NARP is the only national organization speaking for the users of passenger trains and rail transit. We have worked since 1967 to expand the quality and quantity of passenger rail in the U.S. Our mission is to work towards a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice Americans want. Our work is supported by more than 28,000 individual members nationwide.