Beginning today with updates on initiatives to help enhance accessibility to transit, on June 14th NJ TRANSIT held its first-ever Accessibility Forum, with more than 250 people attending online and in-person. The forum was designed to educate the public on the many services and features that make our system as accessible and inclusive as possible, and to provide an opportunity for public feedback and have questions answered. Customers who were not able to attend can view the presentation online at njtransit.com/accessibility. Continuing with opportunities to improve accessibility, last month NJ TRANSIT won another important FTA grant, provided through the FTA’s Areas of Persistent Poverty Program. NJ TRANSIT will now leverage this $520,000 grant as a first step in implementing a series of accessibility, service, and customer experience improvements on our Newark Light Rail system.

Thanks to our extensive and successful grant application efforts, NJ TRANSIT also received last month an additional FTA grant – this one for $514,000, provided through the FTA’s Route Planning Restoration Program – to study the current bus network in Hudson County and its surrounding areas. Like NewBus Newark and NewBus Burlington-Camden-Gloucester, NewBus Hudson will include a detailed performance analysis of the existing system, along with a robust outreach effort and identification of emerging travel destinations, with implementable service recommendations.

Given the number of items on tonight’s agenda, I’ll highlight just a few items up for Board approval. The Board will consider approval of our FY23 Operating Budget, which will allow NJ TRANSIT to maintain and even enhance current service levels without increasing fares for a fifth consecutive year under the Murphy Administration. We will also introduce a significant update to our FY21-FY25 Five-Year Capital Plan, which promises to build on the significant transformation underway at NJ TRANSIT by continuing to improve reliability, on-time performance, customer comfort, and the overall customer experience. We will also seek Board approval to once again advance the design of our Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Northern Branch project, which will actually put the “Bergen” in the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail. In alignment with our new Sustainability Plan now in active development, the Board will consider authorizing the installation of 62 electric vehicle charging stations at nine NJ TRANSIT facilities, to support the transition of our fleet of non-revenue vehicles to electric. In addition, the Board will consider a mid-life rehabilitation campaign for 200 NJ TRANSIT North American Bus Industries, or NABI, buses. Finally, the Board will vote to approve a new agreement with the Police Benevolent Association #304 union, which covers NJTPD Officers and Detectives.

Shifting gears to infrastructure updates, the overall Gateway Program took several important steps forward over the past month. On June 9th, I was proud to speak at a press conference announcing a new RFP for the design of a multi-billion-dollar reimagining of Penn Station New York (PSNY). In addition, last month Amtrak – in partnership with NJ TRANSIT and in coordination with MTA – entered into a contract with a team led by Arup Group to begin designing options to build additional platforms, concourses, and tracks at PSNY. In conjunction with the Portal North Bridge and the Hudson Tunnel Project, this project will one day enable NJ TRANSIT to roughly double capacity into PSNY, and significantly improve reliability for customers. On July 5th, Governors Murphy and Hochul signed the Phase One Memorandum of Understanding for both the Portal North Bridge and the Hudson Tunnel Projects. Although we are not the lead agency on the Hudson Tunnel Project, we look forward to working with all our project partners to get shovels in the ground as soon as possible on this project that is so critical to NJ TRANSIT’s future.

While PSNY is certainly important, NJ TRANSIT’s own historic Hoboken Terminal is set to undergo a transformation as well, restoring it to one of the crown jewels of our system. Governor Murphy has allocated $176 million to the upgrades and development of Hoboken Terminal and the area surrounding the terminal. In concert with this commitment, on July 6th, Hoboken’s City Council approved a Redevelopment Agreement with LCOR that will kickstart a series of public improvements both inside and outside the Terminal. Named “Hoboken Connect,” these improvements include significant renovations to the historic station building, the bus and ferry terminals, PATH infrastructure, and the surrounding streetscape. Including his commitment to Hoboken, the Governor has allocated a total of $814 million to seven NJ TRANSIT stations – including more than $440 million for Newark Penn Station and Walter Rand Transportation Center in Camden – allowing NJ TRANSIT to accelerate these important projects that otherwise would have had to wait years until funding was available. The end result will be significant improvements to the overall customer experience – delivered much more expeditiously – at stations throughout our system.