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Chairman Gordon, Chairman McKeon, members of the Senate and the Assembly, and fellow witnesses, good morning. On behalf of our President and CEO, Wick Moorman, I am here today to discuss the upcoming renewal work at Penn Station this summer. I’m joined by my colleague, Scot Naparstek, our Chief Operating Officer, and together we will be available to answer questions following my statement.

Given that Mr. Moorman recently testified before you about the history of the station and the context for our upcoming work, and that many of you had a chance to join me on a recent tour of the Gateway Program and the station, I will focus my remarks on bringing you up to date on the progress of the renewal program as we approach our first period of continuous work. I know all of you are interested and concerned about how this work will impact New Jersey Transit (NJT) operations into and out of Penn Station. We at Amtrak understand this, and I can assure you we are working together with NJT and the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) to minimize the disruption for all passengers while we advance these necessary investments. With many of you now having seen some of this infrastructure yourselves, I know you appreciate why we have to do this work now. The sheer volume of train traffic, the aging condition of the assets due to chronic underinvestment, and the criticality of this network to the whole region means that the time for small fixes is past and a more comprehensive approach is required.

As you know, we have already begun track renewal work in the station during weekends and have finalized our plans for the two major continuous work projects over the summer, which are set to begin on July 7 and end at Labor Day. As we reported in our earlier testimony, additional weekend work will follow the summer work, lasting through approximately June, 2018. From the customer’s point of view, the primary impacts at Penn Station will fall in the July 10 - September 1 timeframe. Up to 3 tracks will be closed during the July - August work period, and up to 5 tracks will be closed on weekends for renewal work, limiting the number of trains that can use the station. Because this work is occurring in the western part of Penn Station where trains are sorted to and from the Hudson River Tunnel, Amtrak and New Jersey Transit will be the most directly impacted during this phase of the program. However, the benefits of this work will help all three railroads by enhancing reliability and freeing up time and workforce for us to focus on other priorities within the station after the renewal job is complete.

To determine impacts on service and to build a workable schedule of operations during the renewal period, Amtrak shared the work plan and available trains-per-hour capacity with both LIRR and NJT as soon as it was ready. Each railroad undertook service planning to identify the optimal use of the remaining capacity and to build a schedule that could be in effect for the summer work period. Each railroad will now take the lead in communicating new schedules and service changes to their customers, along with possible travel alternatives. Although the work will not directly affect their assets, our planning efforts have also included PATH, New York City, Metro North, and the Moynihan project to ensure coordination, since we expect they will experience changes to their ridership, usage patterns or project schedules as a result of this program.
During this summer period, Amtrak train schedules will incur the largest impacts of the three railroads in terms of proportional reductions in train service. As we announced yesterday, Amtrak will cancel three weekday Northeast Regional round trips (a total of six trains) between New York and Washington. The schedules for our Keystone Service trains between New York and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania will also be modified. Three of the weekday Keystone Service round trips will start or terminate at Philadelphia, and one will start and terminate here in Newark, while service between Philadelphia and Harrisburg will continue to operate as scheduled. Our Crescent, which connects New York with Atlanta and New Orleans will now terminate and originate at Washington, DC, and connections will be provided for Crescent passengers to other Northeast Corridor trains to and from New York and intermediate points. Lastly, we are still working on the plan for the Empire Service trains that connect New York City to Albany, Rochester, and Buffalo, and we will announce changes to this service soon.

We know that passengers are rightfully concerned about travel during this period of time, and that’s why we are committed to providing information well in advance of these changes and will be establishing systems to ensure that our passengers will have the most up-to-date information throughout the program. Additionally, Amtrak is taking ample precautions to ensure that we are able to get this work accomplished on schedule and provide extra support to passengers in the station and on our trains during this summer period. To help oversee and manage the renewal work, we’ve hired national infrastructure solutions firm HNTB Corporation to supplement our project management and technical services and we are supplementing our forces with additional labor and management personnel. On the communications front, we are developing a comprehensive plan aimed at our customers, commuter partners, city and state governments and the general public. Our outreach will employ increased social media and web content, special “Station Ambassadors” who will be positioned to help passengers, and other traditional communications measures to keep everyone informed about the program and the necessary changes to our service patterns over the course of its duration. Finally, Amtrak’s Emergency Management and Corporate Security and Police Departments are busy refining incident protocols and strengthening coordination between the various entities at Penn and the local emergency responders so that we are well prepared to safely handle any disruptions or incidents that occur.

Despite this planning, we know that this is going to be a frustrating few months for passengers at Penn Station as they adjust to the new schedules and reduced service levels. We understand your frustration as well, but there are no easy solutions to addressing the problems of overuse and underinvestment that now face us. I can, however, assure you that this important work needs to be done and that Amtrak is up to the challenge. The paradigm of fitting vital renewal and maintenance work into limited windows so that peak-period service is never impacted must change if we are to get ahead of the challenge and start on the path towards greater operational reliability. We recognize the difficulty of such decisions and the regrettable inconvenience they can cause passengers, but we can’t pretend that a facility with so little spare capacity and significantly aged assets can operate indefinitely under such a heavy load without more time to make basic investments in its core infrastructure. We will aggressively pursue such investments to the extent possible, and we trust that our commuter partners will support an approach that does not wait for problems to occur, but rather anticipates and addresses them.
With our existing funding in FY2017, we have the resources to advance this work now and we are dedicated to doing everything we possibly can to ensure the renewal program accomplishes its objectives. We will keep a close eye on the renewal program as it progresses and, in the event of any additional disruptions or delays to service that occur during this period, we will work collaboratively with our partners to quickly respond and keep the public informed.

We look forward to staying in touch with you over the coming months as we take these important steps to provide the people of this region the efficient and effective transportation solutions they expect – not just for today and tomorrow, but for years to come. As we’ve discussed before, however, reliable rail service into New York from New Jersey is only possible through two important steps. First, both New Jersey Transit and Amtrak need to leave behind the years of underinvestment and fulfill our obligations to fully fund our respective shares of the basic infrastructure capital and operating expenses of our shared-use NEC territory, both now and in the future. Second, we need the Administration, the two states and their commuter railroads, and Congress to predictably fund the Gateway Program and the expansion and renewal of the key Northeast Corridor bridges, tunnels and station capacity that it contains. Without reliable and increased funding for this program, the tunnels and bridges serving the station and future growth for any service to New York City are both at significant risk. Amtrak has done its best to hold this incredibly complex, busy and fragile infrastructure together over the years so that New Jersey Transit has been able to achieve 90% or better on-time performance for their trains at Penn Station on an annual basis, but this performance can’t last without major renewal of the existing infrastructure, and an expansion of capacity made possible by Gateway.

Finally, let me touch on the station concourses. Earlier this month, Wick Moorman proposed what we believe to be the next logical step in the effort to improve the station’s separately run and grossly undersized concourses – the creation of a new concourse development entity which will unify the management and operations of the station’s passenger space and partner with the private sector to bring in world-class expertise to improve the station. Penn Station is a unique and challenging facility and we believe that its proper management and development require the very best talent and experience. Accordingly, we plan to solicit a private-sector partner for our concourse to enhance its operation and have proposed consolidating the management of all of the concourses into a unified structure that could hire a proven private-sector building management firm to improve the station’s functionality and operation on a contractual basis. We hope to have NJ Transit’s participation in this effort and would look forward to working with them and with you to further develop this proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and thank you for your support for improving the Northeast Corridor and Penn Station. We will keep you informed as the planning and work progress throughout the summer. I look forward to working with each of you to develop the necessary resources to keep the renewal efforts going and to make the vitally important Gateway Program a reality.