Chairman Gordon, Chairman McKeon, members of the Subcommittee, and fellow witnesses, good morning. My name is Mike DeCataldo, and I am the Vice President, Operations East at Amtrak. In this capacity, I am responsible for Amtrak’s operations on the Eastern Seaboard, which includes all of our services into and out of New York Penn Station.

It’s an honor to be joining you today on behalf of Amtrak, and our President, Wick Moorman. We are now two weeks into the Infrastructure Renewal at Penn Station. We have had a promising start, without significant service issues or disruptions, and we are looking forward to making significant progress on addressing some of the outstanding infrastructure needs at New York Penn Station.

Introduction

As I’m sure you know, passenger rail plays a critical role in the economic life of the Northeast Corridor region. Seventeen percent of the nation’s population inhabits the area, producing twenty percent of the nation’s GDP, with a total annual economic output of $3 trillion – more than the output of France, and easily enough for the region to qualify on its own as a G-7 nation. It is one of the world’s most productive regions, but its productivity and economic vitality depend heavily on an overall transportation system that is in poor condition and at capacity at many critical points.

Since Mr. Moorman’s testimony in April, and Mr. Naparstek and Mr. Gardner’s testimony in May, we’ve made good progress on several initiatives designed to improve conditions for travelers at Penn Station, in addition to the Renewal project. Amtrak is hiring a diverse team of domestic and international experts to help us improve the day-to-day operation and coordination between the various railroads. This effort includes development of best practices and a framework for a joint station operations center and we are working with NJ Transit and Long Island Rail Road to affirm the scope. Additionally, with this work, we’re also setting the stage to create a new entity to seek private sector partners in facility management to bring world-class expertise to the management of this complex and challenging environment.
The New York Penn Station and Tunnel System Emergency Preparedness Task Force has been created to focus and coordinate the efforts of a strong coalition of transportation providers, city and state law enforcement, first responders, the city Office of Emergency Management, and state and Federal transportation agencies. By increasing communication and engagement between all of these agencies, we can continually improve and further refine our approach to safety, security, and emergency management for the station and tunnel complex. The task force is meeting on a bi-weekly basis during the renewal period, and we have expanded our unified command post at New York Penn Station to help coordinate the efforts of these organizations.

Renewal Program update

Since May, the Renewal Program at New York Penn Station has made significant progress, and we began the most intensive phase of the program on Friday, July 7. It’s inevitably the case that programs in heavily trafficked areas like this are always challenging, particularly when we have to reconcile the needs of three different operators. It’s never easy to reconcile everyone’s needs, but thanks to the cooperation we’ve had from New Jersey Transit and Long Island Rail Road, we were able to arrive at a set of schedules that worked from the operational perspective and that kept the unavoidable disruptions to a minimum. We were able to execute a smooth implementation of the schedule changes we had planned for July 10, which included very successful efforts by all three railroads to “surge” managers and staff to the station to provide additional support for travelers who might need assistance.

The Renewal Program intensified on the weekend proceeding July 10, and we will continue to offer modified weekday services through the period of intensive work, through September 1. Our Engineering Department has a force of approximately 360 people onsite, working on a 24-7 basis, to meet our published schedule to complete this phase of the renewal program. Even prior to this, we’ve been busy advancing elements of the program on weekends, so even though the intensive phase of the program is just getting underway, we have already completed work on some important components of the project, with scheduled work for the week of July 7 to 13 complete. These include:

- Removing and replacing 600 railroad ties as part of the renewal of station track 7;
- Significant progress at A Interlocking on the west side of the station, including total replacement of the 69A and 69B switches, significant progress on the replacement of 89 switch, and preparatory work for replacement of 37/71 core scissor crossover;
- Wood, timber and rail replacement within “JO” interlocking (east side of Penn Station);
- Replacement of the first 96 ties in line 1 of the East River tunnel, with several thousand more to come;
- Removal of old rail and 3rd rail on station track 10, demolition of track bed, removal of old concrete, installation of new ties and the pouring of 140 feet of new concrete;
• Replacement of ties within station track 2;
• Positioning of equipment in New York and New Jersey in preparation for the extensive summer work in July and August, as well as daily maintenance work.
• Removal and replacement of old power and signal cables on 6X track.

This is a continuous process, and just as work went on prior to July 10, it will continue, as we have previously stated, after September 1, although we expect most of that work to take place on the weekends, when impacts to scheduled service — particularly commuter service — are minimal. We realize these efforts create inconvenience for the traveling public, but we are very confident that this coordinated and planned disruption that is necessary for us to do this work will help to avoid random disruptions that cause the railroads that serve New York Penn Station and our commuters and travelers such anxiety. To ensure we’re keeping everyone informed, we are publishing a Weekly Progress Report that is available on our website, at https://www.amtrak.com/NYPrenewal. This highlights the work accomplished during the week, and includes a stoplight chart showing the pace of progress on key activities.

Ready to Build

While the Renewal Program will address some of the station’s most urgent track needs, it won’t address the many other systems that make reliable service possible such as our signals, tunnels or electric traction systems. Nor will it support the new tracks and platforms the station will need to handle the larger volume of traffic — what we refer to as “capacity.” These improvements in the heavily trafficked territory between Newark, New Jersey and Penn Station, New York are bundled in the infrastructure investment program known as the Gateway Program, which has made important strides in the last year thanks to cooperation among the states of New Jersey, New York, the Federal government, NJ TRANSIT, and Amtrak.

There is literally no portion of the existing railroad in Northern New Jersey and Manhattan that will not require significant capacity augmentations to accommodate the traffic growth that we can confidently predict for the coming years. In a region that is expected to add seven million new residents by 2040, the need for transportation capacity is only going to become more pressing. Ridership at Penn Station is expected to grow by 70% by 2040, and the only way to meet this growth in demand will be investment to create the capacity the region needs.

The Gateway Program addresses this challenge by adding new track, tunnel, bridge, electric, signal, and station capacity to the railroad between Newark, NJ and New York City, and by renewing existing assets while minimizing impacts to existing service.

Since 2013, Amtrak and its partners have constructed 1,000 feet of a concrete casing to protect the right-of-way through Manhattan for a new Hudson River tunnel connecting to Penn Station. This month, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Hudson Tunnel Project was published by the Federal Railroad Administration and public hearings will take place in New York and New Jersey in early August. Plans to replace the Portal Bridge are ready to go; funding is the
principal remaining challenge before construction can begin, and early work will begin this summer. Much progress has been made, but we need New Jersey’s continued support to keep up the momentum of the Gateway Program.

We have reached a critical crossroads, and it is time for us to decide whether we wish to invest, and move forward, or to fall back – because that is the choice. It’s simply not possible for us to stand still. We can and must set our sights on the vision of an infrastructure that provides this region’s vibrant economy with the transportation system it needs to grow and prosper in the decades to come.

Thanks very much for the opportunity to testify on this important topic today, and I look forward to any questions you might have.