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Issue:

New Jersey's transportation network is at once rife with problems and devoid of funding. While the cost of repairs is as high as \$21 billion, neglecting critical infrastructural improvements will prove to be detrimental to both economy and state.

Necessary Background:

New Jersey has long invested billions of dollars in its transportation infrastructure; protecting this investment remains the state's highest transportation priority. Nevertheless, the quality of New Jersey transportation systems is rapidly deteriorating -- be it in roads or bridges -- by consequence of cuts in funding or misallocation thereof. The New Jersey Transportation Trust Fund, which helps maintain more than 32,000 miles of roadway and thousands of bridges, bears the cost of maintaining New Jersey's bridges and public roadways in revenue from gas, petroleum products, and sales tax; however, the fund is projected to run dry by 2016 (Source 4). Governor Chris Christie has yet to find a new source of capital for New Jersey's Transportation Trust Fund and -- by extension -- state spending on roads, rail projects, and bridges may be reduced by 40% to a measly \$600 million in the coming fiscal year (Source 1). Consequently, a proposed 9% fare increase may be implemented in 2016 (Source 2).

Evidence of Problem Existing:

The present conditions of transportation infrastructure have borne the burden of heavy traffic on the state's highways and bridges, extensive use and frequent service on its rail and bus systems, and weather and deferred maintenance. The state's transportation systems lack either the resources or the authority to meet the increase in demand that comes in hand with population growth. Just as congestion heightens, so the need for public transit does too. About 14% of the state's roads are considered congested; another 28% are almost at capacity. The percentage of roadways experiencing daily congestion in excess of one hour has increased from 15% to 27% (Source 9). A perpetual lack of funding and excessive debt merely rubs salt into an open wound. The Transportation Trust Fund is financed through various tax revenues and bonds -- and unreliably so, since New Jersey government officials have used said taxes to defray previous debts, resulting in a substantial decrease in the fund. Additionally, revenues from the Turnpike authority were redirected for New Jersey Transit operating expenses; thus, the current level of funding is lower than the requisite for planned project appropriations and debt service costs (Source 2). In spite of contrary efforts, there persists a \$690 million gap (Source 7). By 2016, the New Jersey Transportation Trust Fund will not be capable of borrowing money any longer. Moreover, the lack of funding has already prompted funding cuts for New Jersey Transit, which has left the company burdened by a \$56 million budget deficiency (Source 2). 35% of NJ roads are in poor condition and 36% of bridges require repair, so much so that New Jersey has the sixth highest percent of deficient bridges in the United States (Source 3). Such complications incur motorists a total of \$11.8 billion annually in the form of additional vehicle operating costs, congestion-related delays, and traffic crashes (Source 3).

Impact:

Investment in transportation infrastructure largely affects growth and development trends in New Jersey. Expanding roads and highways in suburban and rural areas can extend access to markets for both producers and consumers, while increased investment in mass transit pathways can be conducive to urban revitalization or gentrification. Economic forces and positive growth are challenging New Jersey's transportation system in unprecedented ways -- and of course will continue to do so. In particular, roadway conditions are a significant factor in approximately one third of traffic fatalities (Source 5). As transportation-related issues compound, debts grow; the government has little recourse but to seek revenue from taxpayers, placing the gross economic value of the state at stake.

Possible Solutions:

Future investments lay the groundwork for continued growth and prosperity. The New Jersey transportation system must maintain and renew the transportation infrastructure by improving mobility, accessibility, and reliability, and

optimizing the freight movement in order to continue the systems effectiveness. Moreover, New Jersey's high urban population percentage opens the door to debate over a number of investment initiatives and the best allocation of state funding, especially in the context of underdeveloped inner city neighborhoods. The Department of Transportation utilizes a variety of both state- and federal-funded programs to improve access to transit facilities and nodes of public transportation. Nevertheless, the main question vis-a-vis transportation infrastructure regards the optimal allocation of government resources to suit consumer needs in the present and increase potential economic output in the future. Many New Jersey state legislators have suggested an increase in the gas tax -- currently the second lowest in the nation (Source 1). A hike in the gas tax may help to reimburse the transportation trust fund's debts. However, a Rutgers-Eagleton survey conducted in February found that 54 percent of state residents opposed hiking the gas tax; only 42% indicated they were in favor (Source 2).

Sources:

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