



Testimony on S2931
Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee
March 11, 2024

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Re: bill S2931

Chair Sarlo and members of the Committee:

My name is Sabrina Rodriguez, and I am the Advocacy and Government Affairs Manager of New Jersey Future, a nonprofit organization that promotes sensible and equitable growth, redevelopment, and infrastructure investments to foster healthy, strong, resilient communities.

We appreciate how important it is to reauthorize the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF), and in the past we have been supporters, especially when the TTF helped advance important transportation policy.

Budgets and spending plans are how the State sets and explains its priorities to the taxpayers of New Jersey. The TTF sets a two-billion-dollar-a-year program that also articulates New Jersey's transportation priorities and policy direction. As a policy and priority statement, we can do better than the bill we have before us today, and therefore we cannot support it at this time.

We have to start by remembering that transportation is not just about cars; it's about people. While Departments of Transportation (DOTs) around the country are looking at how to change their spending priorities and policies to support more walking, biking, and public transit use, and less driving, we in New Jersey have an opportunity to advance this work through the TTF reauthorization.

We ask that lawmakers look at this TTF reauthorization as an opportunity to address greenhouse gas emissions, provide better transportation services for people who want to drive less, and make our transportation system more cost-effective, efficient, safer, and equitable.

We ask that you treat the TTF as what it is—a transportation policy and priority statement. We would like you to consider opening up this process to hear from more people about transportation priorities, and we would like you to consider the following in this bill:

1. We all recognize that no one wants to spend more time in their cars. Less driving also means fewer greenhouse gas emissions, a cleaner environment, and healthier people. The TTF can move New Jersey in this direction. The federal government has signaled that it will expect DOTs to address greenhouse gas reductions as they plan and spend transportation dollars. New Jersey has a chance to join other states in getting ahead of this and set specific targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions specifically by reducing vehicle miles traveled. Setting a state target for reducing the number of vehicle miles we travel will have the benefit of reprioritizing project spending toward fixing our current infrastructure first, adding capacity in ways that support walking, biking, and transit use, and letting people get out of their cars more. The TTF can direct the DOT to establish vehicle miles traveled reduction targets in the next six months.
2. Next, the state needs better data. We ask that the Legislature require the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to collect odometer readers at the time of vehicle registration, similar to how our neighbors in Pennsylvania do it. This information will be incredibly valuable to help us understand if we are succeeding in reducing our vehicle miles traveled and pointing us toward the places where we can make the biggest improvements.
3. Municipalities are on the front line of transportation planning and spending. The local aid portion of the TTF provides much-needed funding for counties and municipalities but doesn't provide the support necessary to enable them to plan and apply for funding for projects that reduce driving. The TTF can direct the DOT to provide more incentives, technical assistance, and funding to help towns, especially overburdened communities, be able to plan and submit competitive applications for state and federal funding.

We look forward to working with you to move New Jersey forward as a leader in transportation that prioritizes people over cars.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

Sabrina Rodriguez

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