



## State of New Jersey

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**Remarks for IBTTA Virtual Press Briefing**  
**“The State of U.S. Transportation During the COVID-19 Pandemic”**  
**May 21, 2020**

Good afternoon to my colleagues and all those participating in today’s press briefing. I am Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Transportation and Chair of the Boards of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority (NJTA), South Jersey Transportation Authority (SJTA) and NJ TRANSIT. Not unlike what you have heard from my colleagues in Denver, Atlanta and Pennsylvania, New Jersey toll roads have experienced significant economic and operational impacts since the onset of COVID-19.

It is important to note that New Jersey State Government never shutdown. Instead, agencies were called upon to create work at home plans for as many employees as possible. From the earliest implementation of restrictions throughout government, Transportation was deemed an essential service. What this meant for the NJTA, operator of the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway, and the SJTA, operator of the Atlantic City Expressway and the Atlantic City International Airport, was devising a plan to maintain a 24/7/365 operation with more than 70% of staff working from home.

NJTA and SJTA began the process of reducing on-site attendance on March 24<sup>th</sup> with the suspension of cash toll collection. This decision impacted more than 950 full- and part-time toll collection staff. Other business units of the Authorities worked on reduced or alternating work schedules. Safety Service Patrols continue to operate to serve customers who may become disabled and to support first responders at incident scenes.

Both agencies implemented enhanced cleaning protocols and distributed personal protective equipment. Employees that may need to access any official business facilities are required to wear face coverings; gloves and hand sanitizer are made available as well. NJTA reported 15 employees testing positive COVID-19. SJTA has no employees testing positive for COVID-19.

Serving our commercial trucking community rose to an all new level of importance. In addition to increasing permitted gross vehicle weight, NJTA was able to stock supplies of hand sanitizer for truckers at service plazas, and all roadways made certain that food, fuel and restrooms were always available. We stayed in close contact with the New Jersey Motor Truck Association to ensure issues were addressed as quickly as possible.

None of New Jersey's toll roads operate under an all-electronic collection mode. Thus agencies worked quickly with the back office operator, Conduent, to convert a violation notice to an invoice, and waived initial invoice administration fees for those who paid tolls under the first notice. Penalties are reinstated after the first invoice.

A mild winter led to good revenue performance and lower operating expenses in January and February for all roadways. With COVID-19 travel restrictions implemented in March, both traffic and revenue saw major reductions. March traffic for the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway was down 29.3%, with revenue down 25.1%. April traffic was down 61.5% with revenue down 61.6%. For the four month period January 2020 through April 2020, traffic is down 22.5%, or 45.3 million transactions, and revenue is down 21.9%, or \$108 million.

The Atlantic City Expressway experienced similar traffic and revenue performance with traffic down 35% and revenue down 33% in March. April traffic and revenue were down 67% and 66% respectively. For the four month period January 2020 through April 2020, Expressway traffic is down 24% and revenue is down 23%.

In order to bridge the operating revenue loss, NJTA will issue approximately \$259 million of Turnpike Revenue Bonds to refinance certain series of outstanding debt that has principal payments in 2020 and 2021 to provide cash flow relief. SJTA has not determined that any additional financial transaction will be necessary.

As for agency construction programs, all are progressing as scheduled. In light of significantly reduced traffic volumes, lane closing hours have been extended, review of the conversion of night construction to day light hours is on a project-by-project basis, and some projects have been accelerated to minimize construction-related traffic once the state's economy returns.

This has been an extraordinary period in our lifetimes. Our professional and personal lives have been impacted in ways we never imagined. But we have always counted on our transportation system to be there for us. Transportation professionals have stepped up to this challenge to keep our systems running. My gratitude to all of the men and women who have worked tirelessly to keep our first responders, front-line workers, and the essential personnel moving.