

Remarks on Infrastructure Improvement Efforts in Bear, Delaware
November 6, 2023

Well, it's good to be home. I've been coming down here a long—please take a seat if you have one.

[At this point, the President addressed audience members on the second level.]

And if I say anything you don't like, don't jump. Okay? *[Laughter]*

Thank you all for being here. And, Sterling, thank you for the introduction—the whole family.

You know, it's good to be here with such good friends. I've spent a lot of my time working with, on, and around Amtrak, and all its employees.

But you know, one of the reasons why it's worked so well here in Delaware is because of John Carney, Tommy Carper, and Chris Coons. And I mean that sincerely. We've had overwhelming support from the Delaware delegation. That's because we ride the trains so damn much. *[Laughter]*

Attorney General Kathy Jennings, who used to work with my son Beau; and New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer; and my good friend and a hell of an athlete, Mike Purzycki; and Pete Buttigieg—thanks for doing such a great job.

Look, guys, we're announcing a historic investment in America's railroads. I've been talking about this for a long time, I know. But finally—finally—we're getting it done. More than \$16 billion—16—with a "b"—billion dollars here in the Northeast Corridor. Twenty-five different projects. All to build a Northeast Corridor from Boston to Washington.

It's part of my agenda to invest in America, and I've been fighting for this for a long time. To invest in Americans, not just America.

And there's no better place to make this announcement than in my home State of Delaware, here in Bear, the Maintenance Facility. And a few miles away, at the Wilmington Shops, over 800—over 800 people keep trains in the entire Northeast Corridor working in good order. And it's not been easy because some of them are pretty old trains.

Mechanics—machinists, electricians, pipefitters, facility workers—you know, coach cleaners, boilermakers, laborers, foremen. They have one thing in common: They're all good-paying union jobs. Union jobs. Union jobs. I've been saying it a long time: The middle class built America, but unions built the middle class. Unions built the middle class.

For years, in the Senate and as Vice President, I met with the workers in these shops, and I made them a promise. I said I'd do all I could and all in my power to fight to keep their jobs and to make our rail system better and to work on the Northeast Corridor. I told them I'd fight for them and with them, and they stuck with me. And that's just what I've done.

When I became President, I made sure that the bipartisan infrastructure law—that's the law to rebuild our highways and bridges and rail and the whole inter—all our infrastructure—by the way, it's a tight little law. It's about a trillion 200 billion dollars, you know, with all having said and done.

The point is: How can you be the leading country in the world and have a second rate infrastructure—second rate infrastructure? It's not possible.

It included the largest investment in passenger rail since Amtrak was created 50 years ago: \$66 billion for world-class rail right here at home. And that includes the largest investment in the Northeast Corridor since the Pennsylvania Railroad laid down these tracks in 1850—in 1850.

The fully electrified trains on this corridor emit 83-percent less greenhouse gases, by the way, than driving your car, 72-percent less greenhouse gases than taking a plane.

And folks here in Delaware know that as Senator I rode the train back and forth between Washington and Wilmington virtually every day for 36 years when I got elected and then as Vice President as well.

Amtrak wasn't just a way to get home to family. The conductors and engineers became my family. And not a joke. I'd have a major event for them in my home every year—all the conductors and engineers from New York on down to Washington.

When I was Vice President, I flew over a million miles on Air Force Two, but I traveled further than that on Amtrak over the years. I remember one of the conductors, when I was going home—Secret Service is wonderful. They really are. But they'd rather you not travel Amtrak—it's not Amtrak—rail—because it has to stop so damn many times, and there are so many options for people to do things that they don't want to have done.

So—but I was coming home to see my mom, and I just—she was living with us at the time; my dad had passed away. *[Laughter]* And I got on the train on a Friday, and—I won't get him into complete trouble; I'll just tell his first name. He was number two in seniority at the time, Angelo.

And Ange came up to me as I walk in, and he said, "Joey." And he grabbed my cheek, and he said, "Joey, baby." And he said, "All this stuff"—because I—they had published in the newspaper that I had traveled 1,200,000 miles on Air Force planes as Vice President. They published that on a regular basis.

He said, "Big"—I won't quote him exactly, but he said, "Big deal, Joey." *[Laughter]* And I said, "What's it mean, Ange?" And he said, "Look"—he said, "We just had the retirement dinner up in Newark." He said, "You know how many miles you traveled on Amtrak?" And I said, "No." He said, "A million"—I think it was—"320,000 miles."

And I said, "How did you figure that? He said, "Well, 118 days a year, almost 300 miles a day, 36 years, plus as Vice"—then he went on, the whole deal. And I said: "I believe you, Ange. Let me get on the train, will you?" *[Laughter]*

But the point is, Tommy and I particularly spent a lot of time on the train. So, when I talk about how badly the Northeast Corridor needs upgrades, you don't need to tell me. I've lived it.

I also know how important this line is to commuters *[commuters; White House correction]* on the MARC rail between Maryland and Washington, the Metro-North between New York and Connecticut, the New York—New Jersey Transit.

I know what it feels like to be stuck on the tracks when you're trying to get home to see your family or trying to get south to make a vote because the track is—something went wrong. I know how much it matters.

Over 2,200 trains run on this corridor every single day, serving 800,000 passengers. It's the busiest rail corridor in the United States and one of the busiest in the world. And you guys keep it moving. You guys keep it moving.

But a problem anywhere along the lines means delays up and down the East Coast for commuters trying to get to work, for businesses trying to get their goods on the shelf, and travelers trying to visit family.

This region represents 20 percent of the gross domestic product of the entire United States of America. If this line were to shut down just 1 day, it would cost our economy—the American economy—\$100 million a day.

But this line has tunnels and bridges that are over 100 years old—I know because I've walked through two of them; train stations that haven't seen a major upgrade for generations; tracks in constant need of repair.

Look, folks, it has real consequences. This outdated infrastructure leads to over 4,000 hours of delays each year on Amtrak—4,000 hours a year.

For example, the Hudson River rail tunnel, a critical link in New York Penn Station—to New York Penn Station—the busiest train station in America, I might add. It opened for business 113 years ago—that tunnel. It was so badly damaged—remember Superstorm Sandy? Well, it got badly damaged at that time, over 10 years ago. There still remains the remnants of seawater in the tunnel eating away at the concrete, steel, and electrical components.

In 2020, passengers saw over 12,000 minutes of delays getting through that tunnel. But last week, thanks to the leadership of Chuck Schumer, we broke ground to rebuild the Hudson River Tunnel. The new tunnel will add capacity to increase the speed, reduce delays in the biggest rail line in the country.

With today's announcement, I'm committing 11—we're committing \$11 billion to this one project—that one project. It's critical to transforming the Northeast Corridor. People have been working on it for over a decade. Now we're finally getting it done.

And that's not all. As everyone who's traveled through the Baltimore Tunnel knows, it's a major checkpoint, but it's also a major chokepoint for 9 million Amtrak and MARC rail passengers who pass through it each year; 1.4 miles—that's how long the stretch is—with a very tight curve so trains have to slow down to 30 miles an hour to get through safely. On 99 percent of the weekdays, there's a delay somewhere near there as a consequence.

I've traveled through that tunnel literally thousands—literally thousands of times. And trust me, I know. That tunnel is 150 years old. It was built 150 years ago. Ulysses S. Grant was President when it was built. The structure is deteriorating. And a lot of you know—a lot of workers know—the roof of that tunnel is leaking. The floor is literally sinking.

This is the United States of America, for God's sake. The United States of America. We know we're better than that. And now we're proving it. That's why we're fully replacing the entire Baltimore Tunnel. We're not just changing it, we're replacing the whole tunnel.

As part of the "Investing in America" Workforce Hubs, we're working with leaders in Baltimore, along with the union officials and career and technical schools, to train the local workforce to help build that new tunnel, so we have the capacity.

The new tunnel will be all electric, and trains will travel through it at 110 miles an hour, not 30 miles an hour. The MARC trains will go from Baltimore to Washington in under 30 minutes. And, on average weekdays, that's nearly a 7 hours—that eliminates 7 hours of delay on average.

Look, we're also investing \$9 billion to replace over 1,000 trains and train cars with state-of-the-art equipment, including electric trains made in America—made in America. And the folks standing with me here today will help maintain and repair those trains that will move along this corridor.

Look, just 2 weeks ago, Mitch Landrieu—the former mayor of New Orleans and my Infrastructure Coordinator and Senior Adviser—was here in Delaware at the—cutting ribbon—to cut ribbons on renovations in the Wilmington train station to make it more accessible.

The Wilmington train station is a busy station for a small city—a relatively small city. But you know what? If you have an—if you have any infirmity, if you have heavy baggage, you've got to go down an entire flight of stairs. You can either walk down two flights of stairs, or you go down an—the escalator is not that good. For real.

Well, thanks to the upgrades, after all these years, passengers don't have to haul their luggage down the stairs anymore. Every passenger, regardless of disability, can have an easy time getting on and off the train as well.

The list goes on, with projects to make life more rational and modern in our train stations, from Boston to Washington. Look, when all this is done, we'll reduce delays and speed up the trains along the Northeast Corridor.

This matters for businesses trying to get their goods to market. It matters for the parent commuting to work in the morning. It matters for folks trying to get home late—at—for dinner. It matters to thousands of people who ride the trains on the Northeast Corridor.

It's like taking 500,000 automobiles off the road every day. That's how much is—that's what it's like. And this has phenomenal environmental positive impact. As we continue to invest in rail across the country, we're going to make even more—take even more vehicles off the road, saving millions of barrels of oil a day.

Folks, meanwhile, our MAGA Republican friends in Congress are proposing to slash Amtrak's budget. We're trying to make train travel easier, faster, safer, more reliable. They're trying to make it slower, harder, and less safe. You can't make this stuff up.

But that's okay. We're not going to let them stop the progress we're making. And it's—I promise you that.

And by the way, we're making all this progress with American workers, with products made in America, and with union labor.

In fact, Amtrak and the Building Trades have agreed to—project labor agreements will be in place all across the rail construction projects up and down the Northeast Corridor. That's another way of saying it's going to create good union jobs. It's going to create over 100,000 of those good union jobs, and that's on top of the thousands of good union jobs running the trains and maintaining the safety—system already.

These are jobs for the folks I thought about as I'd take that train home. You know the part, guys, as you get outside of Baltimore—just before you get into Baltimore? You can look out the window and you're going through, basically, the neighbor.

And I always used to sit there—I mean it—coming home and look out and see people sitting at their kitchen tables—literally, you could see them right along the track—and wondering: "What are they thinking about? What are they—what's on their minds?"

When kids put to bed, questions asked, ordinary and profound: Will there be enough money left over at the end of the month pay—after we pay all our bills just to have a little bit of breathing room? Will we be able to look my child in the eye and say: "Honey, it's going to be okay. We're going to do fine"?

Folks, too many people have been left behind in the past or treated like they're invisible. We're building an economy from the middle out and the bottom up where no one is left behind.

You know, my dad used to say: "Joey"—and I mean this sincerely—"Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about your being able to look your kid in the eye and say 'Honey, it's going to be okay' and mean it." That's what he'd say, and he meant it. That's what a decent living is about.

So let me close with this. Nearly a century ago, Franklin Roosevelt came up with the Rural Electrification Act that brought electricity to millions of Americans. Nearly 70 years ago, President Eisenhower launched the Interstate Highway System. The investment we're making today will be for our kids and grandkids what those historic programs were for previous generations, only bigger.

And, as a result, I truly believe this country is about to take off. Because, for the first time in a long time, we're bringing pride back to cities and towns all across America that have been left behind. I can honestly say I've never been more optimistic about America's future.

And, folks, in my view, the President after I'm—long after I'm President is going to have more to do.

One of the things I convinced President—led when I was Vice President—I convinced the President to do—is to provide money for high-speed rail. You know, you can go—when you get in a train in China, you go 210 miles an hour—China. We can do it here in the United States on this Northeast Corridor. If we straightened out three big corridors, it would cost about a trillion dollars.

But we had the same—we had the ability to do that for a rail from Florida to Mississippi and all kinds of places we can do it. But think about: Why, in the United States of America, do we not have the best rail system in the world?

So this is a big beginning—\$61 billion—to take care of the Northeast Corridor. But there's so much more we can do to better the environment, the quality of life, and make us more competitive. And you're the guys, at this place, that can just do it.

So we just have to remember one thing though—we sometimes forget—we sometimes forget: This is the United States of America. There's not a damn thing we can't do if we set our mind to it. Not one.

So thank you all. May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:14 p.m. at Amtrak's Bear Heavy Maintenance Facility. In his remarks, he referred to Sterling Rapposelli, Jr., electrician, Amtrak Bear Heavy Maintenance Facility; Gov. John C. Carney, Jr., of Delaware; Mayor Michael S. Purzycki of Wilmington, DE; Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer; and former President Barack Obama.

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