



August 25, 2020

Governor Phil Murphy
Office of Governor P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Re: Delay TransitGrid

Dear Governor Murphy,

New Jersey League of Conservation Voters want to thank you for your continued leadership in addressing the climate crisis and your commitment to driving New Jersey toward a 100% clean energy economy. Under your administration, New Jersey has taken multiple steps to becoming the greenest state in the country through signing the landmark Clean Energy Act and the updated Global Warming Response Act into law, rejoining RGGI, committing to 7500 MWs of offshore wind, developing a progressive Energy Master Plan (EMP), denying the Williams Transco NESE proposal, and holding the PennEast pipeline accountable to the law. Your promise of protecting our most vulnerable, over-burdened communities by supporting the cumulative impacts bill showcases your commitment to continued action to improve the health and well-being of our communities, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to expose the inequities of health and safety in our low-income, Black and Brown communities, highlighting the need for a just and fair clean energy recovery.

Though New Jersey LCV strongly supports your efforts to improve the function, resiliency, and reliability of NJ Transit, we write today to express our concern about the NJ Transit “TransitGrid” Micro-grid Project with its affiliated gas-fired power plant in Kearny. This project would take us in the wrong direction, away from the clean energy future that has been promised to New Jersey residents. As you are aware, in 2014, largely in response to Superstorm Sandy and ongoing random outages of the electrical grid, NJ Transit proposed constructing a predominantly gas-powered Microgrid to provide more reliable service to NJ Transit facilities (trains, buses, light transit and ferry service) that provide transportation between (and within) Northeastern NJ and New York City. Despite the good intentions of this project, it would be a step backward and out of touch with the State’s current economic and environmental vision that calls for a more sustainable, fairer and stronger future. It would be a sad progression of the antiquated Christie-Era vision for improving NJ Transit. We can and must do better.

OUR SERIOUS CONCERNS:

- **The Energy Master Plan Disconnect:** The Kearny gas fired power plant does not fit with your clean energy goals clearly laid out in the EMP. Given your administration’s recent advancement of an Energy Master Plan that seeks to meet 50% of the Renewable Portfolio Standard (i.e., 50% of electricity comes from Class I renewables, solar and wind) by 2030, it follows that a Microgrid



that decreases rather than increases greenhouse gas emissions and airborne pollutants would be the preferred solution.

- **Renewable alternatives were not adequately considered:** The original 2014 study did not adequately examine green alternatives. In response to strong opposition, NJT included a new appendix in their Final Environmental Impact Statement (April 2020) that cursorily examined greener alternatives, finding them inadequate. There is clear evidence to the contrary.
- **NJ is the state of innovation and should be a leader in Clean Energy solutions:** While there is a clear understanding on the part of NJT management as to how to accomplish their objectives with natural gas, they have little familiarity or experience with sustainable energy solutions. Achieving the objectives of New Jersey's Energy Master Plan will require *many institutions to break with the past and business as usual*. That is what innovation is all about. This small project is just the right size to be a manageable example of clean, renewable energy. We see the opportunity to make the NJT project one of the first steps in the right direction, not one of the last steps in the wrong direction.
- **Environmental Justice:** This project runs contrary to your own Executive Order 23 and the Environmental Justice (EJ) cumulative impacts bill you support. The TransitGrid project would worsen already poor air quality in the region, with a disproportionate impact on low income and black and brown EJ communities in Kearny, Newark, Jersey City and Hoboken – many of the same communities who have been hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic. The construction of a gas-fired plant in the Kearney area will release roughly 571,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year in Hudson County, which already receives an 'F' rating from the American Lung Association for ground level ozone pollution. This would once again add an additional burden on already overburdened communities.
- **Cost:** It makes no sense to invest taxpayer money in costly, hazardous and outdated fossil fuel infrastructure when we can use our money more wisely. If this project were to go forward as proposed, New Jersey would be spending a minimum of \$137,000,000 (there may be cost overruns) on a *throwaway power plant* expected to be replaced within 30 years. If a greener alternative were implemented, it would become part of a permanent solution.

Realizing the clean energy future envisioned in New Jersey's EMP will require a visionary transformation of New Jersey's energy system – and that begins with our transportation sector. Kearny can be the start of that transformation.

We urge you to hit pause on this outdated, polluting project and plan to advocate for federal funding for a greener solution to meet our transportation resiliency goals.

We recommend that you form a committee that better represents all stakeholders to take a closer look at clean energy alternatives, and conduct an independent energy analysis with experts knowledgeable in renewable energy alternatives (like your administration did with the EMP). That analysis should include: (1) Identification of alternatives to a gas-fired power plant; (2)



Transparency regarding the ongoing power needs and examination of ways to minimize surges; and (3) An outline of the costs for the various alternatives that include the social cost of carbon and impacts to local communities.

We believe that these steps will likely result in a solution that advances the objectives of our nation-leading Clean Energy goals and help make New Jersey a leader in clean energy innovation. Thank you again for your work to promote a stronger, more sustainable New Jersey, for your consideration on changing the course of this project, and for keeping New Jersey on track for the clean energy future the people of New Jersey overwhelmingly want.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you or staff may have at (609) 331-9922 or ed.potosnak@njlc.org.

Sincerely,

Ed Potosnak
Executive Director

Cc: Kevin Corbett, CEO, New Jersey Transit
George Helmy, Chief of Staff, Governor's Office
Matt Platkin, Chief Counsel, Governor's Office
Catherine McCabe, Commissioner, NJDEP
Shawn LaTourette, Chief of Staff, NJDEP
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