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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,  
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEB SITE: <http://commerce.senate.gov>

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December 16, 2013

The Honorable Anthony Foxx  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Foxx:

The U.S. Department of Transportation has an important oversight role in ensuring a safe and efficient transportation system. Given the unannounced lane closures at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey in September 2013 that hampered commerce and safety, I ask that you review the events of this incident and examine the Department's authority to ensure oversight of the agency to prevent future disruptions.

According to media reports, three access lanes leading from Fort Lee, New Jersey to the George Washington Bridge were unexpectedly shut down in September 2013, which led to several days of major traffic delays in New Jersey. The closure caused four hour commutes, brought traffic and commerce to a stop on these roads, and impaired the safe and efficient use of the transportation network in this region. There has been considerable public discussion about whether a traffic study was being conducted by the Port Authority. While the Inspector General of the Port Authority is currently conducting an investigation, it also appears that the public was not made aware of the closings nor were the relevant departments at the agency. As the nation's busiest bridge in one of the most complex and congested areas of the country, planning for traffic disruptions of this magnitude would and should require significant involvement from all levels of government with substantial public notice to avoid unnecessary delays and a potentially dangerous safety threat to the public.

The Department of Transportation's mission is to ensure a fast, safe, efficient, accessible and convenient transportation system. Clearly, actions taken by the Port Authority to irresponsibly cause gridlock on one of our nation's major transportation arteries runs directly counter to this mission. While this type of decision tends to be local in nature, I have serious concerns about the larger federal implications of what appears to be political appointees abusing their power to hamper interstate commerce and safety without public notice. This latest incident also exacerbates ongoing concerns with the governance and oversight of the Port Authority, which the Commerce Committee and the Government Accountability Office have previously noted.

Since the compact that created the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey was ratified by Congress in 1921, the U.S. Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee has exercised oversight of the Port Authority and its impact on interstate commerce. As Chairman of the Commerce Committee, I will continue to exercise this authority, and I urge you to use your Department's oversight authority to fully review this incident. Please also provide me an overview of the steps the Department can take or the authority you need to ensure this type of incident does not happen in the future.

Sincerely,



John D. Rockefeller IV  
Chairman

cc:  
Senator John Thune, Ranking Member