



THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20590

October 23, 2025

Governor Josh Shapiro
501 North 3rd Street
508 Main Capital Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Governor Shapiro:

I am writing to express the significant concerns of the U.S. Department of Transportation (Department) with the current safety and financial state of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). SEPTA is an essential component of the transportation network in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the greater Philadelphia region, and the system's thousands of daily riders deserve a safe, efficient, and reliable public transportation system. The City of Philadelphia will also host the World Cup in 2026, and SEPTA's rail and bus systems must be ready to serve tens of thousands of additional guests safely.

Just this year, SEPTA commuter rail vehicles have caught fire or otherwise experienced an emergency from a thermal event **five times**. Thankfully, no fatalities resulted, but the Department will not stand by waiting for tragedy to strike. If changes are not made immediately, it is only a matter of time before SEPTA's crumbling commuter rail system erupts in flames and kills someone.

Under my direction, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) took decisive action on October 1, 2025, issuing Emergency Order No. 34 (the FRA Order) that identifies fourteen conditions that SEPTA must meet to mitigate serious safety risks with its Silverliner IV commuter rail fleet. FRA has also increased the number of rail safety inspectors at SEPTA facilities and on SEPTA equipment to ensure the safety of the traveling public.

Also on October 1, 2025, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommended removing all Silverliner IV rail vehicles from service, which would have sidelined more than half of SEPTA's commuter rail fleet. To prevent crippling essential transit service thousands of commuters rely on, the FRA Order took a more measured approach involving a robust inspection and reporting protocol that maintains railroad safety while giving SEPTA 30 days to make essential repairs. This approach is predicated on SEPTA's complete cooperation, including completion of those repairs and other rigorous risk mitigations outlined in the FRA Order. If SEPTA fails to take advantage of this opportunity, FRA could exercise its authority to order all unrepaired Silverliner IV rail vehicles out of service, consistent with the FRA Order.

SEPTA's bus fleet has also been neglected and poorly maintained. On August 6, 2025, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) issued a letter to SEPTA's General Manager outlining serious concerns about SEPTA's storage protocols for fire-prone Proterra electric buses. On at

least two occasions, these vehicles have caught fire, causing significant property damage. Thankfully, there has been no loss of life.

Compounding these safety problems is SEPTA's state of severe financial distress. We understand that SEPTA is currently facing a \$213 million budget deficit in fiscal year 2026 and that you have approved its use of long-term capital funds for daily operations. Robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul accounting gimmicks like this are not sustainable and increase the likelihood of further safety failures as SEPTA defers critically needed capital investment.

Pennsylvanians expect fiscal accountability for SEPTA's system. As Secretary, I will not be complicit in the Commonwealth's mismanagement of resources for public transportation. That is why, on October 8, 2025, FTA reiterated that SEPTA must repay the Federal Government more than \$55 million from a failed railcar procurement with a Chinese manufacturer. The Department will not pay for railcars that SEPTA never received and customers cannot use. SEPTA's mismanagement and poor oversight of that procurement surely exacerbated the dire safety and fiscal predicament SEPTA is in today.

Your administration has failed to secure stable State funding, forcing SEPTA into a chronic spiral of service cuts and deferred repairs. Your short-term diversions of Federal Highway Administration funds to SEPTA, while ignoring the broader budget impasse now three months late, merely kicks the can down the track. Because of your inaction and negligent oversight, Pennsylvania's transit systems must mitigate safety and reliability risks. Under President Trump, we are putting American safety first by deploying experts to overhaul SEPTA's practices.

SEPTA has not demonstrated sufficient capacity on its own to mitigate these significant safety and fiscal concerns. Lacking effective action from Pennsylvania leaders, I will take all necessary enforcement action to protect SEPTA customers from unsafe conditions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S.P. Duffy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sean P. Duffy