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## Is There Light at the End of the Tunnel?

By Chip Hallock, President & CEO, Newark Regional Business Partnership

The recent stop work order for the ARC tunnel affected a number of Newark Regional Business Partnership (NRBP) member firms who provide engineering, construction and other services. While those members are justifiably disappointed in the cessation of work on what had been one of the region's few active construction projects, NRBP is hopeful that Governor Christie's action on behalf of New Jersey taxpayers eventually will result in a more efficient and effective mass transit connection to New York and along the entire Northeast Corridor (NEC).

As a founding member of the Business Coalition for Northeast Mobility, NRBP has also been a strong and effective advocate for federal investment in AMTRAK and the NEC. Significant funds to repair aging rail and electric infrastructure have been made available by the federal government during the last several years and we continue to promote the inclusion of the NEC in new high speed rail initiatives.

NRBP was an early supporter for the ARC tunnel while being mindful of the adage, "the perfect is the enemy of the good". As has been well-documented, a tunnel that connected directly to Penn Station and continued to the East Side would have been a more convenient and comprehensive solution for those rail passengers headed to Manhattan. Given New York City's vast and complicated subterranean infrastructure, such a project was deemed infeasible. While not ideal, we supported the ARC tunnel because it would double train capacity into Manhattan and provide an alternative in the event of damage (by any means) to the existing one hundred year old passages under the Hudson River.

While experts differ with respect to the rate of future job growth in New York City, and therefore the necessity for more New Jerseyans to get there, there is sufficient data to forecast continued long-term growth in and connections to "mega-regions" like this one. Given our dense population, already congested roads and the related human and environmental impact, it seems obvious that efficient and enhanced rail service should be a transportation priority.

Governor Christie's action has been described as "killing" the ARC tunnel project and, as the project stood, perhaps that's an accurate description. We prefer to think of this as a significant break in the action that presents as an opportunity to review a full-range of options including redesign; collaboration with Amtrak; additional funding from government entities including the federal government, New York City and State of New York; public-private partnerships; and other alternatives that responsible, bright and creative minds may inspire. Wringing our hands won't do any good- let's wring out some fresh approaches.