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Hudson River Rail Tunnels Shoulda, Coulda Been Done By Now: Cameron on Transportation

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It should have been done by now: 2018 was the expected completion year of the new railroad tunnels under the Hudson River.

When it was proposed in 2009, the \$9 billion project was the biggest infrastructure initiative in the country. Now it's just a footnote to history.

Why do rail tunnels from New York's Penn Station to New Jersey matter to us here in Connecticut? Because

they are the weakest but most crucial link in the Northeast corridor, the \$50 billion heart of the U.S. economy.

Imagine trying to get to Philadelphia or Washington without Amtrak running through our state, into those tunnels and to points south.

There are 23 bridges and tunnels connecting Manhattan from the north and east. But between that island and New Jersey, there are only six — two of those rail tunnels were built in 1910. When Superstorm Sandy flooded those tunnels in October 2012 with 3.5 million gallons of salt water, their lifespan was shortened by decades due to corrosion.

If one of those two rail tunnels were to fail, the entire nation would be in an economic crisis.

New York's Penn Station was never built to handle the 430,000 daily passengers who now use it, especially when compared to the 750,000 who enter the much-larger Grand Central Terminal. Amtrak, New Jersey Transit and the Long Island Railroad carry twice as many riders at Penn than New York's three airports combined.

New Jersey and Pennsylvania residents alone comprise 16 percent of Manhattan's workforce. Their rail commuting options are so tight that many rely on the 7,700 daily commuter buses that bring them into the transit cesspool known as the Port Authority bus terminal.

All that could have changed if the 2009 plan to build additional rail tunnels had moved forward. But then, along came Chris Christie, who balked at the cost and pulled the plug after he was elected New Jersey's governor.

Cynics say he did so to spend money instead on highways and keep the state's gasoline tax low for another few years, even after repaying Uncle Sam for \$95 million already spent on the project.

Now the project has been redesigned — and re-priced at a staggering \$20 billion, which also includes adding seven more tracks at the overcrowded Penn Station. The new target for completion is 2030. New York and New Jersey would each contribute \$3.6 billion with another \$1.9 billion coming from the Port Authority.

But that's only if President Donald Trump's promise for \$1 trillion of spending on infrastructure makes it through Congress. And that seems iffy. The Trump campaign promise hinges on public-private-partnerships. The White House even convened a panel of high-powered business leaders to study the idea, but they all quit after the president's comments following the Charlottesville riots.

Imagine that: Tweets that killed a tunnel.

Even basking in the glow of tax reform, I don't think Congress has the appetite to tackle the infrastructure plan if it further adds to the deficit. Worse yet, those in the red states so loathe the liberal New York area

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they'd just love to see us crumble — like an aging railroad tunnel.

See also:

- [Don't Blame Gov for Transport Project Delays, Blame the Legislature: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Feb. 7)
 - [State Transportation Chief Describes Service Cuts, Rail Fare Hikes Coming Soon Unless Alternate Funding Found](#) (Jan. 26)
 - [AAA Poll: Plurality of CT Drivers, But Not a Majority, Say Tolls Are Best Way to Finance Transportation](#) (Jan. 23)
 - [CT's Prospects Get Ever Darker for Transport Funding, Even for Maintenance and Plowing: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 2)
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