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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOSTS PRESS CONFERENCE WITH BIPARTISAN COALITION OF MAYORS TO CALL FOR LONG-TERM TRANSPORTATION BILL

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you.

Well, Mayor Bowser, thank you for your leadership, and I think if anyone deserves the title America's mayor, it's the mayor of our nation's capital. And we thank you for your great leadership.

It is a sober day. It's a difficult day. And I know for all of us, our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those lost in the Amtrak crash, and the – those injured. And for those of us who live on that train line from Washington, through Philly, up to New York, it's very personal for all of us. We've all taken that train, and so many family members do as well. I said earlier, this is a wakeup call. It's a reminder of how much we depend on our mass transit, how much we depend on our roads and bridges, how much our safety is directly linked to the kind of investments we make in how we get around. That's what has brought us all here. It's a painful coincidence that we stand here just hours after this crash, but we have been working for weeks and months to gather this day, knowing that the day at the end of this month will be a decisive one for this nation, when the highway trust fund will either run out or move forward.

And what I've seen just in the last 24 hours – my fellow mayors and I – we have gone all over Capitol Hill. We've met with our congressional delegations from our states. But we've also had the great honor of meeting with some of the key figures who will determine the fate of transportation in this nation – Chair Inhofe, Chair Shuster – some of the key Democratic leaders in the Senate, including Senator Reid, Senator Schumer, Senator Durbin, Senator Stabenow, and Senator Murray. A number of members of our delegation met with Leader Pelosi. So, we're crisscrossing the capital to get a message across from the grassroots that only here in Washington, can we get the decision we need to move our cities and our nation forward and to invest in our infrastructure. It is literally a decisive moment in American history because as a nation, we know we have been falling behind.

Every one of my colleagues can talk about the examples they have of infrastructure that's starting to fail or is intensely insufficient. And when you put that in the context of not just safety of our people or the strength of our local economies – but when you put it in the context of our ability to compete in a globalized world – our nation's ability to compete economically – all the indicators point to one thing – you only can move forward if you invest. We know our competitors are investing. The United States – strongest nation on the earth – puts 1.7 percent of its GDP into infrastructure. Europe puts 5 percent of their GDP. China puts 9 percent of their GDP into infrastructure investments. Is it any wonder that our competitors are starting to out-distance us economically. We can't let it happen. And here, in these next 18 days, decisions will be made that will frame our future.

Now look, we all are united on a simple set of ideas. And this is a delegation of mayors from all over this country – every region. Mayors from both parties – this has been a profoundly bipartisan effort, and I think for all of us that's gratifying. We know three simple things. We need a long-term transportation bill – a six-year bill

that we can plan around and that will save money for the taxpayers if that planning can be done and not hand-to-mouth, year-to-year. We need a more robust bill than what we've seen in recent years. It's been seven years of flat funding. If we don't change that situation, we can go over a decade with literally no movement in the level of funding while inflation moves ahead, costs increase, and our infrastructure gets weaker. And we all believe in what's called localization. We all believe that if the resources come into our cities, we guarantee the money will be spent well and quickly because our constituents walk right up to us and demand it. Everyone's nodding their heads because we all know it.

Simple vision of how we move forward – and actually, I'm proud to say that in a lot of the meetings, we actually are hearing a lot of agreement from both sides of the aisle here on the broad outline of what has to happen.

This is a bipartisan group, but it's not just mayors. We are working with our colleagues in the business community. We are working with local chambers of commerce. We're working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. We're working with farm organizations. We're working with labor. And there is an extraordinary unity on this issue you find on few others, and that gives us hope. By the way, we have mayors from some of the biggest cities, we have mayors from smaller cities and towns, and there's absolute unity. This is not a red issue or a blue issue. There's no red or blue highway. If ever there was a red, white, and blue issue, it's this one. This is in the interest of all of us.

I'm going to bring forward some of my colleagues who are going to tell you what they experience on the ground in their cities. I like to talk about the over 100 bridges in my city that are over 100 years old as one example of what we face in New York City. But you're going to hear each and every one of the colleagues who speak talk about their particular challenge. There's so many that we've just chosen a core cross section of Democrats and Republicans, but I want to acknowledge those who are not speaking initially. I want to welcome, of course, in the Q-and-A any who want to step forward to come forward. But let me just do this quickly and thank Mayor Thomas Armstrong of Grimes, Iowa; Mayor Ralph Becker of Salt Lake City, Utah; Mayor Virgil Bernero of Lansing, Michigan; Mayor Christopher Cabaldon of West Sacramento, California; Mayor Williams Carpenter of Brockton, Massachusetts; Mayor JP – excuse me, JM Skip Conkling of Altoona, Iowa; Mayor Joy Cooper of Hallandale Beach, Florida; Mayor John Giles of Mesa, Arizona; Mayor Hardie Davis of Augusta, Georgia; Mayor Kevin Dumas of Attleboro, Massachusetts; Mayor Jorge Elorza of Providence, Rhode Island; Mayor Christopher Koos of Normal, Illinois; Mayor Stephanie Miner of Syracuse, New York; Mayor Kenneth – I'm going to do it, Kenneth – Miyagashima – Miyagashima of Las Cruces, New Mexico; Mayor Ed Powlowski of Allentown, Pennsylvania; Mayor Laurel Prussing of Urbana, Illinois; Mayor Jeffery Slavin of Somerset, Maryland; Mayor Nan Whaley of Dayton, Ohio; Mayor Dawn Zimmer of Hoboken, New Jersey; and Mayor Edna Jackson of Savannah, Georgia.

If that's not a cross-section of the United States of America – Democrat and Republican – give them all a round of applause.

[Applause]

And I was honored to co-author today an op-ed in the New York Times, which summarizes how powerful the challenge is. And we want it to be abundantly clear – this affects all of us. It affects New York City. It affects Oklahoma City. It affects so many cities. And I was honored to join with my good friend, the mayor of Oklahoma City, Mick Cornett. Mayor?

[...]

Mayor: In a moment we're going to take questions on this topic, but two important points – I want everyone to understand that this is a profoundly bipartisan coalition – so just the speakers that you have heard. Now, Mayor Bowser and I happen to be Democrats. Mayor Cornett happens to be Republican. Mayor Hodge is a Democrat. Mayor Regalado is a Republican. Mayor Tait is a Republican. Mayor Cownie is a Democrat. And we are all

working together in common cause, and you should see in these meetings how we could complete each other's sentences because we live the same reality and we believe that same things need to be done for our cities in this country.

One more quick point – three sentences in Spanish, and then we will take questions on-topic.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

Mayor: With that, we welcome your questions.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Ah, yes, and we – we hear she's okay, right?

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Thank God.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Right, it's something – I mean, I can just say and welcome my colleagues on this – from a New York perspective, absolutely. I know that's being worked on with Metro North. It's something we need. It's not part of the transportation bill we're talking about here, but it's something I absolutely support.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Well, the – the Mayor who has led the charge for mayors all around the country on the issues of Amtrak is Mayor Cornett, so let me have him speak to it.

Mayor Mick Cornett, Oklahoma City: So it's — I think the lack of support for Amtrak is outrageous. It's clear that America's people would like to move by passenger rail. There are cities and towns all over our country that have no access to Amtrak. I don't know of a single city out there that thinks they have too much. Yet, every time Amtrak funding comes up there seems to be another priority that – that's more important. Those that are against increased Amtrak funding are not listening to the people in America, because Americans have spoken – they want passenger rail in this country.

[Applause]

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor Muriel Bowser, District of Columbia: Well, we know, and I couldn't agree more with the Mayor – and, in fact, what we have seen on the Northeast corridor between Washington DC, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston is actually increased ridership [inaudible] Amtrak, and in a lot of heavy increase usage. So we know that the investments with Amtrak for this state of the ridership now have to be improved. But also, looking to the future to accommodate growing ridership on Amtrak. And it has to be — it has to be made, and it has to be made now. So we expect to get Amtrak up and running between our cities just as soon as possible. I know that, you know, everybody is engaged in making sure that the – the site is being investigated, the cause is being determined, and rescue and recovery efforts are underway safely.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Well, I think we have to think about what this opportunity before us now – with the highway bill – creates in terms of the larger issue. All of us are united in changing the rules of the game here in Washington, when it comes to the transportation bill. We're not going to allow the same old, same old in which these bills are short-term extensions, no increases in funds, no ability to plan. And I think that is also going to have an impact on how we think of the other elements of infrastructure like Amtrak. The bottom line here is we're literally stuck as a country. Practically speaking, we're stuck because the infrastructure keeps aging as we're having this press conference. Our city's infrastructures are aging, certainly our rail system as well. But I think, on the highway bill, we have a chance for a break-through. And what we heard when meeting with members of the House and Senate from both sides of the aisle, is there's a growing recognition here there's a need for a long-term bill. That's progress. There's a growing recognition that it has to be a more robust bill. That is progress. There's certainly a recognition that localization and letting us bring the projects through to fruition will make a difference. So I want to believe if we can something to happen here on the transportation bill, it also will be part of how we fix the rail situation. On topic – anything else on your mind? I'm sorry. Go ahead, Sally.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Look, I think – and some of my colleagues may want to comment on their experiences. It's interesting that in a number of states, there have been very positive efforts to address these issues. And some of them have included additional revenue. And in fact, the voters of those states have often blessed that because they want roads and bridges and rail that works. I think in our case, obviously we've had a situation in Albany recently where there were surplus funds, and I think they needed to be devoted more to things like the MTA, as I've said. But the fact is, even if our states are doing the maximum, the ultimate action is here in Washington. And that's not to let our state governments off the hook, but let's put the horse before the cart. This is where the real change can be made. Everyone may have a different view on what that increase should be. Let's take the example the president has put forward, which is a very constructive proposal – six years, \$80 billion a year – would be a game changer for all of our cities. Literally, every city here would be changed and would benefit if that particular vision came forward, or anything even close to it. So, there's no way our states can reach that kind of level, but our federal government used to. In the past, transportation bills were often increased as much as 40 percent in a given cycle to acknowledge the needs of a growing economy and a growing nation. And that's what I think we want to get back to. Does anyone else want to add? Mayor Becker of Salt Lake City.

Mayor Ralph Becker, Salt Lake City: Good afternoon, I'm Mayor Ralph Becker of Salt Lake City, also president of the National League of Cities. Let me just give you one direct experience this year. The state of Utah – which is not known as being this liberal bastion of the country – this year, passed two measures to address our transportation needs. The first was it raised gas tax, and it indexed that gas tax. So it continues to rise with inflation and the cost of gas. The second was it provided for a local option sales tax for local transportation needs – transit and roads, cities, counties, and transit. If a state like Utah, which is as conservative as any [inaudible] it's the same dynamics as some of our friends here in Congress – can step up to the plate and make the investments we know we need for the future, Congress should be able to do it too.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor Becker: I'll get you those numbers. I mean, I can give you numbers from my city but I think you probably want numbers that are statewide. But it is a very – it'll make a huge difference for us in our infrastructure needs. There's no question about it. But it is not a substitute for a national funding program.

Mayor: Which reminds me of a phrase we use in New York – if you can make it happen in Utah, you can make it happen anywhere.

[Laughter]

Mayor: It's a common phrase in our city. Alright, last call. Anything on this topic? Jen?

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: I think this is absolutely – I'm very, very sad. We're all deeply pained by this accident. Again, the bill we're working on is not about Amtrak. It is about highways, roads, bridges, mass transit. But obviously, it is a kindred area. Now look, I think I can editorialize – and if anyone wants to think differently, please come forward – but I think every single one of my colleagues – Democrat and Republican in every region of the country – we feel obligated to go where we can make an impact for our people. Every one of us comes to Washington because that's where the resources are, and that's where we can make a difference. Every single one of us gathers with our fellow mayors – and Tom Cochran can attest – that's been happening for decades since – who started the U.S. Conference of Mayors – Fiorello LaGuardia, when the depression hit and there was a need for mayors to be a unified voice to achieve change in Washington that would help out cities. This is not a new thing. But any time any one of us goes on those missions, we're not shocked if some people say, you know, how can you be out of town? And the answer is, we're out of town to serve our people because this is where the resources are. The only person who doesn't get that criticism is Muriel Bowser, unless she's in New York, talking to the banks. Right?

[Laughter]

Last call. Any questions? Okay – yes, sir?

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: We're waiting for clarification. I understand the families have not been notified in many cases. So, we're waiting – it's a very tragic situation. And obviously we fear that some of them may have been New York City residents, but we haven't gotten confirmation.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: I know what you know. Excessive speed appears to be the underlying reason. But why excessive speed was being utilized – we've seen different reasons for that in the past, so I don't want to speculate. What I do know is it's a reminder of how vital our infrastructure is to our health and safety. And that's why we're all here today. Thank you, everyone.

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