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**GDC BOARD APPROVES AGREEMENTS TO SUPPORT TUNNEL RESCUE AND
EMERGENCY RESPONSE PREPAREDNESS**

Newark/New York – The Gateway Development Commission (GDC) Board of Commissioners today authorized the Commission’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to enter into intergovernmental agreements and a memorandum of understanding to support the establishment and maintenance of a tunnel rescue team for the Hudson Tunnel Project.

GDC will provide funding to fire departments in the communities where tunnel boring will take place to support training to prepare emergency responders for the unique aspects of tunnel rescue operations and regular ongoing drills. The investment will ensure the departments are prepared to respond in the unlikely event of a tunnel-related emergency while maintaining sufficient capacity to address simultaneous emergencies elsewhere in the communities they serve.

The Commissioners also confirmed Jeff Bernstein to serve as GDC’s Chief Financial Officer. Bernstein joins GDC from Deloitte, where he advises clients in the transportation and infrastructure space. He previously held leadership roles at NJ TRANSIT and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).

“The Hudson Tunnel Project is the most urgent passenger rail infrastructure project in the country. The only thing more important than getting this project done as soon as possible is making sure the hundreds of workers building the new tunnel get home safely at the end of each shift,” said **Alicia Glen, New York GDC Commissioner and Co-Chair, Balpreet Grewal-Virk, New Jersey GDC Commissioner and Co-Chair, and Tony Coscia, GDC Amtrak Commissioner and Vice Chair**, in a joint statement. “Thanks to modern tunnel boring technology, a serious incident is extremely unlikely, but GDC has to prepare for every scenario. These agreements will provide the resources and training local emergency response teams need to keep our workers, and everyone else in the communities where work is happening, safe.”

“The men and women who go to work every day on the Hudson Tunnel Project’s construction sites are doing a great service to our region and the country, and GDC takes our obligation to keep these workers safe extremely seriously. The tunnel boring machines we are using include extensive systems to protect the people working underground and the communities above, but we still have to prepare for emergency scenarios,” said **GDC Chief Executive Officer Tom Prendergast**. “The emergency response teams we are partnering with to establish the Hudson

Tunnel Project's rescue team have decades of experience. Together, we will build on that strong foundation to ensure the safety of our workers and the communities where construction is taking place."

Building tunnels using tunnel boring machines is safe for workers and communities above the tunnel's route. The tunnel boring machines being used for the Hudson Tunnel Project each have more than 1,000 sensors, including air quality monitors. They are also equipped with refuge chambers that contain oxygen, food, and a communications system, where workers can safely wait for rescue.

Today's Board action authorized GDC's CEO to enter into intergovernmental agreements with North Hudson Regional Fire & Rescue (NHRFR) and the Northern Region Urban Area Security Initiative Metro Urban Search and Rescue Strike Team (UASI MUSAR)'s member fire departments, as well as a memorandum of understanding with UASI MUSAR, to support preparations for the unlikely event of an emergency during tunnel boring.

Sixty to 80 NHRFR firefighters will receive tunnel rescue training and up to 60 additional first responders from other UASI MUSAR member fire departments will also receive tunnel rescue training to be available to support as backup to the NHRFR team if needed during an incident. Tunnels are unique, highly constrained environments, and tunnel rescue operations often require use of unique equipment, such as rebreather apparatus that allow closed-circuit breathing. Specialized training and regular drills are necessary to maintain mastery of these particular techniques and equipment.



Teams will train in a replica of the tunnel.

Spec Rescue International and the National Tunnel Institute will lead the trainings. Training will take place at The Bunker, a specialized technical rescue training facility in Hudson County. A model of a section of the tunnel will be installed at the training facility so that teams can practice in conditions that match what they would face in a real emergency.

Jeff Bernstein Appointed Chief Financial Officer

The Board of Commissioners also approved the appointment of Jeff Bernstein to serve as Chief Financial Officer (CFO). In this role, Bernstein will manage GDC's capital and operating budgets, overseeing the Commission's accounts, payments, expenditures, funds, and investments.

Bernstein brings significant experience in the transportation space to GDC, and holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees in civil engineering from The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art and an MBA from Harvard Business School. He comes to GDC from Deloitte, and previously led financial planning and analysis for Lyft's transit, bikes, and scooter business line and served as CFO of ticketing and fare payment platform Bytemark.

Bernstein also has significant public sector transit experience. He served as Deputy Chief Financial Officer at NJ TRANSIT and held several finance- and operations-related roles at the MTA and MTA Metro-North Railroad, including Director of Finance, Administration, and Crew Management.

“Jeff brings a rare combination of public sector financial leadership, private sector transportation experience, and a deep understanding of the transit agencies serving riders in the New York City region,” said **Prendergast**. “Throughout his career, Jeff has delivered time and again for riders across New Jersey and New York. His expertise will be invaluable in supporting GDC’s commitment to being responsible stewards of the funds committed to the Hudson Tunnel Project. I am proud to welcome Jeff to the GDC team and look forward to working with him to deliver this vital investment in America’s rail network.”

“As someone who has spent much of my career working to improve rail transportation for riders in New York and New Jersey, I have always followed the Hudson Tunnel Project closely. It is a vital investment that will benefit millions of riders in both states and up and down the East Coast for decades to come,” said **Bernstein**. “This is an exciting time for the project, with construction well underway and work on newly awarded projects ramping up quickly, and I am proud to join the GDC team at such an important moment. I look forward to helping deliver the reliable, modern rail infrastructure riders deserve.”

[Jeff Bernstein’s headshot is available to download here.](#)

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The [Gateway Development Commission](#) is the bi-state public authority overseeing delivery of the Hudson Tunnel Project.

The Hudson Tunnel Project is an urgent investment in the nation’s passenger rail infrastructure that will improve transportation up and down the East Coast, create hundreds of thousands of jobs, and strengthen the national economy for decades to come by building a new rail tunnel connecting New Jersey and New York and rehabilitating the existing North River Tunnel.

The Hudson Tunnel Project is the cornerstone of the Gateway Program, a comprehensive rail investment program that will modernize rail travel and create new capacity for the most congested section of the Northeast Corridor.