

MONMOUTH COUNTY PLANNING BOARD TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

JAMES GIANNELL
Planning Board Chairman



Anthony Garaguso
Council Chairman

DRAFT Minutes for the Meeting of the
Monmouth County Transportation Council
Tuesday, April 14, 2020
Monmouth County Planning Board
One East Main Street
Hall of Records Annex Building, 2nd Floor
Freehold, NJ 07728

I. CALL TO ORDER – 7:00 PM

II. ATTENDANCE – ROLL CALL

Members Present

Garaguso, Anthony
Vernick, Jeff
Nelson, Eric
Nicholas Ponzio
Grbelja, Nancy
Barrett, Betsy
Ben Lucarelli
Frost, Barry

Staff Present

James Bonanno – Staff Advisor
David Schmetterer

Members Excused

Van Nortwick, Peter

III. REVIEW OF MINUTES

The Council's approval of the March 11, 2020 minutes was sought by Mr. Garaguso. Ms. Grbelja motioned to accept the March 11th minutes which was seconded by Mr. Ponzio and accepted unanimously by the Council with the exception of Mr. Frost, Mr. Lucarelli, and Ms. Barrett who abstained.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

V. NEW BUSINESS

- Message from the Chairman

Mr. Garaguso welcomed the Council members and thanked them for taking part in the Council's first virtual Transportation Council Meeting. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic he is unable to predict when the Transportation Council meetings will return to their usual in person meetings. In the meantime, meeting virtually will provide some sense of normality during these difficult times. He reported that the response to the pandemic by our front-

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line transportation workers has been beyond reproach and thanked the Council's Staff Advisors for their assistance and guidance in holding this virtual meeting despite being displaced from their offices as well as County Freeholders, Officials, and Staff for working diligently to keep residents informed and up to date on the COVID-19 virus and available County services. Finally, Mr. Garaguso thanked the Council members and the public alike for making time to attend this meeting and advised all to visit the Monmouth County webpage for additional information that may help them through quarantine.

- Resolution Recognizing Transportation and Front-Line Essential Workers During the COVID-19 Crisis

Mr. Garaguso introduced a draft resolution for review by the Transportation Council recognizing the hard work and sacrifices that front-line transportation workers have undertaken for the general public during the COVID-19 crisis. Mr. Vernick explained that there are a large number of public transportation bus operators, subway and rail conductors, trainmen, engineers, cleaning and maintenance and other staff that are putting themselves at great risk to continue providing transportation to essential workers and the quarantined public in need of transportation for supplies. At the time of this meeting the MTA has reported that fifty-one employees have passed away from the COVID-19 virus and almost nine thousand employees total have been infected with the virus. Mr. Vernick asked Staff to read the draft resolution aloud for Council members.

After the reading Mr. Vernick noted that the number of deaths and individuals infected had increased substantially and should be reflected in the resolution. Ms. Grbelja, Mr. Lucarelli and Mr. Frost commented that the numbers are likely to continuously be changing and that while horrific and frightening, what is important is the message of recognizing the continued problem of the COVID-19 pandemic and sacrifice being made by transportation workers. Mr. Frost also felt that Connecticut should be included alongside New York and New Jersey in the resolution as together they represent the Tri-State Area. Mr. Garaguso directed Staff to make the changes discussed and asked for a motion to move the resolution as edited. Mr. Vernick provided a motion for the resolution which was seconded by Mr. Frost. The Council voted unanimously and the resolution was approved.

The council next discussed the distribution of the resolution. In addition to the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders and Planning Board who would give discretion over further distribution, Mr. Frost and Ms. Grbelja suggested the resolution be sent to the leadership in the transportation agencies and unions to make available to their employees. The council also suggested that perhaps our county's elected legislators and the governor should receive as well. Staff noted that they would check for the proper method of distribution for this resolution.

Mr. Garaguso opened the floor to members of the public and asked if they had any comments regarding the resolution. Ms. Shelly Kennedy of Atlantic Highlands thanked the Council for continuing to have their meetings and making them available to the public despite the COVID-19 crisis and commended the Council for their resolution. She agreed the transportation workers as well as all other essential workers deserve recognition during these difficult times. The Transportation Council thanked Ms. Kennedy for her input.

Finally, The Council recognized member Peter Van Nortwick who was unable to attend the April Transportation Council meeting due to his status as an essential transportation worker. Mr. Garaguso stated that at the time of this meeting Mr. Van Nortwick was currently working to ensure essential workers and the general public can reach their destinations safely.

- 2020 Decennial Census

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Mr. Garaguso reminded the Council and the attending members of the public that the 2020 Decennial Census is ongoing. He explained the importance of the census and the need for accurate population counts to ensure Monmouth County receives its full and accurate share of transportation funding in the years to come. He urged everyone to respond and be counted whether it be by mail or online. Mr. Vernick added that the federal government had just announced changes to census deadlines due to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure everyone has time to complete the survey and noted that the new deadline should be available on the internet.

- Transportation Network and Deadline Changes Due to COVID-19

Staff informed the Council that the deadline for Real ID's has been pushed from October 1, 2020 to October 1, 2021 to prevent long lines and crowding at the Motor Vehicles Commission once the public quarantine has ended. Additionally, those who had appointments for REAL ID's that have been canceled due to the pandemic will be eligible to receive Real ID's by walk-in once quarantine is over. The Turnpike Authority did not postpone a public hearing for proposed toll hikes and instead made the meeting available to public to view and participate live online. All this information was made available to the public through the Transportation Council's Spring 2020 newsletter which was distributed at the beginning of April. Mr. Garaguso added that all license and registration expiration dates are being extended two months to ensure no one has to worry about expired information.

- Connecting Habitats Across New Jersey

Mr. Vernick reminded the Council of Gretchen Fowles and the Connecting Habitats Across New Jersey presentation Ms. Fowles made to the Council at a previous Council meeting. He outlined the project as an effort to create safe crossings between wildlife habitats along our roadways and other infrastructure. Prior to this Council meeting Staff, at the request of Mr. Vernick distributed a link to the Council with an advertisement for a PBS program called Eco Sense for Living that will be featuring the Connecting Habitats Across New Jersey Program on April 26, 2020. Mr. Vernick encouraged the Council to tune into the program as it may provide some answers to questions Council members may have about the program and help them understand better how to help wildlife in Monmouth County.

-NJ TRANSIT Reduction in Vehicle Occupancy

Mr. Ponzio made the Council aware of that NJ TRANSIT will be taking precautions on public transportation vehicles to limit the risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus. Prior to this meeting Mr. Ponzio had staff share an article with the Transportation Council regarding NJ TRANSIT's COVID-19 precautions that he felt was unclear. Mr. Vernick stated that he also felt the article was misleading. Mr. Ponzio felt it is important to clarify that NJ TRANSIT is not reducing the number of trips by 50%, but rather is limiting the occupancy of all vehicles on scheduled trips to 50% of their maximum occupancy.

The Council expressed concern with the current state of public transportation in Monmouth County. Mr. Garaguso asked if the reduction in capacity per vehicle is going to cause further stress on public transit riders or if a decrease in ridership will make the effects of lowering capacity negligible. The Council directed Staff to contact NJ TRANSIT and request information on current ridership within Monmouth County during the COVID-19 pandemic.

VI. TRANSPORTATION CONCIL QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

- Spring 2020 Newsletter Analytics

Staff announced the newsletter recipient list has increased to a total of 810 recipients. The Spring newsletter received more opens and unique clicks than the previous newsletter in January. The most popular articles in the April newsletter were information about Monmouth County's park and trail network, Real ID and toll hike information, NJ TRANSIT's new Board Members, and getting involved with Waze's transportation data collection.

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VII. REPORTS OF STAFF

- Tourism and Events Demand Management Update

Staff made the Council aware Monmouth County has an open solicitation for a consultant and at least one proposal has been submitted. Staff explained they are unable to elaborate further due to the rules surrounding the open solicitation process. Staff acknowledged that current events may make the Tourism and Events Demand Management Study challenging but they are confident they will be able to select a consultant and produce a well-constructed and interesting study.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT

- Ms. Shelly Kennedy of Atlantic Highlands

Ms. Kennedy commented on the Council's interest in public transit ridership during the COVID-19 pandemic. She pointed out that while most first responders drive to work there are still many who utilize public transit. She elaborated that she has had a great deal of experience commuting by ferry, specifically with Seastreak, and she made the Council aware that Seastreak has adapted their service to a schedule that specifically accommodates first responders. She encouraged the Council to reach out to Seastreak as an interesting source of public transit ridership data during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Kennedy also informed the Council of 2 traffic concerns in Atlantic Highlands. First, she explained that community members are concerned about access and egress for a new 7/11 to be located at the congested intersection of Route 36 and 1st Avenue. The proposed design would cause a bus stop to be located between the driveway access and egress points resulting in pedestrians having to cross the busy driveways to reach the bus stop. Second, she indicated that Route 36 and Avenue D had experienced two pedestrian fatalities. The crossing at the intersection is part of the Henry Hudson Trail and experiences a high volume of pedestrian traffic. It is her belief that the intersection is in need of updated crosswalks or associated infrastructure may make the crossing safer for pedestrians.

Mr. Garaguso assured Ms. Kennedy that the Transportation Council would forward her concerns to the Monmouth County Planning Board and Department of Engineering, as well as the New Jersey Department of Transportation. Staff also informed Ms. Kennedy that the Monmouth County Parks Department is currently working to update crosswalks along the Henry Hudson Trail throughout the Bayshore area which will include the crossing at Avenue D. Ms. Kennedy expressed interest in the upgrades to the Henry Hudson Trail crosswalks and asked when they would be completed. Staff indicated that they would follow up and provide this information for her by email. Mr. Vernick added that the North Jersey Transportation Authority's (NJTPA) Street Smart Campaign could also be useful in educating pedestrians and drivers in the area and encouraged Ms. Kennedy to reach out to the NJTPA about launching a campaign in Atlantic Highlands.

The council thanked Ms. Kennedy for informing the council of her concerns.

IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Next public Monmouth County Transportation Council meeting will be – 7:00PM Tuesday, May 12, 2020. The meeting will either be held in person at the Monmouth County Division of Planning Conference Room at 1 East Main Street, 2nd Floor, Freehold, NJ 07728 or once again by Webex. Mr. Garaguso assured Council members and members of the public that Staff will be in contact through the agenda notification system and email as to the status of the meeting as it approaches.

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X. ADJOURNMENT

Following a motion to adjourn the meeting made by Ms. Grbelja and seconded by Ms. Barrett, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.