

MONMOUTH COUNTY PLANNING BOARD TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

JAMES GIANNELL
Planning Board Chairman



Anthony Garaguso
Council Chairman

Minutes for the Meeting of the
Monmouth County Transportation Council
Tuesday, May 12, 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 April 14, 2020 minutes was sought by Mr. Garaguso. Ms. Grbelja motioned to accept the April 14th minutes which was seconded by Ms. Barret and accepted unanimously by the Council.

IV. PRESENTATION

- Stewart Mader - *Chief Customer Experience Officer & Customer Advocate*
- Anthony Grieco - *Senior Vice President, Communications & Customer Experience*
- Chris D'Elia - *Assistant Regional Manager Office of Government & Community Affairs*

Mr. Garaguso thanked Mr. Mader, Mr. Grieco, and Mr. D'Elia for attending and speaking with the Monmouth County Transportation Council. Mr. Mader, Mr. Grieco, and Mr. D'Elia thanked the Council and Mr. Garaguso for the invitation. Mr. Grieco began by discussing NJ TRANSIT's communication efforts through their two call centers, and eight customer service field offices that handle customer comments made by phone, social media, and walk in. He explained all these channels work toward improving the customer experience. Mr. Mader stated that across the

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country transit agencies and transportation providers are increasing their focus in the customer experience and thinking holistically about the customer experience from the moment planning a trip begins until they reach their destination. He explained that NJ TRANSIT plans to improve their customer experience through the use of customer feedback through the channels Mr. Grieco described as well as the newly founded Customer Advisory Board. The Customer Advisory Board is different from the existing North Jersey and South Jersey Passenger Advisory Committees as it works directly with NJ TRANSIT staff to advise them on the initiatives they are considering and provide feedback and ideas on how to improve the customer experience. Mr. Mader continued that the ideal criteria for a member of the Customer Advisory Board is someone who accurately represent the perspective of a transit rider through various living and working situations, throughout various times of day.

Mr. Mader explained that in the past year NJ TRANSIT has been focusing heavily on refining the organization's use of social media to distribute information, represent NJ TRANSIT, and interact with customers. In his opinion NJ TRANSIT has utilized social media very efficiently throughout the pandemic by distributing information on safety campaigns helping riders stay safe as well as what NJ TRANSIT is doing to keep riders safe such as a 50% capacity limit on vehicles and improved cleaning efforts. One effective change NJ TRANSIT has made to their social media outreach was the creation of social media feeds for each individual train and bus line. Mr. Mader explained that originally NJ TRANSIT put all information out on one feed making it difficult for customers to find the information pertinent to them, now customers only receive information that is relevant to their commute or trip on NJ TRANSIT vehicles.

Mr. Vernick inquired about Mr. Mader's role of Customer Advocate at NJ TRANSIT and asked him to describe some of his responsibilities in that roll. Mr. Mader explained his full role with NJ TRANSIT is Chief Customer Experience Officer and Customer Advocate. In this role he is tasked with bridging the relationship between NJ TRANSIT's customers and staff to provide a broad perspective that will improve how the organization makes decisions around the customer experience. Mr. Vernick also asked about the progress of the new Customer Advisory Board and the condition of the existing North Jersey and South Jersey Passenger Advisory Committees. Mr. Mader stated that he has no involvement with the North Jersey and South Jersey Passenger Advisory Committees however he is responsible for the Customer Advisory Board. He explained that NJ TRANSIT released a press release asking for member applications in Fall 2019 and received 152 applications from people ranging across all NJ TRANSIT services. NJ TRANSIT formed a committee to review the applications and perform interviews of potential candidates which resulted in the selection of the final list of Board members. This selection was completed just before the COVID-19 pandemic which then forced NJ TRANSIT to postpone the first meeting of The Customer Advisory Board on March 18, 2020. Mr. Garaguso asked if NJ TRANSIT would be releasing the membership of the Customer Advisory Board. Mr. Mader responded that the membership was planned to be released shortly before the Board's first meeting but as that meeting has been delayed due to COVID-19, so has the release of the Board's membership. He assured the Council the Board's membership will be released in the near future before the first Customer Advisory Board Meeting.

Mr. Vernick informed NJ TRANSIT Staff that the Monmouth County Transportation Council is an advisory board to the Monmouth County Planning Board with the goal of reviewing and reporting on transportation issues experienced by Monmouth County residents and visitors. Mr. Vernick complimented NJ TRANSIT's efforts with the Customer Advisory Board but felt the organizations could take their efforts a step further by providing for dedicated channels to connect with groups such as the Monmouth County Transportation Council. He explained that one of the things the Council values most is finding ways to have two-way discussions with organizations such as NJ TRANSIT in order to provide valuable information on the experiences being had by Monmouth County residents and visitors. Mr. Mader agreed that it is very important to NJ TRANSIT to communicate with groups such

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as the Transportation Council that value transit and see NJ TRANSIT's service as essential. To add to Mr. Vernick's comment, Monmouth County Staff recommended NJ TRANSIT Staff also reach out to the Transportation Management Associations in New Jersey as they also can provide valuable insight into the customers experiences with transit. Mr. Vernick asked Mr. Mader how the transportation Council could work more closely with NJ TRANSIT and if there are any opportunities to improve communication between the Council and NJ TRANSIT. Mr. Mader stated that speaking to Councils such as the Monmouth County Transportation Council is valuable for NJ TRANSIT. He elaborated that by having conversations NJ TRANSIT staff is able to learn from people's experiences utilizing NJ TRANSIT services and distribute information. Mr. Mader hoped the Transportation Council found their discussion as insightful as he had, and expressed interest in meeting with the Council again or meeting with other local groups that may be able to provide more insight into the experience of Monmouth County residents and visitors. Mr. Grieco added that NJ TRANSIT has gone through a significant reorganization in the past year which involved the creation of the Chief Customer Experience Officer & Customer Advocate that Mr. Mader currently holds. It is Mr. Grieco's belief that NJ TRANSIT is now better poised to have discussions such as these and will benefit more from them than they have in previous years. He also brought to the Council's attention that before the COVID-19 outbreak NJ TRANSIT was in the process of launching their 10-Year Strategic Plan and 5-Year Capital Plan and would be interested in hearing the Transportation Council's opinions on them once they are released.

Mr. Garaguso asked if the decrease in ridership has allowed NJ TRANSIT to focus efforts on other projects such as Positive Train Control. Mr. Grieco responded yes, NJ TRANSIT has taken advantage of the low ridership and shifted some efforts to other projects. Work on Positive Train Control has not been halted by COVID-19 and Mr. Grieco is confident installation will be complete by the December 2020 deadline.

Mr. Vernick informed NJ TRANSIT staff of the Transportation Council's quarterly newsletter and explained its usefulness in distributing information and keeping the public informed. He asked if there was any information NJ TRANSIT would like the Council to share in their upcoming newsletter that will be distributed in July. Mr. Garaguso agreed with Mr. Vernick that the Council's newsletter could be as helpful to NJ TRANSIT as it has been to the Council. As an example, Mr. Garaguso called NJ TRANSIT Staff's attention to the individual Twitter handles offered for each bus and train route. He explained that until today he was unaware these existed and believes including them in the July newsletter will help inform members of the public who are also unaware. Mr. Grieco welcomed any help the Transportation Council could provide in the distribution of NJ TRANSIT information. He asked that the Council assist NJ TRANSIT by informing the public how to access NJ TRANSIT information such as the Twitter handles described by Mr. Garaguso and changes to service.

Mr. Lucarelli asked if NJ TRANSIT staff has considered working to encourage employers to stagger work shifts to allow for greater social distancing on vehicles and a less concentrated peak of riders. Mr. Grieco responded that they have seen a large change in how employers are utilizing their work force due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having employees work remotely has allowed many businesses to limit the number of employees traveling to the office each day and has helped NJ TRANSIT with social distancing on vehicles. With businesses beginning to reopen, NJ TRANSIT is going to have to find a way to maintain the social distancing. Mr. Grieco believes that limiting the occupancy of vehicles to 50% as is required by Governor Murphy's executive order will help. Mr. Garaguso asked how the 50% occupancy limit was enforced on trains. He was curious whether it was done by individual car or the entire train. Mr. Grieco explained that it is enforced by train car and if NJ TRANSIT staff feels there are too many people in one car, they will ask them to spread to other cars.

Mr. Garaguso opened the floor to the public for questions. Mr. Fred Brody asked Mr. Grieco about NJ TRANSIT's progress with converting their fleet to electric vehicles. Mr. Grieco informed Mr. Brody and the Council that NJ

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TRANSIT will be launching a pilot program next year in Camden involving eight electric busses. The program is intended to give NJ TRANSIT experience with working and maintaining a fleet of electric vehicles. Mr. Grieco explained that legislation requires in 2024, 10 % of all NJ TRANSIT's vehicle purchased must be zero emission. This will increase to 50% in 2026 and to 100% in 2032. He assured the Council that NJ TRANSIT is committed to switching to an electric vehicle fleet and the organization is currently working to outfit bus facilities with vehicle chargers and is working closely with utility companies to ensure the facilities have access to the power needed.

Mr. Frost asked NJ TRANSIT Staff what improvements they foresee in NJ TRANSIT's future that may improve the organization's service. Mr. Grieco responded that the organization's Capital Improvement Program is intended to answer exactly this question and encouraged Mr. Frost and the Council to review it upon its release. It outlines improvements to infrastructure and programs that will improve NJ TRANSIT's service in the future.

V. OLD BUSINESS

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

Mr. Garaguso asked staff to read the Council's Resolution Recognizing Transportation and Front-Line Workers During the COVID-19 Crisis, the resolution passed at the Council's April meeting and update the Council on its status. Staff read the resolution aloud and reported that it will be going in front of the Planning Board at their upcoming meeting on Monday May 18, 2020 along with a letter from the Transportation Council Chairman Mr. Garaguso explaining the resolution's importance and the Council's desire for it to be distributed to front-line workers. Mr. Vernick extended the Council's condolences to present NJ TRANSIT staff for the loss of co-workers and friends within their organization due to the virus and thanked them and the rest of the NJ TRANSIT staff for their sacrifice and hard work during this pandemic. Mr. Garaguso echoed Mr. Vernick's sentiments and asked Mr. Mader, Mr. Grieco, and Mr. D'Elia what obstacles have arisen due to COVID-19 and what solution they have used to continue offering bus and rail service?

Mr. Grieco thanked the Transportation Council for their kind words regarding the loss of their NJ TRANSIT family members. He went on to inform the Council that NJ TRANSIT has had 506 total employees test positive for the virus since the beginning of the pandemic with 9 employees succumbing to the illness. The majority of employees have returned to work and the organization is beginning to recover from its original affliction of the virus. Mr. Grieco informed the Council that NJ TRANSIT has been working hard to spread information to customers and employees through multiple campaigns such as the Anti-Viral, and COVID-19 Campaigns with the use of social media, posters, electronic signage, and many other mediums. Due to the virus NJ TRANSIT has seen a 95% drop in ridership and revenue, and has had to make scheduling adjustments to ensure they can financially afford to continue service through the pandemic. NJ TRANSIT representatives have also been requesting federal assistance. Mr. Grieco continued that the organization has increased cleaning efforts on all NJ TRANSIT infrastructure and is encouraging customers to utilize the NJ TRANSIT phone application for the purchase of tickets to limit contact between customers and employees. He added that NJ TRANSIT is using a 24-hour hotline available to their employees to report themselves if they test positive for COVID-19 which allows NJ TRANSIT to quickly find a replacement for infected employees and inform other employees who have been in contact to seek testing for themselves.

Ms. Barrett asked if restrooms were currently open on NJ TRANSIT vehicles. Mr. Grieco responded that the restrooms are open and available to the public and are cleaned every 24 hours. Mr. Frost asked if face masks are being required aboard NJ TRANSIT vehicles and if customers are complying with the rules. Mr. Grieco answered that yes, face masks are required of all employees and customers following the declaration of Executive Order No. 125 passed by Governor Murphy and overall, the organization has not had a large issue with customers not complying with the face mask rule. Mr. Mader added that NJ TRANSIT has increased their monitoring of social media during the pandemic to address issues raised by customers of possible noncompliance with face masks as well as if vehicles experience occupancy of over 50% which is also mandated by Executive

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Order No. 125. Mr. Mader went on to explain that they are contacting vehicles in route in response to customer concerns to address these issues but are finding that most vehicles and customers are complying with the rules as implemented.

Mr. Ponzio raised a few concerns with NJ TRANSIT staff regarding everyday transit operations. He noted the ticket validation process and how conductors physically interact with nearly every passenger on the train while validating tickets. He asked if NJ TRANSIT had plans to change this system moving forward, possibly with the use of new technologies. He also asked if NJ TRANSIT has any plans to install sanitizer dispensers on vehicles and at stations to cut down the spread of germs. Mr. Grieco agreed that the ticket validation system currently in place is outdated and informed the Council that NJ TRANSIT is piloting a program using handheld scanners rather than the ticket punch system to cut back on physical interactions. In terms of the sanitizer dispensers, Mr. Grieco stated that NJ TRANSIT is investigating the use of sanitation stations which provide hand sanitizer, wipes, and possibly face masks at major terminals. Mr. Ponzio thanked Mr. Grieco for this information and thanked Mr. Mader and Mr. D'Elia for their hard work during these unsafe times. Mr. Garaguso thanked NJ TRANSIT staff for the helpful information they have provided on NJ TRANSIT's COVID-19 response efforts and asked if any Council members had final questions regarding COVID-19 before opening the floor to the public. Mr. Frost asked if ventilation filters were being cleaned or replaced more regularly due to the virus. Mr. Grieco said that yes, the cleaning and replacing of air filters is an important part of the cleaning process. Mr. Garaguso then opened the discussion to members of the public.

Monmouth County Planning Board Member Ms. Marcy McMullen asked how NJ TRANSIT enforces the face mask rules and what consequences there are for customers who do not comply. Mr. Grieco responded that they do not provide masks for customers and prefer not to deny customers without face masks to enter vehicles but will ask non complying customers to move to unoccupied train cars if they are available or find a compromise so that everyone can safely ride transit.

Mr. Garaguso thanked NJ TRANSIT staff for taking the time to speak with the Transportation Council and stated he looks forward to having them return for a future meeting. Ms. Grbelja added that she felt this discussion was very informative and extended her gratitude to NJ TRANSIT Staff for attending.

- Governor's Executive Order Capping Ridership on all NJ Transit Buses and Trains

Mr. Garaguso felt this agenda item was adequately handled during the Council's discussion with NJ TRANSIT and asked if any Council members had anything additional they wanted to add on this subject. The Council agreed and had nothing additional to add to the discussion.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- Opportunities for Improving Communication with NJ TRANSIT

Mr. Garaguso expressed his feelings that the discussion tonight between the Council and NJ TRANSIT Staff was a good first step to building a rapport with NJ TRANSIT. Inviting them to future meetings will ensure the conversation keeps growing. The Council shared Mr. Garaguso's opinion and were happy to invite Mr. Mader, Mr. Grieco, and Mr. D'Elia back to future meetings.

VII. REPORTS OF STAFF

- Tourism and Events Demand Management Update

Staff updated the Council that they are working to bring a consultant under contract which will be completed soon.

- Follow up with Fort Monmouth Economic Revitalization Authority

Mr. Vernick reminded the Council of the discussion they had with FMERA staff at a previous Council meeting. He asked Staff if they had been in contact with FMERA staff since their visit. Staff replied that they have not been in

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contact with FMERA. Mr. Vernick encouraged Staff to reach out to FMERA to see if they need input or guidance on transportation issues within Fort Monmouth.

-Monmouth County Grant Applications

Staff informed the Council that they have been working on submitting grant applications for a shuttle programs within the County as well as new electric vehicle chargers and will keep the Council informed of their progress. They also made the Council aware that the Interactive Transportation Map is nearing completion and will be made available to them for their input soon.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT

IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Next public Monmouth County Transportation Council meeting will be – 7:00PM Tuesday, June 9, 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.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Following a motion to adjourn the meeting made by Ms. Grbelja and seconded by Ms. Barrett, the meeting was adjourned at 8:47 PM.