



MONMOUTH COUNTY
Local Concept Development Study for Monmouth County Route 537
Gravel Hill Road to NJ Route 33 Business
Township of Freehold and Borough of Freehold

PUBLIC INFORMATION CENTER SUMMARY
MEETING REPORT

DATE: Tuesday, April 24, 2012
TIME: 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. (Brief Presentation 3:00 p.m.)
LOCATION: Borough of Freehold Municipal Building, Council Room
51 West Main Street, Freehold, NJ

PURPOSE OF MEETING

The purpose of this Public Information Center Meeting was to inform the general public of the physical and operational condition of the CR 537 corridor within the study area and to solicit public input and comment towards the development of the project purpose and need.

MEETING SUMMARY

1. A total of 15 individuals attended the meeting as indicated on the Sign-In Sheets and a total of 11 (13) project team members were in attendance to present information and assist with public questions. The meeting was designed as an open house format with display boards providing aerials maps of the CR537 project study area, environmental screening and the Local Concept Development process flow chart. The project team members were available to answer questions. A Project Information Sheet and blank Monmouth County Comment Form were distributed to the general public upon sign-in to the meeting. The Comment Form could be completed and handed in at the meeting or could be faxed, emailed or mailed to Monmouth County.
2. At 3:00 p.m. Martine Culbertson, Community Involvement Facilitator began the brief presentation welcoming attendees on behalf of Monmouth County, and the cooperating agencies of North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority and the New Jersey Department of Transportation.
3. After introductions by the project team members, Daria Jakimowska, Monmouth County Chief Engineer, Traffic Design, provided information on the corridor, which has retail, hospital, restaurants, school and residential traffic. Due to increased congestion, access and safety issues, this project was developed in attempt to address the traffic and pedestrian concerns in this section of Route 537.

4. Sarbjit Kahlon, Principal Environmental Planner from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) is the Program Manager for this Study. She explained that the project is currently in the Local Concept Development phase, which will define the purpose and need, develop alternatives to meet those needs, and identify the Preferred Alternative for the next phases. The flow chart indicates next steps (see Power Point presentation, to be posted on Monmouth County web site). NJTPA will administer and oversee the project. Monmouth County will manage the project activities as the technical lead, working with the consultant team, led by Hardesty & Hanover (H&H). NJDOT will coordinate the environmental process.
5. Bruce Riegel, Hardesty & Hanover Deputy Project Manager presented information on the project status and photos showing the existing condition of the intersections along the corridor.
 - (a) The project work commenced in November 2011. Field survey work is done and preliminary base mapping and environmental screenings have been completed. The project team is currently obtaining information on utility facilities in the project area and new traffic counts will be collected.
 - (b) Any transportation projects receiving Federal funding must follow the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process. When analyzing alternatives, the project team will look to avoid environmental resources and if not, then to minimize and provide any mitigation. The environmental resources include wetlands, sensitive areas, air, noise, hazardous or contaminated sites, parks, open space and cultural resources such as historic structures and facilities. Community involvement is part of the environmental process.
 - (c) Bruce noted the key operational issues and significant crash data at certain intersections:
 - 62 crashes at Stillwell Corner Rd and Wemrock Rd (mainly rear-end)
 - Photos showing areas where pedestrians are walking along roadway with no sidewalks
 - 123 crashes rear and side-swipes in vicinity of Trotters Way.
 - 95 crashes (rear-end) on RT 537 westbound on bridge over Route 9
 - 170 crashes (mainly rear-end) at Route 9 Northbound Access ramps to Route 537
 - (d) Bruce provided information on the project schedule, as listed on the Project Information Handout and on the Power Point presentation, to be posted on the Monmouth County web site. The Concept Development Phase is scheduled to be completed by April 2013 with a preferred alternative. Input is needed now from the stakeholders and the public in developing the Project Purpose and Need from which alternatives for improvements to the corridor can be created.
6. The meeting was opened for any questions or comments from attendees. The following questions and comments were noted:
 - *Question:* Who are the stakeholders?
Response: The Community Stakeholders include representation from Freehold Borough, Freehold Township, schools, hospital, businesses, historic associations, residents and agencies who have a vested interest in the CR 537 corridor. Any attendees interested in attending the next Community Stakeholders Meeting were welcomed to provide their name to Inkyung Englehart at the Sign-In table.
 - *Question:* Is there funding for this project?

Response: There is funding in place for the Concept Development phase for \$500,000. Future funding will be programmed in the TIP (Transportation Improvement Program) once it is determined what improvements are to be implemented with the preliminary preferred alternative.

• *Question:* If the Mall expands, what is the plan?

Response: The County and project team are collecting information on proposed development in the corridor to determine impacts and welcome information regarding any property development.

• *Question:* Why waste money on sidewalks?

Response: Sidewalks are necessary for safety in areas where there is pedestrian movements especially in residential areas where children may be present to board school buses or public accessing transit options for employment and retail shopping. Such is the case at Gravel Hill Road.

• *Comment:* The bicyclists ride on shoulders, not on sidewalks (Title 39 law). The interest is to create more shoulder width for bicyclists rather than greater sidewalk width.

Additional Comment: Federal and State policy is to provide sidewalks for pedestrian safety and adequate shoulders for safe bicycle access.

• *Question/Comment:* At NJ Business 33 southwest corner near church, can the radius be widened and on the southwest right on turns? There are backups of traffic and residents can't go left.

Additional Comment: Left to go to Route 9 north from ramp on Barkalow, terrible visibility, go to Business 33 to make left, must jockey since there is no dedicated left lane.

Additional Comment: Go 100 feet with only one lane, no acceleration lane, backs up.

• *Comment:* Off Route 9 left on CR 537, Barkalow has yield, goes straight. The geometrics are an issue at this location.

• *Question:* Why was a traffic signal and other improvements completed at Gravel Hill Road?

Response: Improvements were done for safer access on and off CR 537 and signal provides gaps in traffic flow for cars coming across that were afraid to go to RT524 to go to RT9, and from Thompson to go left.

• *Comment:* There are a lot of pedestrians from residential areas going to Raintree shopping area.

• *Comment:* Consider bus location and amenities such as shelter and location best for dropping off and picking up passengers. Temporary works for Great Adventure ride the NJ TRANSIT bus and get on/off at jughandle near mall.

• *Comment:* There is a lot of bike traffic from the Borough to the Raceway Mall and they don't have reflective equipment on their bike. There are bicyclists traveling to and from the mall for work and shopping all day, often carrying bags on their bikes.

Additional Comment: Freehold Township has the businesses and Freehold Borough has the housing so bicycles use the RT537 roadway and with no designated bike lane, in early morning and late at night it's hard to see cyclists, dangerous, not safe. Suggestion made to give cyclists reflective vests to wear and reflectors for their bikes.

- *Comment:* The Race Track has an average of 125 horses coming and going from the track from 4:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

7. On behalf of Monmouth County and the project team, Daria Jakimowska thanked everyone for attending the meeting and providing comments. She noted that Project Team members would continue to be available near the display boards should anyone have additional questions in looking at the information presented in the photos and the newsprint on the wall.

8. In closing the presentation, Martine encouraged attendees to submit their comments or any additional questions after the PIC meeting on the blank Comment Form or if in letter to the attention of the County Engineer, Joseph Ettore.

Any one interested in becoming a member of the Community Stakeholders Group, should provide their contact information to Inkyung Englehart. The next Community Stakeholders Meeting No. 2 will be held to obtain input for various alternatives developed to meet the Purpose and Need Statement and a general public meeting will be held in the future to present the alternatives and the preferred alternative.

We believe the foregoing to be an accurate summary of discussions and related decisions. We would appreciate notification of exceptions or corrections to the minutes within three (3) working days of receipt. Without notification, these minutes will be considered to be record of fact.
Martine Culbertson
Route 537 Community Involvement Facilitator