

MEETING MINUTES
Morris County Board of Transportation Meeting
 Tuesday, April 20, 2021
 Web-Ex Virtual Meeting

In Attendance:

Board Members	Additional Attendees	Staff
Scott Harris	Cathy Wilson, Morris Township Council	Christopher Vitz
Darren Large		John Hayes
Ilene Dorf Manahan		Dede Murray
Frank Reilly		Benjamin Peacock
Jack Holland		
Len Resto		
Jigar Shah		
Commissioner Shaw		
Joe Wells, Chairperson		

- I. Call to Order:** Chairperson Joe Wells called the meeting to order at 2:03 pm.
- II. Roll Call:** John Hayes read the roll call. Eight voting members were present during roll call.
- III. Welcome and Introductions:** Chairperson Wells welcomed all in attendance.
- IV. Approval of Minutes from October 27, 2020 Meeting:** Approval of the minutes was moved by Len Resto, seconded by Jigar Shah, and unanimously approved.

V. Reports:

- A. Road & Bridge Projects:** Christopher Vitz, County Engineer, reported that Morris County has continued to advance numerous infrastructure projects through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The County has started construction on five paving projects, and is waiting on NJDOT Local Aid approval for an additional 21 projects. The 21 projects are expected to be bid throughout the year. The County is moving along pretty early in the season with our paving program. Whitehead Road Bridge in Morris Township was completed and opened to traffic on April 16; the contractor worked on the small bridge over the winter. Work began on Lamerson Road Bridge on April 19. The County continues to advance road and bridge projects as quickly as possible and has not experienced any delay due to COVID-19.

Chairperson Wells asked if any funding from the Federal stimulus bill will be made available to the County. Mr. Vitz responded that an estimated \$100 billion would go towards roads, bridges, and similar infrastructure across the United States, and at this moment it is not known which County projects would receive funding from the stimulus bill.

Commissioner Shaw thanked Mr. Vitz and his team for doing an outstanding job throughout last year and this year. He reported that the Board of Commissioners completed bonding early in order to expedite funding availability. These efforts were completed in the hope that Divisions like Engineering and Transportation can be first in line to get funding for their projects.

Commissioner Shaw also reported that Morris County has received funding from the Recovery Act (RA). The RA dollars are not allocated for infrastructure projects, although the Board of Commissioners is looking at all capital projects to see if any project will qualify for those dollars under the promulgated rules. The RA provides about \$94.8 million dollars for COVID relief. The County is monitoring the infrastructure bill. Commissioner Shaw stated that the Engineering and Transportation Division is doing a good job watching for available funding, as well as prioritizing projects. The County received a call from Congressperson Sherill's office regarding potential funding for infrastructure projects. There are certain parameters the state has to follow. Each Congressperson in each district can send a submittal for funding for projects. A list of projects was put together. The Capital Committee looked at it, the Commissioner Board gave them the green light, and within three days the applications were turned around. The projects that would qualify are projects that are currently ongoing but have the potential to get 80% funding. Commissioner Shaw acknowledged Vitz's quick action on the project list and applications.

- B. NYS&W Updates:** Dede Murray provided a status update for the NYS&W Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Project. The County is working diligently on the construction bid and award process. A low bidder for construction has been identified. Due to some reservations held by the County, County Counsel is being consulted. The County is currently awaiting the advice of Counsel for next steps. At the last meeting Ms. Murray reported that the southern terminus of the trail is being realigned. An easement is required from Wayne Township to realign that segment of trail onto some of their property. The County is having conversations with the Township regarding adding this easement to the next Wayne Township Council meeting agenda.

Chairperson Wells inquired if there are plans for bicycle racks at the Mountain View train station for bicycle riders using the trail as a means for commuting. Ms. Murray replied that there are no bicycle parking facilities included in the design plans, but installation of this kind of amenity could be pursued in the future as a separate project. Currently only kiosks will be placed at trail heads. Chairperson Wells asked for confirmation on the schedule for construction. Mr. Vitz replied that construction is still expected to begin this summer.

- C. Freight Activities:** Benjamin Peacock provided updates on several County railroad projects. The Bridge Management Program has been completed. The

County received the final document on April 5. It is anticipated that a RFP will be advertised for another round of bridge inspections later this year. According to FRA compliance standards, railroad bridges need to be inspected every 540 days.

The County is starting the Dover & Rockway Runaround Track Design project that is being funded through the NJDOT's Rail Freight Assistance Program (RFAP). The kick off meeting for this project will be held next Tuesday, April 27 with the design consultant.

The County is also preparing for the design of the Dover & Rockway Realignment. A preferred alternative was identified through NJTPA's Freight Concept Development Program that was completed in 2020. The project will also be funded through RFAP. Signed contracts were sent back to NJDOT to be executed, and letters were mailed to the municipalities in the project area to notify them that the County has been awarded funding. The County will prepare the RFP for this project once the contract is executed.

A new NJTPA Freight Concept Development project is underway which is the Berkshire Valley Road Truck Circulation Project in Roxbury. NJTPA and consultant team held the kick off meeting on March 2, 2021. The first monthly project status meeting was held on April 7. A meeting is scheduled for April 21 to discuss public outreach strategies.

A contract for Berkshire Valley Road Railroad Bridge Repairs is going out to bid soon and is expected to be awarded in May. The County is also advancing two projects that will be funded through the State's Crossing Reconstruction Program. The first is the Berkshire Valley Road Crossing in Roxbury. NJDOT awarded Morris County \$261,700 for this crossing. An RFP will be issued once the County passes a resolution accepting the award. Construction is expected to begin next year. The second project is at Commerce Boulevard in Roxbury. NJDOT will hold a Diagnostic Team Meeting on April 27. The hope is to have this crossing slated for replacement after the work on Berkshire Valley Road Crossing is completed.

Scott Harris reported that the County continues to be tremendously responsive on advancing projects such as crossing improvements and signal work. The need for some signal work has come up due to the aging of some of the systems. Mr. Harris commented that it is greatly appreciated, especially from an operational and safety standpoint. Mr. Harris also reported that freight demand remains strong. Lumber shipments are back to pre-COVID levels, while plastic shipments continue to exceed anything that has historically been seen. It appears that manufacturers of plastics in Morris County are producing in greater and greater capacities, which is great for employers, employees, as well as the tax base for Morris County. The lumber industry was affected by the pandemic and is working on the back-log that was caused by the shut down last year. Lumber has been experiencing some constraints in catching up with demand such as the availability of ports. Regardless of these challenges, lumber in Morris County doing well.

Chairperson Wells asked Mr. Harris if the plastic industry is predominantly domestic or if it relies on imports. Mr. Harris responded that the plastic industry is chiefly, if not entirely, domestic with the occasional import from Canada. When asked by Chairperson Wells about lumber in the same regard, Mr. Harris replied

that lumber is largely out of the states of Washington and Oregon with the occasional Canadian shipment. Mr. Harris expanded mentioning that the drywall and gypsum sector is even more local, as the products often come from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. These two items are now moving by rail more frequently as prices and inventory stabilize. Based on his involvement in the residential construction business, Commissioner Shaw added that there is an acute shortage of lumber. By way of example, the price of a standard size sheet of plywood has risen from \$30/sheet to \$97/sheet. This increase is only from November of last year. The increased expenses resulted in a pullback on projects in the residential construction industry. Commissioner Shaw stated that he hopes the supply lines for these items begins to free up so demand can be met.

VII. Old Business:

None.

VIII. New Business:

Darren Large from Morristown Airport reported on the impact of COVID-19 on operations and on current construction projects at the Airport. Mr. Large stated that the Airport was heavily impacted in the beginning of the pandemic with about 0% operations. Currently, aviation is at about 80% of pre-COVID levels. There has been a significant shift in the type of traffic that operates out of the Airport. Before the pandemic, larger corporations represented the majority of operations at the facility. At this time, smaller to mid-size charter aircraft are more prevalent, and many corporations are not currently operating their flight departments. Most air traffic using the facility is relatively local as the flights are typically at a maximum of 500-600 miles away. There are also fewer overnight flights. Airport staffing levels remained the same and they have been working throughout the pandemic.

The Airport is in the second year of a ten-year runway rehabilitation project. The project will rehabilitate the main runway at the Airport which was installed in 1941 and extended in 1969. The runway will be brought to present day standards including safety areas, lighting, and pavement. The Approach Light System Replacement project is expected to start next year. The existing system was installed in 1969.

Chairperson Wells inquired about the difference in revenue between the smaller size charters and large commercial aircraft charters, and if revenue is at 80% of pre-COVID levels as well. Mr. Large responded that revenue is down. Revenue from fuel purchases and landing fees have been affected, but operations and revenue are expected to rebound as COVID-19 restrictions lift and travel increases. Chairperson Wells asked if corporations are divesting their aircrafts. Mr. Large responded that they have not seen large divestments from companies. Purchasing and maintaining an aircraft is very time consuming and expensive. Most companies are letting their aircraft sit and instead are working on operation strategies as they move into the second and third quarters of this year. Most of the operators based at the airport are looking to potentially start some more business in the September time-frame. Typically, corporate traffic at the airport reduces in June, July, and August, and then increases in September.

Commissioner Shaw mentioned that he is a pilot and used to keep his plane in the old west tie down. At the beginning of the month, Commissioner Shaw received a call from a Council member in Hanover Township asking if there has been a temporary change in flight patterns or altitude. Mr. Large said what is most likely being observed is the category of planes using the airport. Many of the large corporate aircrafts are not being used, so the majority of flights are the smaller private jets. Mr. Large also mentioned that in the past there have been no touch-and-go landings on runway 13-31. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) a couple years ago stated that touch-and-go activity cannot be restricted at the airport. Since that notification from the FAA, Morristown Airport has allowed touch-and-go flights. A couple of national flight school chains have been running operations at the airport. Currently, there is a pilot shortage and an immense amount of training has become available to improve pilot numbers. Mr. Large has been working with the FAA to try and alleviate the noise impact on the residents who live adjacent to the crosswind runway 13-31. The majority of time that they are using that runway is when the winds are in that direction. Winds often arise from the north during the winter and spring. This northerly origin of wind requires the Airport to shift flights to that runway.

IX. Public Comments:

Councilperson Cathy Wilson from Morris Township said she recently learned about the Morris County Board of Transportation and expressed interest in attending future meetings. Councilperson Wilson asked if there were plans to expand the hangars or terminals. A newspaper article mentioned that the Airport was applying for a NJDEP permit. Mr. Large responded that there is a facility in the west tie down area. The company currently in that area is Lynx FBO (a nationwide fixed base operator). Aircraft that fly into the airport can park and purchase fuel from the FBO. Lynx FBO is looking to do some redevelopment in that quadrant of the airfield. It is one of the final areas suited for redevelopment at the airfield. This project will move smaller aircrafts to a grass area adjacent to the west tie down. Two hangar facilities will be developed on the west tie down area. This will serve existing aircraft that are coming to and from the facility. Councilperson Wilson inquired whether the redevelopment would result in an increase in air traffic. Mr. Large responded that there might be some increase in air traffic, but the existing customer base is already robust. If there is any increase, it will not be a substantial difference. In regards to the redevelopment, Councilperson Wilson inquired whether acquiring the NJDEP permit is the first step and once it is obtained, what Board will hear and approve this project. Mr. Large stated that the redevelopment was a part of Morristown Airport's Master Plan which was adopted in 2012. During the development of the Master Plan, there were public hearings regarding the development in the west tie down area and other improvements in that area over the next 20 years. The project is currently waiting NJDEP approval. Upon approval of the redevelopment, there should be more public meetings. Upon approval of the permit, development will take place. The Hanover Township Planning Board will hear the application.

Additionally, Councilperson Wilson asked about any updates on a County bike share program and mentioned that TransOptions is pursuing a bike share program. Mr. Hayes said that the County is not pursuing a bike share program at this time. Mr. Resto stated that the Morris County Park Commission offers bike share programs at some of their parks, but not recently due to COVID-19.

X. The Next Regular Meeting: Virtual Meeting on Tuesday, July 20, 2021 at 2:00 pm.

XI. Adjournment: Adjournment of the meeting was moved by Mr. Resto, seconded by Ms. Manahan, and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Dede Murray, Division of Engineering & Transportation