

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

**In Attendance:**

<b>Board Members</b>	<b>Additional Attendees</b>	<b>Staff</b>
Melverne E. Cooke	Chris Mroczka	Christopher Vitz
Ronald Francoili	Ben Schumer	John Hayes
Scott Harris		Dede Murray
Jack Holland		Benjamin Peacock
Ilene Dorf Manahan		
Len Resto		
Jigar Shah		
Joe Wells, Chairperson		

**I. Call to Order:** Chairperson Joe Wells called the meeting to order at 2:03 pm. At the time of the meeting’s opening, an insufficient number of members were present to make quorum.

**II. Roll Call:** John Hayes read the roll call. Six voting members were present during roll call.

**III. Welcome and Introductions:** Chairperson Wells welcomed all in attendance.

**IV. Approval of Minutes from April 20, 2021 Meeting:** Approval of the minutes was tabled until later in the meeting after the report on Road and Bridge Projects. Approval of the minutes was moved by Jigar Shah, seconded by Chairperson Wells, and unanimously approved.

**V. Reports:**

**A. Road & Bridge Projects:** Christopher Vitz, County Engineer, reported on road and bridge projects.

The County has been working on its 2021 paving, bridge, and traffic signal projects, and working to complete a few projects that had continued from last year as a result of contractor staffing issues, COVID, and some delays on certain projects. Three road bridge projects have been completed this year. About three or four more road bridge projects are underway. Approximately 20 miles of roads have either been completed or are under contract for milling and resurfacing. Another five or six miles are expected to be completed some time this year or early next year. The 2022 Capital Budget process is beginning. The Commissioners are

in favor of an overall budget of \$30 million. That amount is comprised of funding for road, bridge, and traffic signal projects, vehicle purchases, building enhancements, and other improvement projects that would qualify for capital funding. The budget for roads, bridges, and traffic signals will remain consistent for 2022.

Len Resto inquired about the amount of damage to the railroad bridge due to the recent truck strike. Mr. Vitz responded that the crash occurred last Tuesday, July 13 in Roxbury Township. The truck was traveling on Berkshire Valley Road (CR 642) and struck the County-owned Chester Branch Railroad Bridge at about 40 miles per hour causing damage to the girder that supports the weight of the bridge over the road and a beam underneath that holds the track structure to the bridge. Both the road and the bridge had to be taken out of service.

The road was able to be reopened within a day and a half, but only to one lane of alternating traffic. The bridge required additional support installed from underneath. The County is currently working with the contractor to replace the steel member that was damaged beyond repair and also to fix a hole in the girder. Mr. Vitz reported that he was at the site earlier today. The contractor was preparing to install the girder between two steel plates. The steel beam will be delivered tomorrow; the contractor had to prepare the beam in their yard prior to delivery at the site. At this time, train service is expected to be restored by Thursday, July 22. The County is working diligently with the contractor and Scott Harris, the railroad operator, to get service back and running by that date.

Mr. Resto inquired if the truck driver sustained any injuries from the crash. Mr. Vitz reported that the driver's injuries were significant enough to require hospitalization. Mr. Vitz detailed that the 2020 dump truck that was being driven was actually empty, and if the truck had been full, it would likely have caused much greater damage. It is presumed that the bed of the truck was up in the air a little bit, resulting in the bed striking the bridge. The contractor hired to perform the emergency repairs was already under contract with the County to start other repairs to the bridge in August. The County directed the contractor to prioritize repairs that will restore rail service and reopen the road to traffic, and subsequently complete the other repairs. Additional repairs include replacing steel members, repainting the bridge, and improving signage. The County will charge all time and materials used for the emergency repairs to the trucker driver's insurance company. The bridge should be open to rail service by Thursday, July 22 and the remainder of non-emergency repairs will be completed during August.

Chairperson Wells asked how the crash and emergency repairs will affect the plans for the bridge, and if the repairs will involve modifying the track to handle the larger rail cars. Mr. Vitz responded that the bridge can currently handle the standard 286k lbs. rail cars. One of the projects that has just started includes studying alternatives for eliminating the height restriction the bridge causes for vehicles traveling on Berkshire Valley Road, such as raising the bridge or lowering the road bed underneath the structure. John Hayes added that the Berkshire Valley Road Truck Circulation Project is being funded and managed by NJTPA under the Freight Concept Development Program. The Dover and Rockaway Railroad Realignment study was completed through the same NJTPA program.

Chairperson Wells inquired about any updates regarding the Federal Infrastructure money that was discussed at the meeting last quarter with Commissioner Shaw. Mr. Vitz responded that the news has reported that the Senate is working on the \$3.5 trillion Infrastructure Program Bill. That funding is separate from the Transportation and Infrastructure Bill for which Representative Sherrill and Representative Malinowski had reached out to Morris County to identify potential projects. The list of projects submitted for this funding were approved by the Congressional committee and they have progressed with the bill for both members of Congress. There is a parallel bill that is going through with the senate. The same list of projects was submitted to Senator Booker's office. The County is hopeful that the list of projects will continue moving through the approval process in order to receive funding from these bills. Mr. Vitz asked Mr. Hayes if those projects have been added to the NJTPA Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Mr. Hayes will check the status. Chairperson Wells asked if there were any particular projects the County was looking to highlight. Mr. Vitz responded that there were five projects that progressed through to the bill, including the Berkshire Valley Road Truck Circulation Project, the adaptive reuse and relocation of a historic truss from Denville to the Columbia Trail in Washington Township, the replacement of the Bloomfield Avenue Bridge in Montville, and the replacement of the Lenape Island Road Bridge in Denville.

The County has continued to remove ash trees along its roadways as part of the Ash Tree Removal Project. The project will enter its third year this fall. It has been observed that the ash trees are dying off at quick rates. The County is working diligently to respond to this unfortunate, large tree die-off to keep the roads safe. Chairperson Wells asked if there have been any flooding issues this past quarter due to the high amounts of rain. Mr. Vitz responded that there were some flooding issues in Washington Township. After receiving high volumes of rainfall, overflow from a farm field flooded onto a County road and washed out a fence on the opposite side of the road. The edge of the roadway was previously reinforced in that area due to past flooding. The road had to be closed, but no damage was caused to the roadway due to the flooding. Overall, the County roads have been resilient to flooding. Additionally, the Morris County Mosquito Division continues efforts to combat the increase in mosquito populations this year.

- B. NYS&W Updates:** Dede Murray provided a status update for the NYS&W Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Project. The County is moving towards construction. The County just completed a tree inventory for the entire length of the project and within a twenty-foot buffer of the path's centerline. Over 1,700 trees were inventoried, 64 of those trees were white ash. Construction is anticipated to start this fall. The County will be rebidding for construction between late summer and early fall. A contract was awarded to a design firm for Wayfinding and Signage Design services. Design services will begin between late summer and early fall.

Commissioner Wells inquired about the County's decision to rebid the construction project and if the County intends to keep the original low bidder. Ms. Murray responded that the County rejected all bids and the contract will be rebid entirely. A Responsibility Hearing was held between County Counsel, Engineering, and the contractor, and it was determined that the County would reissue the RFP. Ilene Dorf Manahan asked if any money is owed to the contractor. Ms. Murray replied that the County does not owe money to the low bidder. Chairperson Wells asked

about the maintenance of the Water District right of way and if there is a specific agreement between the County and the water company regarding tree maintenance along the water line. Ms. Murray responded that the Water Company maintains the area above their pipe, and the County will not be maintaining or clearing trees around the waterline. Mr. Vitz responded that there will not be tree maintenance after the path is completed, other than removing trees that fall onto adjacent properties or are a safety risk. The Water District has requirements for tree maintenance to keep the pipe protected. The County is selective in its removal of trees to uphold the character of a park facility for its users, and will only clear trees if and where necessary.

**C. Freight Activities:** Mr. Hayes provided updates on several County railroad projects.

- The kick off meeting for the design of the Dover & Rockaway Railroad Runaround Track was held on April 27. This runaround track will improve rail operations in Rockaway Township. The design and construction phases are funded through NJDOT's Rail Freight Assistance Program (RFAP). The County also met on-site with the design consultant and Scott Harris last Thursday to discuss potential locations for the runaround track.
- The County is getting closer to starting the design of the Dover & Rockaway Railroad Realignment Project. This project will remove most of the railroad out of downtown Dover and connect to NJ Transit's line east of Dover. This preferred alternative was identified in NJTPA's Freight Concept Development Program last year. NJDOT awarded the County a RFAP grant to design this project, and the contract with NJDOT was executed on May 12.
- The County will be conducting regular inspections all railroad bridges, as required by the Federal Railroad Administration. Inspections occur every 540 days. The RFP was advertised on July 13, and proposals are due August 3.
- The RFP for the Design of Berkshire Valley Road Railroad Crossing Improvements along the High Bridge Branch was also advertised on July 13.
- The County is starting to look at improving the High Bridge Branch crossing at Commerce Boulevard in Roxbury. County staff attended a Diagnostic Team Meeting with NJDOT, the railroad operator, and Roxbury Police on May 12 to identify the improvements needed at the crossing. The signal system at this crossing is so old that the railroad is having a hard time finding replacement parts.
- The Freight Concept Development Program for the Berkshire Valley Road Truck Circulation Project, which is studying the Chester Branch Railroad Bridge and the intersection of Berkshire Valley Road and North Dell

Avenue in Roxbury, started early this year. Staff have attended monthly meetings with the project team and provided background data and documents to support the study. The NJTPA, the consultant, and Morris County will be meeting with Roxbury in August to discuss this study. The County will send out a link to the project webpage when it is launched this fall.

Mr. Harris commended the County's quick response to the Berkshire Valley Road Railroad Bridge truck crash.

**VII. Old Business:**

None.

**VIII. New Business:**

Chairperson Wells asked if we are having meetings in our building. Regular County employees are here every day. A couple meetings have been held in office. The Commissioners are meeting in-person. Mr. Resto mentioned the Chatham Borough Hall has reopened but masks are required. The first in-person Chatham Council meeting was held on July 12. The municipality is monitoring the transmission rate.

Chairperson Wells suggested the possibility of holding the next Board of Transportation meeting at Morristown Airport. Board Member Darren Large of the Airport was not present at the meeting to give input. Board members expressed interest in meeting in-person at the airport if possible. Ms. Manahan shared that meeting at the airport would be a good opportunity to learn more of the status of the Columbia Turnpike and Route 24 intersection project. Ronald Francioli mentioned that Hanover Township is very concerned and interested in the intersection project and that the administrative office at Morristown Airport would be a good location for the Board meeting. Mr. Hayes mentioned that he will speak with Morristown Airport to coordinate a future meeting.

Mr. Francioli reported that Rutgers University awarded Hanover Township a grant through their "Accessibility and Breaking Down Transportation Barriers" program. The project is in its early stages and will address accessibility and safety for disabled members of the community. At this time, the Township is looking to hire a consultant for the project.

Ms. Manahan stated that Morris Township received funding for a project to improve biking and walkways in the Township.

Chairperson Wells asked if anyone attended the NJTPA Autonomous Vehicles webinar that was forwarded to Board members by County staff. The webinar discussed the future of autonomous vehicles, and he found the webinar to be very interesting and educational. Chairperson Wells sees a lot of ability to improve the existing gaps in our transportation systems. Mr. Resto asked if there was a recording of the webinar available. Mr. Hayes responded that there should be information about the webinar available on NJTPA's website, and that an email with links to that information can be sent out to the Board. Mr. Hayes mentioned that the webinar was related to the NJTPA's Regional Transportation Plan. The draft RTP is on the website and can be sent to Board members as well.

**IX. Public Comments:** Ben Schumer, a resident of Long Hill, expressed interest in receiving information on the Autonomous Vehicle webinar and the draft RTP Plan. Schumer inquired when the meeting minutes will be available. Mr. Hayes replied that the minutes are available online after they are approved and adopted by the Board at the meeting in October. Mr. Schumer also has interest in discussing the Route 24 intersection. Mr. Schumer mentioned a town in Japan that uses a hybrid system where vehicles can ride on the road as well as on rail lines, and he stated this is something that the County may want to consider for the future.

**X. The Next Regular Meeting:** Virtual Meeting on Tuesday, October 19, 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 2:42 p.m.

*Minutes prepared by Dede Murray, Division of Engineering & Transportation*