

MEETING MINUTES
Morris County Board of Transportation Meeting
 Tuesday, January 16, 2024
 Web-Ex Virtual Meeting

In Attendance:

Board Members	Additional Attendees	Staff
Ron Francioli	Laura Cerutti, Avenues in Motion	Christopher Vitz
Ilene Dorf Manahan	Christine Hellyer, Morris County Division of Aging, Disabilities and Community Programming	Kevin Stephens
Len Resto	Ted Ritter, NJTPA	
Manuela Schuster		
Jigar Shah		
Chairperson Wells		
John Wetzel		

I. Call to Order: Chairperson Wells called the meeting to order at 2:15 pm.

II. Roll Call: Kevin Stephens read the roll call. Six voting members were present during roll call. Ron Francioli joined later during the meeting, making a quorum with seven voting members.

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

IV. Approval of Minutes from October 17, 2023 Meeting: Approval of the minutes was moved by Mr. Francioli, seconded by Ilene Dorf Manahan, and unanimously approved.

V. Election of Officers: Manuela Schuster nominated Len Resto as her replacement for Secretary. The following members were unanimously approved for 2024:

- Joe Wells, Chairperson
- Frank Reilly, Vice-Chairperson
- Len Resto, Secretary

Chairperson Wells stated that Mr. Reilly needs to be informed of his election for Vice-Chairperson to confirm his acceptance to serve in that position.

VI. Reports:

Mr. Vitz reported how Morris County fared regarding the recent rain and snowstorms. Mr. Vitz stated that the first storm that occurred in December affected areas of the County known to experience flooding. These areas included Pequannock, and West Mill Road, East Mill Road, and Bartley Road in Washington Township. Additionally, there were reports of slight flooding in Long Hill Township. Mr. Vitz stated that Pequannock was hit the hardest during this storm.

Last week's storm primarily affected the same areas as the December storm. However, the flooding in Washington Township lasted longer than it did during the December storm. Bartley Road, East Mill Road, and West Mill Road all experienced closures, but they were able to be reopened by the next day. The County bridge on Snake Hill Road near Picatinny Arsenal experienced a small washout during this storm that the County was able to repair the next day.

Mr. Vitz reported that the County was fully prepared for the snowstorm over the past weekend (Sunday). There were 35 plow runs conducted by 70 Public Works Department employees working 12-hour day/night shifts. Seventy more trucks on contract were called in after an additional 3-4 inches of snowfall. The County was able to keep the roads open well.

Seventy Public Works employees were split between day and night shifts in preparation for today's storm. There was not as much snow to plow as previous storms; staff primarily focused on clean-up work and salting caused by the freezing rain.

Mr. Resto stated that it was reported at the Chatham-Madison Joint Meeting that Chatham Township's sewer plant lost process for two days after being overwhelmed by river flooding and had to report to the DEP. Chairperson Wells mentioned that processing plants on the Passaic side of the Pompton River also faced similar issues.

Ms. Manahan inquired about the Pequannock flood zone and the progress of the State's buyout of that land to mitigate the flooding issue. Chairperson Wells, Chair of the Open Space Community in Pequannock and a resident since 1970, reported that all houses along Harris Avenue on the north side of the town were indeed bought out, and a greenway was developed. The houses on North Pequannock Avenue, Pequannock Avenue, and Riverside Avenue were also removed. However, he stated that until something is done with the river itself, there will probably not be many changes in the amount of flooding in the township. Chairperson Wells also reported that homes in the township are being raised to account for the rising flood elevations.

Mr. Francioli asked if there were any updates on the Rt. 24/Columbia Turnpike/Park Avenue improvements. Mr. Vitz responded that Morris County prepared and sent the Request for Proposals (RFP) for preliminary engineering to the NJTPA and is awaiting approval to put the project out to bid. Mr. Vitz added that the response from NJTPA is expected to be in February.

A. Road & Bridge Projects:

Mr. Vitz reported that the 2024 paving designs are continuing. Demolition work of several homes continues in preparation for the Landing Road Bridge Project, which has a projected construction start date of late 2024 or early 2025.

Mr. Stephens provided an update on NJTPA's development of a Safety Action Plan involving eight counties in the region, including Morris County. This is part of a more significant effort across the United States to eliminate crashes involving severe injuries and fatalities. Safety Action Plans provide a framework for improving safety, aiming to eliminate fatal and severe injury crashes. The project will have a significant public outreach component and be data intensive. The plan will present recommendations to improve safety through design, education, and enforcement. Adoption of the plans by the County Commissioners will make the Counties eligible to apply for implementation funding through the Federal Safe Streets and Roads For All grant program. NJTPA awarded a contract to Jacobs Engineering to create the Safety Action Plan. The plan is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Mr. Stephens reported that the fall season of Morris County's traffic count program was completed in December. Counts were taken along 30 locations on county routes.

Mr. Stephens reported on the state of the County Ash Tree Removal Program. The ash borer beetle has infected the ash trees present in Morris County. As a result, the County is in the process of removing these ash trees in the county road right-of-way to improve the safety of residents. Phase 3 and 4 of the removal programs were completed, and over 1,600 trees were removed. The Phase 5 contract, which includes county roads in 18 municipalities, kicked off on October 19.

B. Pompton Valley Rail Trail Updates:

Mr. Vitz reported that the recent flooding events have hindered some of the work on the Pompton Valley Rail Trail. Chairperson Wells confirmed this is a highly flood-prone area of Pequannock.

Mr. Stephens reported that work continues on the Pompton Valley Rail Trail. This work includes repairs to the steel bearings on the Pompton River Bridge, signs being installed along the trail, and work continuing on grading and topsoil. Future work on the trail includes work beginning on seedings and plantings along the trail, installation of the elevated trail deck, and additional rehabilitation work on the Pompton River Bridge.

Chairman Wells inquired about the steel bridge over the brook in the Passaic County area. Mr. Vitz responded that the rail bridge by Meadow Road was installed.

Mr. Stephens stated that the project will be completed in the Summer of 2024.

C. Freight Activities:

Dover & Rockaway Railroad Runaround Track: Mr. Stephens announced that the contract for the construction of the Dover & Rockaway Railroad Runaround Track was awarded, and a kick-off meeting will be held tomorrow. The runaround track will be built north of I-80 in Rockaway Township to improve railroad operations. This project was funded through NJDOT's Rail Freight Assistance Program.

Chester Branch Rail Bridge: Mr. Stephens reported that Morris County is seeking funding for two rail projects in the future. The first of these projects is the Chester Branch Rail Bridge. Morris County has applied to NJDOT for their Rail Freight Assistance Program to receive funding to design a new Chester Branch Rail Bridge that crosses over Berkshire Valley Road in Roxbury. The bridge has a clearance of 11'-5", which is too low for trucks to travel beneath. Despite warning signs, trucks continue to crash into the bridge. The new bridge will have at least a 14' 3" clearance to allow trucks to travel safely beneath the bridge. Morris County and NJDOT met at the bridge on November 19 to discuss the County's application.

East Hanover Avenue Bridge: The East Hanover Avenue Bridge is the other rail project for which Morris County seeks funding. Mr. Stephens reported that the County requested that this project is included in NJTPA's next Freight Concept Development Program. This program would study alternatives to address the lack of clearance under the East Hanover Avenue bridge for Plate F rail cars, the industry standard size. Catenary wires are suspended under the bridge, limiting the height of the rail cars passing beneath the bridge. NJ Transit owns the rail, but the County would be allowed to be the local sponsor for the study. Allowing Plate F railcars would benefit the region economically and the Morristown & Erie's Whippany Line railroad.

- D. MAPS and Human Services Transportation Plan:** Christine Hellyer, Director of Aging, Disabilities and Community Programming, gave a presentation on the Morris Area Paratransit System (MAPS) and the Human Services Transportation Plan. Ms. Hellyer reported that MAPS provided 30,953 trips for an estimated 980 individuals. In late 2021/early 2022, the County started a pilot program called the Transportation Network Company (TNC) Program through a contract with Avenues in Motion. The program allows the County to book Uber and Lyft rides for its ambulatory riders. In 2023, the County was able to book over 1,800 rides through the TNC program, which was a massive increase from the 358 rides that the program recorded in 2022. Ms. Hellyer stated that the pilot program has proven to be highly successful, especially considering MAPS struggles to hire drivers for the service. Last year, MAPS completed over 30,000 trips with only 18 drivers. There are currently nine vacancies for those driver positions.

A Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan is required to receive Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) program funding. The original plan was drafted in 2008 and updated in 2013. There is currently a coordinated effort with Rutgers University to draft the latest

plan update. The revised plan features 17 recommendations, including for education, outreach, service enhancements, operations, and management. Examples of recommendations include a bilingual training guide, a community mobility transportation campaign, and technology training. Ms. Hellyer expects to receive NJ Transit approval for the updated plan within one to two months. Mr. Resto stated that he has seen more people getting rid of their cars and walking for food shopping. Mr. Resto asked whether these individuals would be considered for the MAPS program. Ms. Hellyer stated that MAPS transportation is designed to support seniors, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. So, if they fit those parameters, MAPS transportation would be an option. However, the Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan covers all populations, including the individuals that fall out of those parameters.

Ms. Schuster asked if the plan had recommendations for transporting low-income residents to work. Ms. Hellyer stated that there was nothing particular in the plan for that issue; the plan was more focused on food insecurity and transportation needs of the homeless. Ms. Schuster asked whether Avenues in Motion would have further information. Ms. Hellyer replied that a year after the County's TNC program started, the County expanded the program to include trips for low-income clients of the Office of Temporary Assistance and the One Stop Center. Ms. Schuster asked if Ms. Hellyer was in contact with Leslie Drew from the One Stop Center to gain input for the plan. Ms. Hellyer stated that most of the contact with the One Stop Center regarding the plan was conducted by Rutgers. Chairperson Wells commented that he was amazed by the number of rides provided by MAPS and inquired if the riders have ever been surveyed on their experiences. Ms. Hellyer reported that the last survey was conducted in 2019, with a 53% response rate and primarily positive reviews. The County is planning to conduct a new rider survey soon.

VII. Old Business: None

VIII. New Business:

Ted Ritter from NJTPA thanked Mr. Vitz and Mr. Stephens for highlighting some of NJTPA's recent developments for projects in Morris County. Mr. Ritter announced Commissioner Stephen Shaw was elected as the new NJTPA Board of Trustees Secretary at the January 8, 2024 meeting. Mr. Ritter went into the variety of programs that NJTPA offers, such as the Vibrant Places Program and Planning for Emerging Centers. Mr. Ritter focused on the Complete Streets Technical Assistance Program. This program is based on a coordinated effort between the State of New Jersey and Vorhees at Rutgers. It provides free technical assistance to municipalities to advance different Complete Streets initiatives. The program has a competitive application process, and the deadline for the next application round is February 2. Complete Streets are roads designed for all users and modes of transportation, balancing the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers, and public transportation. Mr. Ritter also referred viewers to the NJTPA website and YouTube channel for further information on NJTPA's projects and federal legislation like the IJA Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which continues to provide a variety of new grant programs that could be available for Morris County.

Ms. Manahan asked Chairperson Wells if there was a potential typo regarding the October 16, 2024, meeting date, as it falls on a Wednesday instead of the typical Tuesday. Chairperson Wells said he would contact Mr. Hayes to confirm that date.

Ms. Schuster asked Laura Cerutti from Avenues in Motion if she could provide the number of rides that Avenues in Motion coordinates for transportation to work for the Morris/Sussex/Warren workforce development board. Ms. Cerutti stated that those numbers would be found within Ms. Hellyer's report on the TNC data.

IX. Public Comments: None

X. The Next Regular Meeting: Tuesday, April 16, 2024, 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 3:06 pm.

Minutes prepared by Kevin Stephens, Division of Engineering & Transportation