

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**Morris County Board of Transportation Meeting**  
Wednesday, October 16, 2024  
30 Schuyler Place, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room  
Morristown, New Jersey

**In Attendance:**

Board Members	Additional Attendees	Staff
Carlos Duarte	Ted Ritter, NJTPA	Christopher Vitz
Jack Holland		John Hayes
Ilene Dorf Manahan		Kevin Stephens
Manuela Schuster		
Jigar Shah		
Chairperson Joe Wells		

**I. Call to Order:** Chairperson Wells called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

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

**III. Welcome and Introductions:** Chairperson Joe Wells welcomed everyone in attendance for the Board of Transportation Meeting and introduced the meeting's additional attendee, Ted Ritter, the Manager of External Affairs at the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). John Hayes welcomed Board Member Carlos Duarte to his first in-person Board of Transportation meeting.

**IV. Approval of Minutes from April 16, 2024 & July 16, 2024 Meetings:** The minutes will be approved at the next meeting when there is a quorum.

**V. NJTPA Long Range Transportation Plan Update:** Ted Ritter opened his update on NJTPA's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) by providing an overview of the NJTPA. The NJTPA is the federally authorized Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the 13-county northern New Jersey region, which includes Morris County. Mr. Ritter also used the agency's website to illustrate the substantial region that the NJTPA represents. Mr. Ritter then went on to describe one of NJTPA's primary roles, which is preparing planning products, including the Long Range Transportation Plan. Mr. Ritter described the plan as the agency's vision for North Jersey's long range transportation future. The federal government requires MPOs to adopt long range transportation plans every four years. The most recent LRTP was produced and adopted in 2021, while the upcoming LRTP is expected to be completed in 2025. Mr. Ritter stated that there will be several opportunities for the public to be involved, including an online survey to gauge community opinions that the 2025 LRTP will aim to tackle.

Mr. Ritter asked the board members to identify the transportation issues that should be addressed in the plan. Ilene Dorf Manahan was the first board member to provide feedback. Ms. Manahan stated that public transportation service is one of the primary

issues in need of improvement. Ms. Manahan explained that the existing infrastructure needs to be improved to see more reliable public transit service. Ms. Manahan stated that the trains have become so unreliable that she prefers taking the bus into New York City. Chairperson Wells recommended that there needs to be better connectivity, including parking improvements and more ways to access trains and buses.

Carlos Duarte mentioned that his primary concern was road infrastructure. Mr. Duarte also highlighted the issues he has been seeing on Rt. 10 in Parsippany regarding the development of new housing. According to Mr. Duarte, these latest developments, which also offer affordable housing units, are located in areas along Rt. 10 that offer very limited public transportation options for residents who may not own cars. Jigar Shah concurred with Mr. Duarte's observations and wants incoming residents to have more access to trains or buses in the area.

Chairperson Wells asked why there has been a noticeable increase in traffic volume at earlier in the afternoon than he remembered, especially in the Pequannock area. Chris Vitz suggested that flexible work hours and remote work opportunities during and after the Covid-19 pandemic are likely contributors. Mr. Vitz added that this traffic combining with regular school traffic could be a factor in the traffic increases that Chairperson Wells has witnessed.

## **VI. Reports:**

### **A. Road & Bridge Projects:**

#### Local Safety Action Plan

John Hayes provided an update on the development of Morris County's Local Safety Action Plan (LSAP). The NJTPA is funding and managing the development of local safety action plans for eight counties in the NJTPA region. A consultant team led by Jacobs Engineering was hired to undertake the project. The LSAP will be focused on improving safety on county and municipal roads. The intent is to identify serious and fatal crashes and provide strategies for addressing those crashes through different approaches, including engineering, education, and enforcement. The goal is to develop recommendations that can be implemented.

Mr. Hayes reported on several public outreach efforts for the LSAP. These activities include updates to the public-facing website, including a web survey and an interactive map for visitors to share comments and concerns. Mr. Ritter noted that feedback has been received through the survey and map and they will remain open for comments until the end of November 2024. Mr. Hayes added that the consultant team had a table at the Morristown Fall Festival on September 29 to collect public comments and feedback. The second Local Implementation Group Meeting, which includes municipal representatives, engineers, local law enforcement, County prosecutors, County Superintendent of Schools, NAACP, planners, and Avenues in Motion, will be held on November 7, 2024. A virtual public meeting is planned to be held next year to provide an additional opportunity for the public to provide feedback and help guide the plan.

Ultimately, Mr. Hayes stated that adopting the Local Safety Action Plan and a goal of zero fatal and serious injury crashes will make Morris County eligible to apply for implementation funding through the Federal Safe Streets and Roads For All grant program.

#### Safety Improvement Projects

Mr. Hayes provided updates on two safety improvement projects funded by the NJTPA Local Safety Program. The East Main Street/Mendham Road from Tempe Wick Road to Cold Hill Road in Mendham Borough and Township Project, and the South Morris Street from Millbrook Avenue/Munson Avenue to Byram Avenue in Dover Project will have their design kickoff meetings in the next few weeks. Both projects will review and develop corridor, intersection, and pedestrian safety improvements. They are also both in the vicinity of schools and have a high number of children walking to the schools. The grants given to these projects support both design and construction.

The Board of Transportation also discussed the Morris Street/Spring Street roundabout. Ms. Manahan voiced her concerns about the existing roundabout at this location and questioned whether there were any planned improvements or the possibility of a return of the traffic signal at the intersection. Mr. Hayes replied that Morris County Engineering and Transportation would consult with Morristown to determine their perspective. Mr. Vitz stated that the County is waiting for crash data from Morristown to see if there has been a reduction in crashes.

#### Road Projects

Chris Vitz reported that Morris County is beginning to wind down its paving projects for the year, with an expected completion in mid-November. Paving was completed on Mendham Road in Mendham Township and Mendham Borough, in the vicinity of the Morris County Library on East Hanover Avenue in Whippany, and along Green Pond Road in Rockaway Borough.

Additionally, Mr. Vitz reported that the traffic signal replacement at the intersection of Center Grove Road and Quaker Church Road in Randolph should be completed as soon as JCP&L provides electricity. This is part of the Intersection Improvements at Center Grove Road and Quaker Church Road Project which is funded through NJTPA's FY 2016-2017 Local Safety Program.

#### Bridges

There were no bridge project updates to report.

### **B. Pompton Valley Rail Trail Updates:**

Mr. Vitz reported on the Pompton Valley Rail Trail Construction Project. There have been delays in getting handrails for various sections of the trail delivered, including the southern end of the trail and the bridge. The deliveries of the handrails are expected to be delayed for five months. Mr. Vitz also noted that an

additional pedestrian crossing at the railroad crossing has been completed. Chairperson Joe Wells asked if the striping of the crossings and fencing along the trail were completed. Mr. Vitz stated that the striping and fencing were complete. Full ownership and responsibility of the Pompton Valley Rail Trail will be handed over from Morris County's Division of Engineering and Transportation to the Morris County Park Commission on November 1, 2024. Following this transfer, the trail will become fully open to the public. Chairperson Wells asked if there will be an opening day ceremony. Mr. Vitz replied that there would not be a ceremony in the fall, there will likely be a press release from Morris County. There will likely be a grand opening in the spring.

### **C. Freight Activities:**

Mr. Hayes provided some background information on the existing freight railroads in Morris County. The County owns three freight railroads: the Dover & Rockaway Railroad, the High Bridge Branch, and the Chester Branch. Day-to-day rail operations are handled by Chesapeake & Delaware LLC under a 5-year management agreement. Morris County is responsible for capital projects, any significant changes to the railroads, and railroad bridge inspections and repairs.

#### Dover & Rockaway Railroad Runaround Track

Kevin Stephens gave a brief presentation on the construction of the Dover & Rockaway Railroad Runaround Track. Mr. Stephens started his presentation by stating that the runaround track was an NJDOT Rail Freight Assistance Program (RFAP) funded project constructed on the Dover & Rockaway Railroad in Rockaway Township to improve railroad operations. The runaround track will allow the locomotive to be moved from one end of the train to the other, so the locomotive does not have to push the railcars from the rear after making deliveries to the four customers located toward the end of the rail line in Rockaway Township. Mr. Stephens presented a series of photographs in a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate the construction management process he oversaw between July and September to ensure that the project was successfully completed. Mr. Stephens highlighted the delays the project faced, the quickness in which the contractors were able to build the track, the process of testing the track, the establishment of the runaround track's fouling point, and the additional drainage work carried out at the project site through collaboration with Morris County Engineering's Senior Drainage Engineer. The final inspection for the runaround track was carried out in mid-September, and the track is fully operational with rave reviews from Morris County's Railroad Operator, Chesapeake & Delaware LLC.

#### Chester Branch Rail Bridge

Mr. Hayes gave an update on the Design of the Chester Branch Rail Bridge over Berkshire Valley Road, which was awarded a grant of \$558k through NJDOT's FY 2024 Rail Freight Assistance Program (RFAP). The current bridge does not provide sufficient clearance for trucks that have repeatedly struck the bridge. A new rail bridge will be designed to provide at least 14' 3" clearance, allowing

trucks to pass beneath the bridge safely. The RFAP grant contract was approved at the Board of County Commissioners Meeting on June 26. Following the last Board of Transportation Meeting, the grant contract was fully executed with NJDOT, and the County is currently developing a Request For Proposals (RFP) for the design of the new Chester Branch Bridge.

#### Dover & Rockaway Railroad Realignment

Mr. Hayes reported on the design of the Dover & Rockaway Railroad Realignment, which is funded through NJDOT's RFAP. This project aims to remove a section of the freight railroad in downtown Dover. The ROW would eventually become a greenway or path that the Town of Dover is very interested in seeing advance. The project was studied in the NJTPA's Freight Concept Development program, which identified a preferred alternative. The Dover & Rockaway Railroad connects to NJ Transit rail west of Dover; to allow the railroad to be removed from downtown Dover, the connection to NJ Transit rail would be moved to the east of Dover. Mr. Hayes noted that all freight railcars going to the three county-owned rail lines use NJ Transit rail.

Mr. Hayes stated that when the design for the project started, the design team encountered newly deed-restricted riparian areas and wetlands on McWilliams Forge property that would make the preferred alternative unlikely to advance. As a result, the design consultant examined several other alternatives. However, the consultant identified environmental restrictions in each alternative. Mr. Hayes reported that the design consultant and the Division of Engineering & Transportation met with Dover on June 24. At the meeting, Dover officials suggested a new alternative involving a connection between NJ Transit Rail and the Dover & Rockaway Railroad near Samis Avenue in Dover.

The consultant reviewed this new proposed alternative and provided several sketches to the County. The County will contact NJ Transit to discuss the potential feasibility of this new connection. Following feedback from NJ Transit, the County will discuss the project with Dover again.

Manuela Schuster asked how the D&R Realignment project was being funded. Mr. Hayes replied that the County was awarded a grant for design through NJDOT's Rail Freight Assistance Program (RFAP). However, NJDOT has not indicated if the County will be reimbursed since the project is not designing the preferred alternative and is examining additional alternatives. And there is the possibility of the realignment project not continuing due to a lack of feasibility,

#### East Hanover Avenue Bridge

Mr. Hayes announced that NJTPA has selected the East Hanover Avenue Bridge Catenary Rail Clearance Project as a part of its FY 2025 Freight Concept Development Program. Mr. Hayes explained that the catenary wires suspended under the bridge are too low to allow standard Plate F rail cars to pass beneath the bridge. Addressing this would allow Plate F rail cars to reach Morristown & Erie's Whippany Line railroad. 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's economy and the Morristown & Erie's Whippany Line

railroad. The NJTPA issued an RFP in June 2024; consultant proposals are due on August 7.

Mr. Hayes stated that NJTPA received proposals following an RFP that was issued in June and that the consultant selection committee meetings were held in August. At the moment, NJTPA is working on officially awarding the contract, with an anticipated project kick-off date in November. The Freight Concept Development Program Study has an estimated completion date of June 2027.

**VII. Old Business:** None.

**VIII. New Business:** None.

**IX. Public Comments:** None.

**X. The Next Regular Meeting:** Tuesday, January 14, 2024, at 2:00 pm.

**XI. Adjournment:** Adjournment of the meeting was moved by Ms. Schuster, seconded by Mr. Holland, and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

*Minutes prepared by Kevin Stephens, Division of Engineering & Transportation*