



CENTRAL JERSEY TRANSPORTATION FORUM

DRAFT Meeting Highlights

Wednesday, July 15, 2020 | 1:00 pm

Virtual Meeting

Welcome & Introductions

The meeting was held online in a webinar format via Zoom. There were 55 participants including representatives from eleven municipalities, three counties, two MPOs, and various agencies and organizations. Forum Chair Bill Neary welcomed participants and introduced speakers. Barry Seymour, Executive Director of DVRPC, and Mary Ameen, Executive Director of NJTPA each addressed the Forum and provided an update on how each MPO is continuing operations remotely.

The meeting highlights for the February 2020 Forum meeting were distributed by email and voted on online via Survey Monkey at the approval of the Chair and Steering Committee. The highlights were approved with several minor edits, and a revised copy will be posted online.

Keynote Speaker

James W. Hughes, Ph.D. Distinguished University Professor and Dean Emeritus gave a presentation on Unfolding Economic Realities. He discussed employment reversals from the last decade, calling highs and lows the most volatile in US economic history. Dean Hughes discussed COVID-19 as an accelerant propelling structural change already underway and called this time the Spring of Remote Work. A return to the office, he said, would include a rebalancing of office ecologies and ecosystem focused on satellite office facilities, remote work at home, and reconfigured offices. Origin-destination contractions may result in a more permanent reduction traffic congestion in the suburbs, though transit and elevators may be liabilities for urban areas. The Rt 1 corridor region has the potential to be reinvented with a multi-nodal suburban office footprint. Brick and mortar retail spaces may be repurposed for satellite offices or last-mile delivery stations. Dean Hughes cautioned that post-pandemic smart-sprawl strategies will be necessary.

NJDOT Construction Update

NJDOT Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti provided an update on DOT operations. NJDOT has used a hybrid of remote and in-office work that requires systems not available on mobile technology. The capital program construction was deemed "essential" by the governor and has continued, using internal PPE protocols and keeping nonessential staff such as survey crew home. Extended hours of construction were possible due to lower congestion and allowed NJDOT to meet its June 30 goal. Many communities have asked NJDOT to close state highways for outdoor dining; workarounds have been to close municipal roads and additional sidewalk space near main streets. NJDOT has been able to secure a toll adjustment on the NJT & Parkway to fund additional projects that use capacity-building and technology to reduce congestion, such as a BRT in collaboration with NJTRANSIT in northern NJ.

NJTRANSIT adopted its strategic and capital plan, but operations have been significantly affected. The Commissioner called for others to help advocating for face coverings. NJDOT will be able to execute its \$900M program for FY21 in its entirety. There has been no indication that the gas tax will be adjusted to meet performance, though NJ has been working closely with the Eastern Transportation Coalition on the mileage-based user fee study to understand whether it is a better way to collect revenue in the future.

Central Jersey Chambers of Commerce

Peter Crowley, President of the Princeton Mercer Regional Chamber, discussed economic impacts in Central Jersey South. The closure of Princeton University has hurt the town and surrounding areas, affecting smaller businesses the most. Trenton created a \$2M program to help businesses, and Princeton launched a similar program funded by the University. There has been some residual feedback on outdoor dining with the Chamber's Rally for Restaurants program and Mr. Crowley thanked the Commissioner for helping to open some streets. The dramatic reduction in traffic has created uncertainty, but traffic on Rt 1 is starting to pick up. There's still \$130B in PPP funds still waiting to be awarded.

Lina Llona, President of the Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce discussed economic impacts in Central Jersey North. Middlesex County is among the top 5 for tourism and the pandemic has been devastating to the hotel industry. Restaurants are also struggling with the closures of Rutgers, J&J HQ, and court houses. New Brunswick has lost 4 of 55 local restaurants. Middlesex has a reverse tourism season, and Ms. Llona cited concerns about fall 2020. Theaters have also taken a hit, as the pandemic followed a 19-month closure of theatres due to roadway construction. Local street closures and use of parks for outdoor dining has been successful and Ms. Llona expects outdoor seating to stay long-term. Other industries enjoying some success are Golf and warehouses and logistics facilities, many of which are hiring for good-paying jobs. Healthcare in the downtown remains busy. Both Ms. Llona and Mr. Crowley called for support of local businesses in your community.

Regional Updates

Cheryl Kastrenakes, Executive Director of GMTMA provided an updated on the Trails Plan, which was adopted by the Board. The SR 129 Pedestrian Road Safety Audit report was completed in February, and the Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan for Ocean City's Age-Restricted Communities was finalized in June 2020. GMTMA is working to create a Waze carpool app to bridge the housing-car divide. The Zline has new mid-day service via the ZLine van as of July; ridership has increased 6% from this time last year.

Bill Neary provided an update on KMM. Operations continue virtually via Zoom webinars, YouTube videos on bicycle safety, and weekly staff meetings.

Barry Seymour announced criteria for a new transportation alternatives program to be released in the coming weeks. Chairman Bill Neary adjourned the meeting.



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Attendees

Mayors		
Hopewell Township	Kristin	McLaughlin

Municipal Staff & Council Members		
Franklin Township	Theodore	Chase Jr
South Brunswick Township	Bryan	Bidlack
Township Of Plainsboro	Les	Varga
Lawrence Township	James	Parvesse
South Brunswick Township Planning Board	Jerome	Lutin
Montgomery Township	Gail	Smith
Princeton	Deanna	Stockton
Monroe Township	Miriam	Cohen
Hillsborough Township	David	Kois
Princeton Council	David	Cohen

Counties		
Middlesex County Office of Planning	Anthony	Gambilonghi
Somerset County	Walter	Lane
Middlesex County Office of Planning	Doug	Greenfeld
Somerset County Planning Board	Kenneth	Wedeen
County of Mercer	Matthew	Lawson
Middlesex County Freeholder	Charles	Kenny

Metropolitan Planning Organizations		
DVRPC	Jackie	Davis
DVRPC	Michael	Boyer
DVRPC	Barry	Seymour
NJTPA	Mary	Ameen
NJTPA	Lois	Goldman
DVRPC	Kendra	Nelson
NJTPA	Brian	Fineman
NJTPA	Ted	Ritter
NJTPA	Dave	Behrend

Other Regional Bodies		
Greater Mercer TMA	Cheryl	Kastrenakes
KMM	Bill	Neary
Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission	Joe	Donnelly
Einstein's Alley	Katherine	Kish
Greater Mercer TMA	Jerry	Foster

State Departments		
NJDOT	Commissioner	Gutierrez-Scaccetti
NJDOT	Andrew	Swords
NJ Office of Planning Advocacy	Barry	Ableman
NJDOT	Steve	Schapiro
NJDOT	Brian	Leckie
New Jersey Department of Transportation	Michael	Russo
NJDOT	Sal	Cowan
NJDOT	Monica	Etz
FHWA NJ	Brian	Goodson

Other		
Princeton Mercer Chamber of Commerce	Peter	Crowley
Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce	Lina	Llona
Rutgers University	James	Hughes
West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance	Alison	Miller
Shropshire Associates	Andrew	Feranda
Mercer County Community College	Widmarc	Dalce
NJ TRANSIT	Matt	Slotman
Kimley-Horn	Matt	Shinton
Princeton Future	Sheldon	Sturges
The Hathaway Group	Patricia	Ward
Connect the Dots	Kiersten	Mailler
Dewberry Engineers Inc.	Ali	Vaezi
Dewberry	Jack	Kanarek
AAA	Frank	Neary