

COUNTY OF MORRIS
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT
DIVISION OF TRANSPORTATION

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March 24, 2010

James Weinstein, Executive Director

NJ Transit Headquarters

1 Penn Plaza East

Newark, NJ 07105

Dear Mr. Weinstein:

The Morris County Board of Transportation, which was created to help foster and guide public transportation in the region, recognizes the need for NJ Transit to increase fares and to reduce service on underutilized bus and rail lines to help offset its \$300 million funding deficit. The Board has reviewed the proposed bus and rail service reductions and has a number of serious concerns related to the direct impacts of the service reductions on the transit-dependent people that live and work in Morris County, as well as on the continued viability of many businesses in the region. The Board members are opposed to any reduction in public transportation. However, after hearing the comments made at our special meeting, the Board concluded that while our rural routes have not attracted the ridership we had hoped, it is imperative that NJ Transit continue to provide bus service on the essential and well-used Morris County Metro 1, 2, and 3, and WHEELS 966 routes.

In response to the unprecedented proposals by NJ Transit to eliminate bus service in the county, the Morris County Board of Transportation held a special meeting on Monday, March 22nd to hear public views and concerns about the cuts and to help determine actions the Board should take in response to those proposed cuts. Though scheduled with relatively short notice, the meeting attracted some 40 attendees. In addition to comments from members of the general public, the Board of Transportation was moved by the many social service agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and representatives of the business community that spoke on behalf of their clients and employees, expressing the need for continued bus service. Some of their comments are noted below.

Considering the routes and usage of these lines, the president of the Morris County Chamber of Commerce reported the Chamber has been contacted by many businesses whose employees would be unable to get to their jobs. The loss of access to their jobs for certain members of the workforce obviously would have a direct and drastic impact on the employees themselves, challenging their ability to be self-sustaining and supportive of their families, possibly adding to the unemployment roles at a time when the state is looking to attract and keep every job possible. Moreover, the loss of needed

employees because they can't reach a business facility could hurt the companies and, potentially, a company's ability to remain in the county or state – again, at a time when the state is looking to attract and retain businesses.

One small company that would be severely impacted by the elimination of the bus routes is PABCO Transit, which operates all of the MCM routes. Representatives of PABCO Transit stated at our meeting that if the urban routes are eliminated, they will be forced to go out of business since the MCM routes are PABCO's sole source of income. The closing of PABCO would eliminate 30 small business jobs, leaving many of the current employees with no health benefits and likely seeking public assistance.

Other speakers included representatives from the Morris County Office of Temporary Assistance, Morris View Healthcare Center, the Interfaith Food Pantry, Community Hope, Association of Retarded Citizens of Morris County, Homeless Solutions, the Interfaith Council for Homeless Families, and the Jersey Battered Women's Service. All of these agencies expressed dire concerns for their clients who are dependent upon bus service, especially the MCM 3. Many of these organizations are located in and around the County's Hanover Avenue Complex and the adjoining Central Park of Morris County (former Greystone Hospital property) where the new Central Avenue Complex, a 50,000 square foot "non-profit mall" is planned. NJ Transit might not be aware that this Central Avenue Complex was created by the Morris County Freeholders to consolidate most of the County's human service agencies into a central location, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and coordination. This site, adjacent to existing Morris County offices, was selected specifically because of its accessibility via mass transit for those who most need and rely on social services.

The director of the Morris County Department of Human Services stressed that the elimination of MCM 3 bus service to this essential center would have serious human services consequences. The proposal is even more disconcerting since NJ Transit provided Morris County with assurances at a September 18, 2008 meeting held at the Greystone property that bus service would continue to the Greystone Hospital campus. As a result of that meeting, Morris County felt confident that NJ Transit understood the importance of providing bus service to the county's existing and strategically expanded human service complex and the new non-profit mall. Also a result of that meeting, NJ Transit re-routed the MCM 3 to serve this important facility, which will be fully operational in 2011. The proposed elimination of the MCM 3 will severely impact this facility and will be a tremendous barrier to the non-profits, many of which are relocating to this site to facilitate service to their most vulnerable clients. It is imperative that buses continue to serve this facility.

At the meeting, a representative from the Morris Area Paratransit System (MAPS), which provides door-to-door transportation to the elderly and disabled, primarily for medical and work-related needs, explained at the meeting that the elimination of bus service would likely be followed by the elimination of Access Link. These riders would then look to MAPS for service. However, MAPS is already at capacity and indicated it would not be able to accommodate all of the additional people requiring rides.

Other speakers concerned about the possible loss of the MCM 3 expressed needs to reach the Morristown medical corridor along NJ 124, which includes Morristown Memorial Hospital and related medical facilities and physicians' offices, and the County College of Morris' satellite campus in Morristown.

Representatives of the County College of Morris in Randolph spoke emphatically about students' ability to reach both its main campus in Randolph, served by the MCM 2, and its satellite campus in Morristown, served by the MCM 3. Both bus lines connect with rail service in several towns making

campus access possible for a significant number of students who would not otherwise be able to benefit from a college education.

The following summarizes the needs to retain the Morris County Metro 1, 2, and 3, and WHEELS 966 routes. Many of the statistics that follow were derived from the technical memorandums of NJ Transit's \$1 million Northwest New Jersey Bus Study, which recommended **increased** bus service to this region, certainly not elimination.

MCM 1 provides service along the US 202 corridor to six rail stations and the Willowbrook Mall, where people work or can transfer to other bus lines. These important connections include NJT 75, NJT 191, NJT 193, NJT 194, NJT 195, and NJT 198. These connections provide rides to Newfoundland, Butler, Newark, New York City, and points in between. MCM 1 has an annual ridership of 78,069. Forty-four percent of the riders use this bus for work trips and 83 percent have no vehicle available. Seventy-seven percent of the riders on this line have annual incomes under \$50,000.

MCM 2 serves the County College of Morris in Randolph Township. It is estimated that 36,000 trips are made by college students along this line. MCM 2 also provides service to three rail stations, retail establishments on NJ 10, and the Mack-Cali Business Campus. The MCM 2 has an annual ridership of 78,912. Forty-two percent of its riders are going to work, with 70 percent having no vehicle available. Eighty-two percent of the riders have annual incomes below \$50,000. (NOTE: While we strongly oppose the elimination of the MCM 2 for the above-stated reasons, halting this service on May 1st will leave many students without transportation to the County College for final examinations. At a minimum, this service should be extended until the end of the school year.)

MCM 3 serves Morristown Memorial Hospital and related medical facilities and physicians' offices, three universities (FDU, Drew and St. Elizabeth's), five train stations, Short Hills and Livingston Malls, and many large businesses along the NJ 124 corridor. This important route also provides service to Greystone and the County "Hill" complex on Hanover Avenue, and the Central Avenue Complex of human services departments and organizations. This route has an annual ridership of 99,600 and recorded a 26 percent increase in ridership over the past five years. This substantial increase in usage will no doubt continue once the Central Avenue Complex is fully operational in 2011. Forty-three percent of the trips are for work and 67 percent of the riders have no other vehicle available. Ninety-seven percent of the riders have annual incomes below \$50,000.

WHEELS 966 represents one of the few options for employees and students to travel from the Convent Rail Station to work and school. With 180 daily boardings, this route provides valuable shuttle services from Convent Station to Fairleigh Dickinson University, Verizon, Crum and Forster, and Honeywell. Cutting this service would have dramatic effects on Morris County's workforce and employers.

If the elimination of the MCM routes occurs, the following 17 municipalities will no longer have MCM bus service: Boonton, Chatham Borough, Chester Borough, Chester Township, Jefferson, Lincoln Park, Madison, Mendham Borough, Mendham Township, Mine Hill, Montville, Mount Olive, Netcong, Randolph, Roxbury, Victory Gardens, and Washington Township. Effectively, 1,000 daily bus riders will no longer be served. This represents 60 percent of MCM's current customers. Frankly, we have not been able to ascertain the methodology used by NJ Transit to plan the discontinuance of these routes, and it is unknown whether that methodology has been applied similarly throughout the entire state. Additionally, we have been unable to find any other county that has been so severely impacted, targeted to lose virtually its entire bus system.

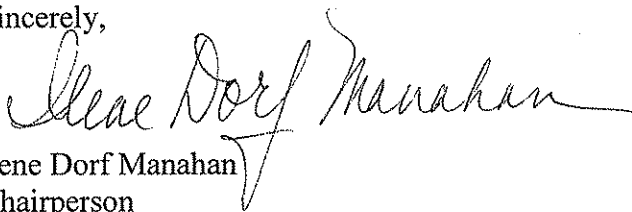
The discontinuation of these bus routes will have severe economic consequences on transit-dependent riders accessing work, school, medical care, and social services. Additionally, as locational decisions are often made by businesses based on the availability of employees and accessibility of public transportation to get employees to work, cutting service will likely increase the loss of jobs to the state and the already high unemployment rate. NJ Transit has historically made policy decisions, such as the establishment of Transit Villages, to encourage people to live near transit. These proposed cutbacks will inevitably drive people and businesses to new locations or out of the state altogether. Furthermore, the reduction of the MCM bus routes will negatively affect rail usage in that important connections between bus and rail will not be able to be made. The combined decrease of riders on the bus and rail system makes continued funding of the ARC Tunnel counterintuitive.

Morris County has become recognized as a leader in providing outstanding transportation services for its residents and for working with businesses in the county to enhance their ability to attract and keep the vast spectrum of workers they require. The county's transportation services undoubtedly have enabled many people, including the elderly and handicapped and those without other means of transportation, to live and work here. We extend that philosophy of supporting a business friendly environment and quality of life beyond Morris County as strengths New Jersey has to offer as a whole.

Moreover, Morris County has consistently demonstrated its commitment to working with the state to provide needed and invaluable transportation services by subsidizing NJ Transit for its service; the county has traditionally supported the MCM bus service by providing a significant funding subsidy. Each year, Morris County has provided \$150,000 for the urban bus routes and nearly \$90,000 for the rural routes. Morris County is one of only two counties in northern New Jersey that subsidizes bus routes. The county has also financially supported MCM by investing \$20,000 in cable, newspaper, and on-line advertising. The Board hopes this historic and annual investment will position us for a continued partnership with NJ Transit to provide transportation services, particularly where they are sorely needed and well-utilized. Cutbacks in service are understandable; however, elimination is unacceptable.

As Chairperson of the Morris County Board of Transportation, I respectfully request the opportunity to meet and discuss this matter with you. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ilene Dorf Manahan
Chairperson

Encl.

Copy to: Governor Chris Christie
Senators Lautenberg & Menendez
Congressman Frelinghuysen
Morris County's New Jersey Legislative Delegation
Mr. James S. Simpson, Commissioner, NJDOT
Ms. Mary K. Murphy, Executive Director, NJTPA
Members, Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders
Members, Morris County Board of Transportation