

Toll hike proposed for Turnpike, Garden State Parkway, but they won't tell us how much

*By Larry Higgs / NJ.com
February 25, 2020*

There's a proposed toll hike coming on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway, but officials of the authority that runs the highways said it won't tell drivers how much more they will pay.

The last-minute addition to the [New Jersey Turnpike Authority's](#) board of commissioner's agenda, covered exclusively by NJ Advance Media, called for public hearings dates of March 18 and 19 for a "proposed capital program and supporting revenue enhancement." But officials provided no other details.

"The program is still in development. Today was to approve a public hearing," said Tom Feeney, a Turnpike Authority spokesman, after the vote. "Between now and then, we'll have details."

The closest thing to details was about the need for a new capital plan and funding from John Keller, turnpike authority executive director.

"We completed our (last) 10-year capital plan. This year, the Turnpike Authority awarded all the \$500 million in this year's program," he said.

The action was a surprise after Turnpike Authority officials boasted in October that the \$1.8 billion [2020 budget did not require a toll increase](#) to fund it. It was the eighth year the authority has gone [without taking a toll increase](#) in the annual budget.

The [last toll increase was a 53 percent hike](#) on January 1, 2012, which was the final part of a multi-phase toll increase package approved in 2008. That toll increase [financed the authority's \\$7 billion capital plan](#) that paid for [widening parts of the Turnpike](#) and Parkway.

However, since that plan expired, questions had been raised about how the Authority would fund the next major construction and rehabilitation plan.

Documents provided to commissioners said, "just \$400 million are currently available over the next five years to tackle important projects that enhance roadway safety, relieve congestion and improve access onto and off the Turnpike and Parkway."

Keller said the authorization would allow the authority to adopt a strategic plan to 2029 for capital projects.

But no information was available about what projects that could include.

"It's a rolling list of projects," Feeney said. "We'll see the program when it comes out."

Tolls are the Authority's major revenue source. Last year, the authority earned \$1.612 billion, which is 86% of the agency's \$1.861 in revenue.

The process is a stark contrast to how the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey did when its commissioners [approved a \\$1 cash toll increase](#) and reduced E-ZPass discounts for 2020 at its Hudson River and Staten Island crossings in September.

Officials announced the toll increase and the additions to its capital plan the toll and fare and fee hike would fund and public hearings at the same time last July.

If approved, toll hikes would also [help finance a proposal](#) by state Senate President [Stephen Sweeney](#) to provide dedicated funds for NJ Transit.

That proposal, that Sweeney announced Friday, would constitutionally dedicate \$500 million annually for NJ Transit's operating budget that would include \$125 million from the Turnpike Authority and \$75 million from a Clean Energy Fund to transit operations. It would also use a 1 percent tax on corporate income in New Jersey from an existing tax. That plan would require voter approval.

The Turnpike Authority action comes on the same day that Gov. [Phil Murphy](#) is scheduled to give his [2020 state budget address](#).

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.nj.com/traffic/2020/02/toll-hike-proposed-for-turnpike-garden-state-parkway-but-they-wont-tell-us-how-much.html>

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Possible toll increases on Turnpike and Parkway in the works

*New Jersey 101.5
Posted Feb 25, 2020*

Commuters may soon have to pay more on the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike if the Turnpike Authority approves a toll hike.

The authority's board on Monday approved a resolution setting public hearings on the proposal but did not reveal how much a potential increase would amount to, [according to a report on NJ.com](#).

The authority has not raised tolls on the highways since 2012.

Commuters already are paying more on bridges and tunnels operated by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

In January, tolls went up on the George Washington, Bayonne, Goethals and Outerbridge Crossing bridges and the Lincoln and Holland tunnels by 25 cents, to \$11.75, during off-peak hours for E-ZPass users and by \$1.25, to \$13.75, during peak hours. Tolls by Mail went up by \$1, to \$16.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike last month also increased its E-ZPass toll on the bridge connecting to the New Jersey Turnpike by 30 cents, to \$5.70, and by 50 cents, to \$7.20, for other drivers.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://nj1015.com/possible-toll-increases-on-turnpike-and-parkway-in-the-works/>

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Ciattarelli Rips Plan To Increase Tolls On Parkway, Turnpike

*By Alexis Tarrazi, Patch Staff
Feb 26, 2020 11:42 am ET*

HILLSBOROUGH, NJ — Gubernatorial candidate and Hillsborough resident Jack Ciattarelli expressed his opposition to the proposed toll hikes on the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike by Governor Phil Murphy.

"This smacks of backroom deal-making. It will end when I am Governor," said Ciattarelli, 58, a Republican. "If Governor Murphy wants to raise tolls on the most over-taxed people in the nation, then he should make the case in an open, honest, and transparent way. Burying news of the toll hike while giving a budget address that calls for higher taxes is political choreography at its worst and a new low for an administration adverse to transparency."

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority made the possible toll hike plan public on Tuesday, saying it was authorizing public hearings on "revenue enhancement" for the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway. (*See Related: [Possible Toll Hikes On Garden State Parkway, NJ Turnpike Coming](#)*)

The NJTA's board voted to authorize three public hearings on March 18 and 19.

"This is exactly the kind of typical Jersey government that people can't stand, making it only harder to accomplish the greater good," Ciattarelli said. "I don't support toll hikes, not ones agreed on behind closed doors and especially not ones along corridors that carry significant local traffic, as the Parkway does. If the Governor want tolls hikes, deliver on some real reforms and tax decreases first."

Ciattarelli a former State Assemblyman announced his run for governor of New Jersey for 2022 this past January.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://patch.com/new-jersey/hillsborough/ciattarelli-rips-plan-increase-tolls-parkway-turnpike>

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Heads up drivers: Toll hike proposed for parkway, turnpike

*News 12 New Jersey
Posted: Feb 26, 2020 6:35 AM EST Updated: Feb 26, 2020 6:52 AM EST*

A proposed toll hike is coming to the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway, but officials haven't confirmed how much it will cost drivers.

Public hearings on toll hikes will be held by New Jersey Turnpike's Authority Board on March 18 and 19.

The last toll increase was 53% in 2012, which was the final part of a multi-phase toll increase package approved in 2008.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<http://www.news12.com/story/41818455/heads-up-drivers-toll-hike-proposed-for-parkway-turnpike>

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Possible Toll Hikes On Garden State Parkway, NJ Turnpike Coming

By Tom Davis, Patch Staff

Feb 26, 2020 9:45 am ET

Authorities plan to possibly hike tolls soon on New Jersey's two major highways, with officials saying on Tuesday that they're looking to bring in revenues to support major projects.

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority made the possible toll hike plan public on Tuesday, saying it was authorizing public hearings on "revenue enhancement" for the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway.

The NJTA's board voted to authorize three public hearings on March 18 and 19 "to determine an appropriate capital plan and explore funding to support those capital projects," Tom Feeney, a spokesman for the agency, told Patch.

Tolls are the major source of revenue for the Turnpike and Parkway, and [NJ Advance Media](#) and [News12](#) said the proposed toll hike would be the first since 2012, when a 53 percent increase was approved.

It's not exactly clear where the increases would occur, and what they would pay for. NJ Advance Media reported that \$400 million is currently available over the next five years "to tackle important projects that enhance roadway safety, relieve congestion and improve access onto and off the Turnpike and Parkway."

"There is no specific proposal for the capital plan or the funding at this point. The Turnpike Authority staff is working on those," Feeney said. "They will be fully explained and explored in public, but there have been no final decisions made about what's going to be in the proposal, so I have no specifics to share."

Under the 2012 increases, toll rates on the Garden State Parkway increased from \$0.35 to \$0.50 for ramp tolls, from \$0.50 to \$0.75 for two-way toll plazas, and from \$1 to \$1.50 for one-way toll plazas. It is the third hike in tolls for the Parkway since its opening in 1954, and the seventh for the New Jersey Turnpike since that highway's inception in 1951.

The increases were voted on and approved as the second phase of a two-fold toll hike in October 2008, during the administration of former Gov. Jon Corzine.

Feeney said then that the toll prices were originally raised to support a decade-long construction projects package totaling \$7 billion, including a widening of the Turnpike and the Parkway south of Toms River. The package also included the agency's \$1 billion-plus contribution toward a new rail tunnel to cross the Hudson River.

However, former Gov. Chris Christie killed the rail tunnel project in 2010, claiming that the construction was certain to go over budget, and then redirected the over \$1 billion dollars in revenues to other state transportation projects.

Gubernatorial Candidate Jack Ciattarelli ripped the new plan to increase tolls by an untold amount on the Garden State Parkway and the New Jersey Turnpike, claiming it was quietly unveiled at a Turnpike Commission meeting while much of the focus was on Gov. Phil Murphy giving his budget address.

"This smacks of backroom deal-making. It will end when I am governor." said Ciattarelli. "If Governor Murphy wants to raise tolls on the most over-taxed people in the nation, then he should make the case in an open, honest, and transparent way."

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://patch.com/new-jersey/springfield/s/h10ze/possible-toll-hikes-garden-state-parkway-nj-turnpike-coming>

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Murphy flexes power to nix proposed NJ Turnpike, Parkway toll increases (updated)

By: Daniel J. Munoz, NJBiz

February 26, 2020 2:36 pm

Gov. Phil Murphy said he might veto a potential toll increase on the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike if he is not happy with the results.

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority said it will be holding public hearings on March 18 and 19 for a "proposed capital program and supporting revenue enhancement" – or simply, tolls – but details are scant, and dollar amounts are not yet available.

Tolls last went up on the state's two largest highways in January 2012.

"At the end of the day I reserve the right to either pull it back entirely or pull it back in part," Murphy said at an unrelated event Wednesday morning at William Paterson University.

Under the state constitution, Murphy has the authority to veto the meeting minutes of any executive board or commission, such as the NJTA, thereby nullifying any decisions made during that session.

He used that power in January 2019 with the Delaware River and Bay Authority when he nullified a toll hike they approved, [according to NJ.com](#).

"Just because it may be complicated or somewhat unpopular is not a reason enough not to give it full consideration," Murphy added.

[Murphy's 2021 budget](#), which clocks in at \$40.9 billion, proposes siphoning off \$129 million from the NJTA to plug holes in [New Jersey Transit's budget](#), despite repeated vows to end the practice. Legislative leadership meanwhile is proposing a [\\$500 million](#) dedicated yearly source of funding for the cash-strapped agency, which includes an increase to the corporate business tax and additional dollars from the Turnpike Authority and Clean Energy Fund.

"We've been open from day one to dedicated sources of funding as long it makes sense," Murphy said.

Editor's Note: An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that Gov. Murphy used his veto power in Jan 2019 with the Delaware River Port Authority to nullify a toll hike. It was corrected on Feb. 27, 2020 at 9:40 a.m. to reflect it as the Delaware River and Bay Authority.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://njbiz.com/murphy-flexes-power-nix-proposed-nj-turnpike-parkway-toll-increases/>

Tolls may be increasing on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway

By Pat Ralph | PhillyVoice | February 26, 2020

Drivers who regularly travel on the New Jersey Turnpike or the Garden State Parkway should get ready for a toll hike coming down the pike.

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority Board approved this week a motion to establish public hearings on a proposed toll increase, [according to NJ Advance Media](#). But the amount of the proposed increase has not been announced.

Turnpike Authority officials said more details will be provided by the time of the public hearings, slated for March 18 and 19.

"The program is still in development," Turnpike Authority spokesman Tom Feeney told NJ Advance Media. "Today was to approve a public hearing. Between now and then, we'll have details."

The Turnpike Authority, which oversees both roadways, has not raised toll prices since hiking them by 53% in 2012, according to NJ Advance Media.

The announcement came after the Turnpike Authority said that its \$1.8 billion budget would not include a toll increase.

Tolls comprise the Turnpike Authority's main source of revenue. The authority earned more than \$1.6 billion in revenue from tolls during 2019 – about 86% of its revenue.

Toll increases are commonplace in Pennsylvania, where the state's Turnpike Commission has [approved 12 consecutive toll hikes](#). The latest was a 6% increase that took effect in January 2020.

That increase raised the common toll for a passenger vehicle from \$2.30 to \$2.50 for cash customers and from \$1.40 to \$1.50 for E-ZPass drivers. Class-5 tractor trailers saw their toll prices jump from \$3.70 to \$4.00 for E-ZPass users and from \$16.30 to \$17.30 for cash users.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.phillyvoice.com/new-jersey-turnpike-garden-state-parkway-toll-increase/>

Murphy says it's 'too early to judge' proposed toll hike for Turnpike, Garden State Parkway

Updated Feb 26, 2020; Posted Feb 26, 2020

By [Brent Johnson](#) / NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

A day after it was revealed [tolls could go up](#) on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway, Gov. [Phil Murphy](#) said Wednesday he reserves the right to reject the plans in part or in whole, but it's "too early to judge" what will happen.

In a last-minute addition to its agenda Tuesday, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority's board of commissioners said it would hold public hearings in March for "proposed capital program and supporting revenue enhancement." But officials did not provide other details — like how much the toll hikes may be.

The Authority oversees the Turnpike and Parkway. But the governor has the ability to veto its proposals.

Murphy suggested during an unrelated public event Wednesday he doesn't know specifics about the plan, noting that he's "read the same stories you have."

"I've said from Day 1, getting our infrastructure back up on its feet after years — if not, in some cases, decades — of neglect is obviously a priority," the Democratic governor said during [the event at William Paterson University in Wayne](#). "Strong preference for having transportation dollars fund transportation projects. Just because it may be complicated or somewhat unpopular is not reason enough not to give it full consideration."

"But after all that, I'm waiting to see what this is," Murphy added. "I know about as much as probably you do in terms of what I've read here. There's public hearings. I want to see what this plan looks like."

"And at the end of the day, I reserve the right to either pull it back entirely or pull it back in part," he continued. "And it's too early to judge any of that."

Tom Feeney, a spokesman for the Turnpike Authority, told NJ Advance Media that the program "is still in development" and the agency will have details before the hearings March 18 and 19.

The authority has not taken a toll increase since 2012, when there was [a 53 percent hike](#).

If approved, toll hikes would [help finance a proposal](#) by state Senate President [Stephen Sweeney](#), D-Gloucester, to provide dedicated funds for NJ Transit.

Under Sweeney's plan, New Jersey voters would be asked to approve constitutionally dedicating \$500 million annually for NJ Transit's operating budget that would include \$125 million from the Turnpike Authority and \$75 million from a Clean Energy Fund to transit operations. It would also use a 1 percent tax on corporate income in New Jersey from an existing tax.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.nj.com/politics/2020/02/murphy-says-he-could-pull-back-proposed-toll-hike-for-turnpike-garden-state-parkway.html>

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Murphy downplays knowledge of toll increase, but his staff briefed unions on plan

By [David Wildstein](#) / New Jersey Globe | February 26 2020 3:17 pm

Gov. [Phil Murphy](#) said he didn't know the details of proposed toll increases at the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway before reading about it following his budget address, but senior administration officials and the state transportation commissioner briefed several outside stakeholders about the plan on Monday, the New Jersey Globe has learned.

Murphy was in his office just a few feet away when chief of staff George Helmy and commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti met with building trade union leaders and the Utility and Transportation Contractors Association to discuss a plan that could lead to a toll increase.

"I've read the same stories you have about the Turnpike (Authority) holding hearings," Murphy said at a press availability after announcing a plan to fund two years of in-state college tuition. "I know about as much, probably, as you do in terms of what I've read here."

Administration sources told the Globe that Murphy was referring to the lack of any specific numbers at this point, not that he was unaware of the authority calling for public hearings that might lead to a toll hike.

Murphy was not in the room for the stakeholder meetings, sources who attended the briefing confirmed.

Some unions were briefed last Friday, sources confirmed to the Globe.

The Star-Ledger, the only newspaper that covered a Turnpike Authority meeting that occurred while Murphy was delivering his annual budget address, reported that the plan was a “last-minute addition” to the agenda.

Murphy said he has a “strong preference for having transportation dollars funding transportation projects.”

“Just because it may be complicated or somewhat unpopular is not a reason enough not to give it full consideration,” the governor said. “I want to see what the plan looks like, and at the end of the day I reserve the right to either pull it back entirely or pull it back in part, and it’s too early to judge any of that.”

This kind of scenario has played out in the past.

In 2011, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey proposed a massive toll and fare increase as a predetermined strategy that allowed Gov. Chris Christie to feign shock and outrage.

Christie, who was the architect of the strategy, eventually demanded that the increase be cut in half in a bid to score political points.

Editor’s note: As a matter of full disclosure, this reporter, then an executive at the PANYNJ, attended the meeting with Christie prior to the toll and fare increase announcement and participated in a briefing with the governor. It was Christie’s proposal to double the number so that he could order it reduced at a later date.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://newjerseyglobe.com/governor/murphy-downplays-knowledge-of-toll-increase-but-his-staff-briefed-unions-on-plan/>

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Toll hikes coming down the Pike? Jersey drivers already pay enough in gas taxes and E-ZPass

Posted Mar 01, 2020

By Paul Mulshine | Star-Ledger Columnist

For a Jersey driver, tolled at every turn, there is nothing quite as satisfying as heading out across the country on the Interstate Highway System.

Once you escape our area, you might as well throw your E-ZPass out the window.

This is a great pleasure. But there are many forces conspiring against those of us who want to keep the “free” in freeway.

Some years ago there was a move to put tolls on Interstate 80 across Pennsylvania, but it was beaten back by the forces of freedom. Just recently such a move was throttled in Wyoming.

But the politicians planning such moves are never satisfied. We learned last week that the New Jersey Turnpike Commission, which implemented a massive toll hike just eight years ago, is pondering yet another price increase.

That became news only because Advance Media reporter Larry Higgs was the sole media representative at the commission meeting, which was being held the same day as Gov. Phil Murphy's budget speech.

Higgs noticed [a "last-minute addition"](#) to the agenda that called for hearings later this month on "proposed capital program and supporting revenue enhancement."

Officials provided no other details, so we don't know just what those revenue enhancements might be. But as recently as 2012, the Turnpike Authority, which also runs the Garden State Parkway, got a revenue enhancement to the tune of 53 percent.

And then in 2016, the state Department of transportation got another big revenue enhancement, a hike in the gas tax to the current 23 cents a gallon.

I don't mind paying the gas tax. You have to pay for roads in some fashion, and at current rates the state and federal gas tax costs the driver of a typical car only about two cents a mile.

But current Turnpike tolls can exceed 30 cents per mile on the northern end – on top of the gas tax. That's enough enhancement for now.

The defenders of tolls say that paying them is a choice. You can always go up Routes 1 and 9 if you don't feel like paying them.

True. But then there's the latest revenue enhancement that every red-blooded American driver despises.

That's right; I'm talking about the dread VMT.

That's bureaucratese for "Vehicle Mileage Tax." The people pushing the VMT want every car to be fitted with what amounts to a glorified E-ZPass transponder, one that can measure your mileage wherever you go.

I'd like to blame this on those nanny-state Democrats, but there are plenty of Republicans pushing it as well. I learned that when I came across an article on the website of the nation's leading toll-advocacy group, the International Bridge, Turnpike and Tunnel Association, otherwise known as the IBTTA.

[The article](#) described how the Republican ranking member on the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Sam Graves of Missouri, "is looking to vehicle miles tax/traveled to raise \$1 trillion for highway, bridge, and other infrastructure repairs."

The article went on to state that leading Democrats also endorse the VMT and that all are hoping to get the Trump administration to back the idea of a national VMT.

But what interested me, as a Jersey driver, was the author's citing of our Transportation Commissioner, [Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti](#), in the piece.

"There is no more important funding decision than that which involves this nation's transportation network," she is quoted as telling the House Ways and Means Committee at a Jan. 29 hearing. "When the transportation system fails, our economy is in jeopardy. When the transportation system fails, families are disconnected and most importantly, when our transportation system fails, our national defense is compromised."

Gutierrez-Scaccetti is second vice-president of the IBTTA. Before Murphy hired her, she was executive director of the Florida Turnpike, where she was a leading innovator in the field of maximizing toll revenues. She's also chair of [the Turnpike Authority board](#).

The article implied that she supported the VMT. But does she? Neither the IBTTA nor the DOT press people could tell me.

However in [that committee testimony](#), Gutierrez-Scaccetti came out in favor of a less controversial proposal to rescue the federal Highway Trust Fund, which can no longer fund the Interstate Highway System: She advocated indexing the federal gas tax to inflation.

"Do not abandon the gas tax as the primary method of funding transportation projects," she testified.

That certainly sounds like common sense.

Now just change "primary" to "only" and you've got a proposal that we Jersey drivers would love to see.

But when it comes to toll hikes, we've had a lifetime supply.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.nj.com/opinion/2020/03/toll-hikes-coming-down-the-pike-jersey-drivers-already-pay-enough-in-gas-taxes-and-e-zpass-mulshine.html>

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Ocean County Freeholders Object To Potential Toll Increases

*By [Alyssa Riccardi](#), Jersey Shore Online
March 5, 2020*

Many residents and commuters are worried as to what the future holds, as the possibility of toll prices increasing on the Parkway and Turnpike may happen.

Ocean County Freeholder Director Joseph H. Vicari said that with the county's limited transportation options, commuters will be affected the most if there is an increase in tolls.

Although the New Jersey Turnpike Authority Board of Commissioners did not discuss the new amount for tolls, the Board of Freeholders passed a resolution protesting any toll increase on

the Garden State Parkway and the New Jersey Turnpike and asked the state to reconsider this plan.

"Ocean County continues to be a growing county in the state and with this growth we need to move people to and from jobs, medical appointments, and recreational activities just to name a few destinations," Vicari said. "To do this our residents heavily rely on the Garden State Parkway and the New Jersey Turnpike."

If the tolls were to increase, it would give little benefits to Ocean County residents. Most of the money collected goes to subsidize transportation in northern New Jersey, including rail transit.

"New Jersey has not given Ocean County's motorists any traveling options," Vicari said. "This Board has long supported a rail line as a transportation alternative in Ocean County. Yet after years and years of studies, this has not moved forward by the state."

Vicari is also urging that there needs to be an Ocean County representative on the New Jersey Turnpike Authority Board of Commissioners.

"There is currently a seat open on the authority and it should be filled by a representative from Ocean County," Vicari said. "We have seen in the past, that when someone from the county served on the authority, we have been able to work together to provide needed improvements to our roads and infrastructure. Without a voice, we have taxation without representation."

The Freeholder Board is also concerned that increasing tolls may impact tourists and visitors.

"Ocean County motorists, based on volume, already pour millions of dollars into the parkway through the toll system," Vicari said. "Any increase in tolls also will negatively affect the state's multibillion dollar tourism industry, which is a leading economic engine in Ocean County, providing more than \$4.7 billion annually."

Vicari proposes that the State Legislature should consider a New Jersey income tax deduction for commuters who pay at least \$500 in toll costs per year as verified by EZ Pass.

"Instead of asking for more maybe there is something the State can do to help our commuters," Vicari said. "Clearly most people using the Parkway and Turnpike are doing so to get to and from work. It's their livelihood and we shouldn't charge them more for that."

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.jerseyshoreonline.com/ocean-county/freeholders-object-to-potential-toll-increases/>

Here's how much Turnpike, Parkway tolls are going up and the projects it'll pay for

*By Larry Higgs | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com
Updated Mar 10, 2020; Posted Mar 09, 2020*

Drivers will get three opportunities to tell New Jersey Turnpike officials what they think about a [toll increase proposal](#) next week that could hike the price of a passenger car trip on the Turnpike by an average of \$1.25 and Parkway tolls by 30 cents.

The details were finally revealed of [a toll increase process that started on Feb. 25](#) when NJ Turnpike Authority commissioners voted to set public hearing dates but not say how much drivers will pay.

The legal notice on the authority's website also lacked the type of details drivers would expect, such as a breakdown of cash, E-ZPass rates and how much non-passenger vehicles will pay. It only said tolls would increase by \$1.25 for the "average trip" on the Turnpike and 30 cents on the Parkway for passenger vehicles.

Turnpike officials did not immediately respond to an email asking for details.

An organization that represents drivers said the proposal was light on details and suggested the authority step on the brakes.

"Why the rush? As in, hearings in less than a month's time with no detailed information available?," said Steve Carrellas, [National Motorists Association](#) New Jersey policy director. "The NJTA is acting like the PANYNJ before they started acting with more transparency."

Among his questions is why the public has less than two-weeks to review and comment on a plan that doesn't show all the toll increase costs to drivers and costs of the proposed projects.

"NJ-NMA recommendations are to have the hearings start no sooner than 45 days prior to full information being made available to the public and for the written comment period to conclude at least three weeks after the last hearing," Carrellas said. "What's the rush?"

The toll increases on the Turnpike and Garden State Parkway would fund an ambitious capital plan of 53 projects on both highways, including widening the remaining two-lane sections of the Turnpike between exits four and one, on the Hudson County extension and adding a fourth lane at exit 13.

Four sections of the Parkway would also be widened, including the local and express lanes between Exit 98 in Wall and Exit 125 in Sayreville, between the Turnpike in Woodbridge and I-78 in Union, between I-78 and Route 3 and from Exit 154 for Route 46 in Clifton and Route 17 in Paramus.

It would also create a new exit 19W and toll plaza on the Turnpike's western spur, however a location was not specified.

On the Parkway and Turnpike, toll collection would finally go cashless, meaning drivers without E-ZPass accounts would be billed by mail. A dozen Parkway exits that are missing certain traffic movements would be completed.

Similar to what the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey did last fall, the authority proposes having "indexed" or automatic future toll increases, after 2022 which would be no higher than 3%. Officials did not say what economic indicator those increases would be tied to.

Unlike the Port Authority, the process is a stark contrast to the level of information and details released when the Port Authority commissioners introduced a toll increase proposal and amended capital plan last July and [approved a \\$1 cash toll increase](#) and reduced E-ZPass discounts in September at its Hudson River and Staten Island crossings. Those increases took effect in January.

Comments will be taken at three public hearings held next week. The first two would be held from 1 to 3 p.m., Wednesday, March 18 at NJ Turnpike Headquarters, 1 Turnpike Plaza, which is off Mutton Hollow Road and near Route 9 south in Woodbridge and at from 6 to 8 p.m., Camden County College Dennis Flyer Memorial theater, Lincoln Hall Jefferson Drive, Sicklerville.

The last hearing is scheduled for 7 to 9 p.m., March 19 at Ramapo College trustee pavilion conference room, 505 Ramapo Valley Road in Mahwah. No date has been set for a vote by the turnpike commission.

Comments also can be mailed to the Turnpike Authority Executive Director, 1 Turnpike Plaza, Woodbridge NJ 07095 or emailed to njtapubliccomments@njta.com by March 27.

The February vote was a surprise after Turnpike Authority officials boasted in October that the \$1.8 billion [2020 budget did not require a toll increase](#) to fund it. It was the eighth year the authority has gone [without taking a toll increase](#) in the annual budget.

The [last toll increase was a 53 percent hike](#) on January 1, 2012, which was the final part of a multi-phase toll increase package approved in 2008. That toll increase [financed the authority's \\$7 billion capital plan](#) that paid for [widening parts of the Turnpike](#) and Parkway.

It also [could fund a plan by State Senate President Steve Sweeney](#) to provide \$500 million in dedicated funding for NJ Transit from a 1 percent tax on corporate income and \$125 million from the state's turnpike and \$75 million from a Clean Energy Fund to transit operations. Voters could be asked to amend the state constitution to dedicate those monies.

Officials justified completion of the last 10-year capital plan. This year, the Turnpike Authority awarded all the \$500 million in this year's program," said John Keller executive director.

Documents provided to commissioners said, "just \$400 million are currently available over the next five years to tackle important projects that enhance roadway safety, relieve congestion and improve access onto and off the Turnpike and Parkway."

Keller said the authorization would allow the authority to adopt a strategic plan to 2029 for capital projects.

Tolls are the Authority's major revenue source. Last year, the authority earned \$1.612 billion, which is 86% of the agency's \$1.861 billion in revenue.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.nj.com/traffic/2020/03/heres-how-much-turnpike-parkway-tolls-are-going-up-and-the-projects-itll-pay-for.html>

Freeholders Oppose GSP and Turnpike Toll Hike

By Mordechai Wincorn

Hamodia | The Daily Newspaper of Torah Jewry

Monday, March 9, 2020 at 2:54 pm

Ocean County's government body voiced its opposition to a proposed toll hike on the Garden State Parkway (GSP) and New Jersey Turnpike, and called for the area to be represented on the state's highway authority.

40 miles of the GSP run through the county and, together with the Turnpike, they are the area's central thoroughfares towards New York City and northern parts of the state.

The state's highway commission announced that it would discuss the possibility of a toll hike at its next meeting in mid-March, but did not reveal how large of an increase was being considered. Following the announcement and call for public comment, Ocean County's Board of Chosen Freeholders passed a resolution opposing any toll hike.

In a statement released after the resolution vote, the board's Director Joseph Vicari said that while several toll increases have been made over the decades, Ocean County has seen few benefits from increased state revenue.

"New Jersey has not given Ocean County's motorists any traveling options," Vicari said. "This Board has long supported a rail line as a transportation alternative in Ocean County. Yet after years and years of studies, this has not moved forward by the state."

The only public transportation available from most of the county towards New York City is the New Jersey Transit bus line.

Director Vicari also pointed to the state's failure to widen Route 9, the county's often traffic-clogged north-south route.

"Ocean County has been continually informed by state transportation officials that dualization of Route 9 will probably never occur," he said. "So where does that leave us?"

Mr. Vicari called for an Ocean County representative to fill an open seat on the New Jersey Turnpike Authority Board of Commissioners.

"We have seen in the past, that when someone from the County served on the authority, we

have been able to work together to provide needed improvements to our roads and infrastructure," he said. "Without a voice, we have taxation without representation."

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://hamodia.com/2020/03/09/lakewood-news-2/>

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New tolls? Turnpike Authority not holding hearings in Ocean, Monmouth

*By Dan Alexander, New Jersey 101.5
March 11, 2020*

The Turnpike Authority has scheduled three public hearings next week for proposed toll hikes, construction projects and a new toll.

But none of the hearings are in Monmouth or Ocean counties, where the Garden State Parkway covers the most miles.

[At its meeting on Feb. 25](#), the board approved public hearings to be scheduled for "revenue enhancement" to support proposed projects planned for both the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway. According to [a legal notice](#) posted on Saturday, a toll increase and a new toll are part of the projects.

Tolls would increase by "no more than \$1.25" on the Turnpike and includes a new Exit 19A on the western spur and "no more than 30 cents" on the Parkway. The plan would also rescind all bus discounts and create a 40% discount for all buses.

The other big change that would come with the increase will be a switch to all-electronic collections and 3% annual increases.

The public notice does not include the cost of the projects or when the hikes would take effect.

Ocean County Freeholder Director Joe Vicari said he sent a letter to the Turnpike Commission requesting a hearing to be held in Monmouth or Ocean County where he says a toll increase will have the greatest impact.

"The people in Ocean and Monmouth counties must use that to go to work every single day. Not to have it, I think, is disrespectful," Vicari told New Jersey 101.5

Turnpike spokesman Tom Feeney said the hearing locations had to be suitable for public hearings and on the be available.

"And at least one needed to be available in the daytime and at least one in the evening," Feeney said, noting the locations are spread out in North, Central and South Jersey.

The freeholder said shore residents have few traveling options and see little benefit from a toll hike, which he said instead goes to subsidize transportation in North Jersey including rail.

"When you say a toll increase it's really a tax" and the best option would not to increase taxes, according to Vicari. He has some ideas on improving transportation for shore residents including trains, tax breaks and better representation on the Turnpike's board.

"We're treated like second-class citizens in Ocean and Monmouth counties and the only way to solve that problem is to have someone appointed from our area on the Turnpike Authority," Vicari said, adding that no one from the two counties has sat on the board in the past eight years.

He supports revival of the Blue Comet rail line that he said at one time ran from New York to Atlantic City and said much of the rail bed is still in place.

"New Jersey's the most populated state in the United States and now its time to not only improve the economy" of not only Ocean County but the entire state by rebuilding the line, Vicari said.

The freeholder also said that the state should look at making improvements to Route 9, which he said has not been improved since it was first built in the 1920s forcing commuters and tourists onto the Parkway.

To soften the impact of a toll increase, Vicari also proposes a state income tax deduction for commuters who pay at least \$500 in toll costs using their E-ZPass.

The proposed Turnpike projects include:

- Over height vehicle detection
- Exit 17 (Lincoln Tunnel) ramp replacement
- Widening between Exits 1 and 4 at the southern end of the Turnpike
- Widening of the Newark Bay-Hudson County Extension between Exits 14 and 14C
- Alignment at the "mixing bowl" at Exits 15W and 16W

The proposed Parkway projects include:

- Completion of Exits 6,13,17,20, 29, 40, 123-124, 147 and 168
- Widening between Exits 80 and 83
- Widening of the local and express lanes between Exits 98 and 125
- Widening of the road between Exits 129 and 153

The public hearings to present the plans are scheduled for:

- Wednesday, March 18 at the Turnpike Authority offices from 1 to 3 p.m.
- Wednesday, March 18 at Camden Community College in Sicklerville from 6 to 8 p.m.
- Thursday, March 19 at Ramapo College in Mahwah from 7 to 9 p.m.

The Turnpike Authority also accepts written comment through March 27, which can be sent to: Executive Director, NJ Turnpike Authority, 1 Turnpike Plaza, PO Box 5042, Woodbridge, NJ 07095 or via email at njpubliccomments@njta.org.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://nj1015.com/new-tolls-turnpike-authority-not-holding-hearings-in-ocean-monmouth/>

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Turnpike Authority presses on with plans for toll hikes, despite global pandemic

News12 New Jersey

Posted: Mar 31, 2020 11:11 PM EDT Updated: Apr 02, 2020 3:49 PM EDT

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority is pressing on with plans to raise the price of tolls, even holding a public meeting about the issue, despite the need for social distancing amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The plan would be to increase the tolls on highways like the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway. But one New Jersey lawmaker is calling foul.

"By saying we had them and [we streamed them](#) – give me a break. The goal really is to encourage people to participate," says New Jersey state Sen. Declan O'Scanlon.

Tolls are set to go up 36% on the Turnpike and 27% on the Parkway. The money is slated to fund billions in transportation projects. But the cost details have not been coming forward very quickly, something O'Scanlon calls suspicious.

"It did seem like they were trying to add it to an agenda at the last minute when they had introduced it back in late February," the senator says.

A public meeting about the issue was held on March 18 – the same day that state officials announced more than 400 cases of coronavirus in New Jersey, along with five deaths. And after Gov. Phil Murphy implored people to stay at home.

Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti defended the meetings, saying that the revenue will be critical to a post-coronavirus economy.

"Public works projects sustain us in our recovery efforts and help to stimulate a lagging economy," she says.

But major advocacy groups have called out the process and say that the topic deserves more scrutiny. Some also feel that Murphy should intervene and delay the hikes until the fall.

"The governor hasn't done it because his bandwidth, like everyone else, is completely focused on – oh, I don't know, staying alive. Keeping his constituents alive. Keeping our economy alive," O'Scanlon says.

Murphy tells News 12 New Jersey that he doesn't know much about the public hearings.

"We've got to get that balance right between government going forward, life going forward and at the same time acknowledging we're in a war," Murphy said.

The last toll increase was about eight years ago. There is a similar effort in southern New Jersey to raise the tolls on the Atlantic City Expressway. There are three hearings to be held this week which will be streamed online.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<http://www.news12.com/story/41959784/turnpike-authority-presses-on-with-plans-for-toll-hikes-despite-global-pandemic>

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New tolls proposed to help pay for New Jersey Turnpike capital improvements

*By Sarah Downey / The Center Square
Mar 12, 2020*

As New Jersey Turnpike officials prepare to raise toll fees to pay for construction projects, public hearings are scheduled next week for input on the plans.

The **hearing notice** on the Turnpike Authority website states that for the 2020 toll schedule on the New Jersey Turnpike, "an average trip for a passenger vehicle would increase by no more than \$1.25."

On the Garden State Parkway, the 2020 toll schedule would be adjusted so the average trip for a passenger vehicle would go up by no more than 30 cents.

On both the Turnpike and the Parkway, pro rata increases for other classes of vehicles would also take effect.

A new uniform discount of 40 percent would be applied for all buses, and a toll would be established at the new Interchange 19-W on the Turnpike's western spur.

The 2020 program, which currently has 24 capital improvement projects proposed for the Turnpike and 29 for the Parkway, includes system-wide pavement preservation, median barrier improvements and fiber optic upgrades.

Steve Carrellas, New Jersey policy director for the National Motorists Association, **told NJ.com** that the proposal was lacking in details.

"Why the rush? As in, hearings in less than a month's time with no detailed information available?" Carrellas said. "The NJTA is acting like the PANYNJ (Port Authority of New York New Jersey) before they started acting with more transparency."

Carrellas noted the exact toll increases and costs for all the projects have not yet been released.

Public comment is welcome at three upcoming hearings; the first two are scheduled from 1 to 3 p.m. March 18 at NJ Turnpike Headquarters, 1 Turnpike Plaza, in Woodbridge, and then from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Camden County College Dennis Flyer Memorial Theater, Lincoln Hall Jefferson Drive, in Sicklerville. The third is scheduled from 7 to 9 p.m. March 19 at Rampao College Trustee Pavilion Conference Center in Mahwah.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

https://www.thecentersquare.com/new-jersey/new-tolls-proposed-to-help-pay-for-new-jersey-turnpike/article_bc5aa86a-645d-11ea-9d9a-1bb2e79140f1.html

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We now know how much proposed toll hikes at the Turnpike, Parkway are

By Larry Higgs | NJ.com

Updated Mar 16, 2020; Posted Mar 13, 2020

New Jersey Turnpike officials have canceled a public hearing scheduled to be held at Rampao College on March 19. The other two hearings on March 18 in Woodbridge and at Camden County College will be live streamed. Details about how to watch will be posted on the [Turnpike Authority website](#). The public comment period will be extended to April 3.

[New Jersey Turnpike Authority](#) officials revealed more details about [a proposed toll increase](#) that will hit drivers and promised more information would be released soon.

Drivers using the New Jersey Turnpike face the biggest bite -- a 36% increase toll increase -- while Garden State Parkway drivers would see a 27% hike, said Tom Feeney, a Turnpike Authority spokesman. The authority also runs the Parkway.

The increase will be applied equally to the toll rates for cash and E-ZPass, peak and off-peak rates and for trucks and cars, he said. It could increase the price of a passenger car trip on the Turnpike by an average of \$1.25 and Parkway tolls by 30 cents.

Bus discounts will be changed to a blanket 40% reduction, instead of charging different rates based on the type of bus.

"Every rate will increase by the same percentages," Feeney said. "The proposed toll tables will be published before (upcoming) public hearings."

What are drivers getting? The hike, which is estimated to raise more than \$500 million, will support a new capital plan that extends to 2029. In addition to 53 projects that widen various sections of the Parkway and Turnpike, both roads will get cashless toll collection, and full time use of exit 19W from the Turnpike western spur that takes drivers directly to the Meadowlands sports complex that had been only open on event days.

"With additional traffic going to the complex because of the activities at American Dream, it makes sense to keep the interchange open all the time," Feeney said. Drivers with E-ZPass will have the option of going directly into the complex from the southbound Western Spur and paying the toll at 19W.

Up to now, those drivers would have exited the Turnpike at Exit 16W, paid a toll there and gotten on Route 3 to access the Meadowlands sports complex. It's a different way to get to the same place while paying the same toll they would have paid if they went the old way, Feeney said.

No official date for a vote on the proposal has been set by the Turnpike Authority's board, but it could happen as early as its April 28 meeting at its headquarters in Woodbridge, so long as upcoming public hearings are held as scheduled, Feeney said.

Comments will be taken at three public hearings next week, which, as of Thursday night, were still on, despite numerous cancellations of other events throughout the state due to the coronavirus.

The first two will be held on Wednesday, March 18. One at NJ Turnpike Headquarters, 1 Turnpike Plaza, which is off Mutton Hollow Road and near Route 9 south in Woodbridge, will run from 1 to 3 p.m. And another from 6 to 8 p.m. at Camden County College Dennis Flyer Memorial theater, Lincoln Hall Jefferson Drive, Sicklerville. The last hearing is scheduled for 7 to 9 p.m. on March 19 at Ramapo College trustee pavilion conference room, 505 Ramapo Valley Road in Mahwah.

Comments also can be mailed to the Turnpike Authority Executive Director, 1 Turnpike Plaza, Woodbridge NJ 07095 or emailed to njtapubliccomments@njta.com by March 27.

Turnpike officials have been under fire for a [slow reveal of the toll increase details](#) when the agency's board of commissioners voted in February to set the public hearings, but did not say how much tolls would increase until last weekend's public notice.

That led the National Motorists Association to call for a 45-day delay in the public hearings to give drivers enough time to read the proposals and comment on them, and to put off the board of commissioners' vote.

It's not clear exactly when the toll hikes would go into effect.

The [last toll increase was a 53% hike](#) on January 1, 2012, which was the final part of a multi-phase toll increase package approved in 2008. That toll increase [financed the authority's \\$7 billion capital plan](#) that paid for [widening parts of the Turnpike](#) and Parkway.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.nj.com/traffic/2020/03/we-now-know-how-much-proposed-toll-hikes-at-the-turnpike-parkway-are.html>

Toll hikes on Parkway, Turnpike will pay for \$24B in work. Here's what it'll cost you.

By Larry Higgs / NJ.com

Updated Mar 18, 2020; Posted Mar 18, 2020

Drivers using the Garden State Parkway could see the current \$1.50 tolls at most toll plazas increase to \$1.90 and the average New Jersey Turnpike toll raise by \$1.30, according to [toll hike details](#) revealed one day before public hearings are scheduled to be held.

The increase could fund a whopping [\\$24 billion capital program](#), more than three times the size of the 2008-2018 \$7 billion capital program.

Toll revenue could fund an ambitious multi-year capital program that would widen 10 sections of the Turnpike and Parkway, totaling \$11.65 billion, bring cashless tolling to both toll roads for \$900 million and replace the bridge between the New Jersey and Pennsylvania Turnpikes for \$500 million, which is the Jersey share of the span.

"That's a list of long-term capital projects. There will be a rolling five-year capital program drawn from that list," said Tom Feeny, a Turnpike Authority spokesman.

Turnpike officials said the proposed increase will raise tolls on the Turnpike by 36 percent and by 27 percent on the Parkway. But the details reveal some bigger bites to driver's wallets.

The average Turnpike trip, which now costs \$3.50, will cost \$4.80, and the average parkway trip that cost \$1.11 would increase by 30 cents, officials said.

But the numbers that mean something to motorists are the prices they could pay at the Parkway's large "main line toll plazas. All except one plaza charges \$1.50. Those would rise to \$1.90 for cash or E-ZPass. Exit ramp tolls would increase from 50 to 65 cents.

The real bite on the Parkway comes in the price to drive a car round-trip from Bergen County to the end point in Cape May which would be \$19.95 under the increase. A one-way, end-to-end trip would cost \$9.45 The current cash rate and E-ZPass for the same 172-mile trip is \$8.25.

"The end-to-end (round-trip) Parkway change reflects a 142% increase. Ouch!," said Steve Carrellas, National Motorist's Association state chapter Government and Public Affairs director. "Even the biggest disruption (coronavirus) we've seen in generations doesn't stop the Turnpike Authority."

Driving a passenger car from end to end on the turnpike would cost \$18.85 for cash or E-ZPass and \$14.15 for off-peak E-ZPass payment. The cash and peak hour E-Z pass rate now for the same 117 mile trip is \$13.85 and \$10.40 for off-peak E-Z Pass. Future toll increases

would be indexed to an indicator officials haven't determined yet, starting in 2022 and would be limited to 3% annually.

Two groups have called for the hearings to be postponed because of government restrictions on gatherings of more than 50 people to limit spread of the coronavirus. The New Jersey Sierra Club joined an earlier call by the National Motorist's Association to postpone the hearings.

A hearing scheduled for March 19 in Ramapo was canceled. The other two hearings are Wednesday, March 18 at NJ Turnpike Headquarters, 1 Turnpike Plaza, which is off Mutton Hollow Road and near Route 9 south in Woodbridge, will run from 1 to 3 p.m.

The second is from 6 to 8 p.m. at Camden County College Dennis Flyer Memorial theater, Lincoln Hall Jefferson Drive, Sicklerville. Both will be live streamed on the [Turnpike Authority website](#). A March 27 deadline for email and written comments was extended to April 3.

The NMA called for the hearings and planned April 28 vote to be put off for 45 days to give drivers and other interested groups an opportunity to read the detailed plans and comment. The process started with a Feb. 28 vote by Turnpike Authority commissioners to schedule hearings but not to reveal details of the toll hikes.

Gov. Phil Murphy said his main concern about the hearings was that the 50 person maximum in one room be adhered to, during a Tuesday press briefing.

"We will reiterate that to them," he said.

Detailed toll rate schedules for the [Turnpike](#) and the [Parkway](#) and specific information about the [capital plan](#) toll increases would fund are on line.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.nj.com/traffic/2020/03/toll-hikes-on-parkway-turnpike-will-pay-for-24b-in-work-heres-what-itll-cost-you.html>

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Coronavirus outbreak not stopping Turnpike toll hike hearings

*Dan Alexander, New Jersey 101.5
March 17, 2020*

The public hearings for proposed toll increases on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway will go on despite the COVID-19 outbreak and warnings to stay home and limits on crowd sizes.

[Two of the three hearings](#) to increase the toll on the Turnpike by "no more than \$1.25" and "no more than 30 cents" on the Parkway will happen 1 to 3 p.m. at Turnpike Authority headquarters

in Woodbridge and 6 to 8 p.m. at Camden County College in Sicklerville. Both hearings will be streamed live on [the Turnpike Authority website](#).

A hearing that had been scheduled for Thursday at Ramapo College in Mahwah has been canceled.

"With live streaming and an extended period for the public to submit comments as part of the hearing record, we believe we will be able to protect public health without limiting public participation," Turnpike Authority spokesman Tom Feeney said in a written statement.

Authority staff will keep track of the number of people in the meeting room so as not to exceed 50 people, a limit imposed by Gov. Phil Murphy to encourage social distancing. During the governor's daily briefing about the coronavirus, Lt. Gov. Sheila Oliver said the state is giving guidance to agencies about how to comply with public meeting laws in these circumstances.

"These hearings are about funding a capital program that will sustain tens of thousands of jobs in the coming years and help maintain a transportation network that provides a competitive edge for New Jersey in the regional, national, and global economies," Feeney said. "In these uncertain economic times, it is important to move ahead with the process in a responsible and transparent manner."

Sierra Club President Jeff Tittel said the hearings should not be held.

"The Turnpike Authority knows that they shouldn't be holding these hearings. They are deliberately playing games to keep the public out," Tittel said, adding that "hundreds" would turn out to oppose the hike.

"These proposals are a big hit to our wallets because commuters will be paying more to still be stuck in traffic. Instead of waiting to hold these hearings until after the coronavirus emergency is over, they want to go ahead and hold the hearings to push the plans through," Tittel said.

The Turnpike Authority extended the period to submit written comments until 5 p.m. April 3. Comments can be sent to: Executive Director, NJ Turnpike Authority, 1 Turnpike Plaza, PO Box 5042, Woodbridge, NJ 07095 or via email at njpubliccomments@njta.org.

The proposed Turnpike projects includes:

- Over height vehicle detection
- Opening exit 19W to the Meadowlands and the American Dream full time and adding a toll plaza
- Exit 17 (Lincoln Tunnel) ramp replacement
- Widening between Exits 1 and 4 at the southern end of the Turnpike
- Widening of the Newark Bay-Hudson County Extension between Exits 14 and 14C
- Alignment at the "mixing bowl" at Exits 15W and 16W

The proposed Parkway projects include:

- Completion of Exits 6,13,17,20, 29, 40, 123-124, 147 and 168

- Widening between Exits 80 and 83
- Widening of the local and express lanes between Exits 98 and 125
- Widening of the road between Exits 129 and 153

The other big change that would come with the increase will be a switch to all-electronic collections and 3% annual increases.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://nj1015.com/coronavirus-outbreak-not-stopping-turnpike-toll-hike-hearings/>

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Despite COVID-19 Crisis, Turnpike Authority to Hold Hearings on Toll Hikes

*JOHN REITMEYER | MARCH 17, 2020
NEW JERSEY SPOTLIGHT*

Even amid an unprecedented global health crisis, officials say the show must go on, at least when it comes to a multibillion-dollar capital plan that could soon hit motorists on the Garden State Parkway and the New Jersey Turnpike with hefty toll increases.

Public hearings on the building program — totaling as much as \$24 billion to be generated by raising tolls at least 27% on the parkway and 36% on the turnpike — are still scheduled for today, despite Gov. Phil Murphy's declaration of a state of emergency across New Jersey during the ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

Murphy has repeatedly implored residents to stay home if they can to prevent further spread of the disease, including Tuesday when he said, "This is no time for business as usual."

But he also isn't calling for the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, which operates both the turnpike and the parkway, to reschedule two public hearings planned for today as a precursor to the proposed toll hikes, which could go into effect later this year.

Instead, the governor pointed to arrangements for a livestream of the hearings that the NJTA will make available on its [website](#), as well as assurances that officials would restrict attendance to the 50-person limit Murphy has urged for any public gathering across the state to help prevent spread of the disease, which is responsible for three deaths and hundreds of infections in the state. The two public hearings are planned for locations in Woodbridge in Middlesex County and Sicklerville in Camden County.

"I have very little insight into those hearings other than I said it was very important to me, and to us, that they not exceed the limits that we put in place," Murphy said Tuesday as he and other state officials answered questions from reporters during a daily coronavirus briefing.

'Shameful'

Despite the online arrangement, and the canceling of a third hearing, which was to be held in Mahwah on Thursday, some are still calling on the turnpike authority to put the entire hearing process on hold amid the coronavirus outbreak.

This comes as many New Jersey residents are dealing this week with serious issues related to both personal health and a new need to make arrangements for children and other loved ones whose lives have been disrupted by widespread school closures and other [statewide restrictions ordered by Murphy](#) earlier in the week.

Jeff Tittel, New Jersey director of the Sierra Club, called the decision to carry on with the NJTA's public hearings "shameful."

"A lot of people are stuck at home and they may not have any access to the internet," Tittel said. "This is classism."

Meanwhile, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which has killed nearly 8,000 people around the world, has also raised new questions about whether it's an appropriate time for the agency to consider launching such an ambitious, multiyear capital program at all.

Years of major projects

The plan calls for more than 50 major projects to be undertaken on both toll roads in rolling, five-year increments. Murphy on Tuesday pointed to the potential for increased unemployment in New Jersey and suggested it would likely take a significant federal stimulus plan to fully address the economic upheaval caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

Earlier this week, members of the state Assembly also highlighted the looming uncertainty for New Jersey businesses and workers as they passed a [series of economic-relief bills](#) on an emergency basis.

Asked about those concerns, Tom Feeney, a spokesman for the turnpike authority, said the public hearings are "about funding a capital program that will sustain tens of thousands of jobs in the coming years and help maintain a transportation network that provides a competitive edge for New Jersey in the regional, national, and global economies."

"In these uncertain economic times, it is important to move ahead with the process in a responsible and transparent manner," Feeney said.

He also said those attending the hearings today would be asked to "adhere to social distancing," which is the precaution of leaving at least 6 feet of space between any two individuals.

Impact on tolls

In all, the NJTA toll-hike proposal calls for as much as \$24 billion in spending, far outpacing the \$7 billion capital program that the agency has been working under for roughly the past decade.

On the turnpike, where the toll for the average trip now costs \$3.50, the proposed increase would bring the average toll up to \$4.80, according to NJTA estimates. For parkway motorists, the average toll of \$1.11 would go up to \$1.41, according to the estimates.

But even after the toll hikes would be enacted, NJTA officials note that per-mile tolls on the parkway would rank 14th among more than 40 peer toll roads nationally, and on the turnpike they would rank 27th among peers.

However, the NJTA is also seeking to implement an indexing policy that would allow tolls to be raised up to 3% each year, starting in 2022. The provision has the potential to drive the increases much higher, especially with a compounding effect of the annual increases if they occur.

That harkens back to a [plan floated more than a decade ago](#) by then-Gov. Jon Corzine that sought to make regular highway-toll hikes part of a broader effort to better fund state transportation-infrastructure investments while also addressing other fiscal challenges, including the state's significant debt.

Pay-by-mail tolling

The funding raised by the new toll hikes would be used to underwrite a range of major projects, according to a 45-page [summary of the capital program](#) posted by the agency online. A series of parkway widening projects will cost more than \$5 billion, and a series of turnpike widening projects will run another \$6 billion. The capital plan also calls for a \$2.86-billion bridge-replacement initiative spanning both highways, and \$900 million to ensure all toll plazas on both roads can accommodate electronic tolling or pay-by-mail.

Discussions about the capital plan drew wide praise from representatives of the state's construction industry who spoke during the turnpike authority's public meeting in February, according to meeting minutes posted online, even as few details were made available to the public at the time.

But Tittel said the capital plan has the potential to increase sprawl and dampen New Jersey's battle to reverse the ongoing impact of climate change.

"This is something from the 1950s," Tittel said.

When the proposed toll hikes would go into effect is not clear right now. According to NJTA rules, a public hearing must be held at least 45 days before any toll hikes can be levied.

How to take part

For those who would like to attend Wednesday's hearings in person, the first is being held from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the turnpike authority's headquarters at 1 Turnpike Plaza in Woodbridge. The second will be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Dennis Flyer Memorial Theater on the campus of Camden County College in Sicklerville. No more than 50 people will be allowed on location at either site, according to Feeney.

In addition to its livestream, the NJTA is also taking public input via email using the address NJTAPublicComments@njta.com. The agency is also accepting written comments by mail or courier, which should be addressed to: Executive Director, New Jersey Turnpike Authority, 1 Turnpike Plaza, P.O. Box 5042, Woodbridge, NJ 07095.

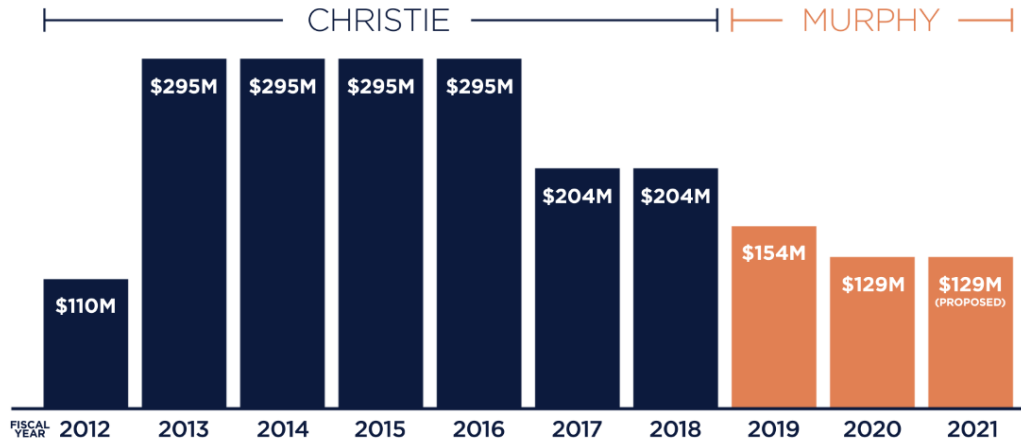
The deadline for submitting comments has been extended to 5 p.m. on April 3.

“With livestreaming and an extended period for the public to submit comments as part of the hearing record, we believe we will be able to protect public health without limiting public participation,” Feeney said. “People will be able to learn about the proposal and make their feelings known without having the sole option of attending the meeting in person.”

The capital program and its associated toll hikes have been put forward at a time when Murphy, a first-term Democrat, has proposed a [new state budget](#) for fiscal year 2021 that would continue to [tap the NJTA](#) to help subsidize the state’s beleaguered mass-transit agency. Murphy’s state budget plan calls for another \$129 million to be redirected from the NJTA to New Jersey Transit’s operating budget in the fiscal year that begins in July. That would push the total transferred between the two agencies over the last decade above \$2 billion.

DIVERTED FUNDS FROM NJ TURNPIKE AUTHORITY TO NJ TRANSIT

SOURCE: NJ DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY



Hike in gas tax also possible

The potential toll hikes also come when New Jersey motorists may be facing another gas-tax increase later this year. While it’s still too soon to know for sure, the latest revenue projections from the state Department of Treasury have raised concerns since the gas-tax rate is now tied to overall revenue and consumption goals that were established under a 2016 law. The gas tax supports the state’s Transportation Trust Fund, which operates separately from the state budget to fund road, bridge and rail-network improvements throughout New Jersey.

Unlike other state highways that qualify for TTF funding, the toll roads must pay for all capital investment using NJTA resources, which are primarily raised through tolls.

Murphy — who has the authority to reject the toll hike proposal or scale it back — did not weigh in during Tuesday’s coronavirus press briefing on the question of whether the toll hikes should be shelved amid the unfolding economic uncertainty tied to the ongoing disease outbreak. His office also did not comment when asked about that issue later in the day.

A spokesman for Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin (D-Middlesex) stressed that the planned toll increases are still "proposals."

"The speaker trusts that the (NJTA) Board will keep the best interests of the people of New Jersey in the forefront of their decision," said spokesman Kevin McArdle on Tuesday. Coughlin also "strongly suggests that people stay home and watch the livestream" of the public hearings, he added.

A spokesman for Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-Gloucester) declined to comment Tuesday. But Tittel, from the Sierra Club, warned that Murphy may be tempting fate by pushing a toll-hike plan when many economists are predicting a recession has either begun or is about to. He pointed to Corzine, who lost his bid for reelection in 2009 as the effects of the Great Recession took hold.

"Here we are again with a toll hike and the economy going south," Tittel said. "Sound familiar?"

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.njspotlight.com/2020/03/despite-covid-19-crisis-turnpike-authority-to-hold-hearings-on-toll-hikes/>

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Turnpike, Parkway Toll Hike Hearings Go On Despite Coronavirus

By Tom Davis, Patch Staff

Mar 18, 2020 10:31 am ET | Updated Mar 18, 2020 11:47 am ET

NEW JERSEY – Two public hearings are planned for toll hikes on the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike, even as New Jersey has shut down virtually all state, local and commercial business.

Public hearings on a capital building program that would raise tolls around 27 percent on the Garden State Parkway and 36 percent on the New Jersey Turnpike later this year remain scheduled. It's not clear when those hikes would take effect.

The hearings will go on even as the state also has banned gatherings of 50 or more.

Murphy said during a press conference on Tuesday that live streaming will in place and that it "was very important to me, and to us, that they not exceed the limits that we put in place." He also said he has "very little insight" into those hearings.

The hearing at the Turnpike Authority headquarters in Woodbridge will be held from 1 to 3 p.m. on Wednesday. Attendees will be asked to adhere as closely as possible to social distancing guidance, the NJTPA said in a release.

That hearing will also be live streamed. Details on how to watch will be posted on the Turnpike Authority website (www.njta.com).

The presentation will be recorded and available for viewing after the completion of the hearing, the release said.

The Camden County College hearing will proceed as scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m. on Wednesday at the Dennis Flyer Memorial Theater on Jefferson Drive in Sicklerville.

"In uncertain economic times, the Turnpike Authority does not want to delay consideration of a capital program expected to sustain tens of thousands of jobs in coming years. The hearing arrangements will allow that process to continue while protecting public health and without limiting public participation," the release said.

Because of these changes, the Turnpike Authority has extended the public comment period until 5 p.m. on April 3. Members of the public now have until that time to submit written comments about the proposal in order to have those comments become part of the hearing record.

Comments can be sent by email to NJTAPublicComments@njta.com or by mail or courier to Executive Director, New Jersey Turnpike Authority, 1 Turnpike Plaza, P.O. Box 5042, Woodbridge, NJ 07095.

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority made the possible toll hike plan public last month, saying it was authorizing public hearings on "revenue enhancement" for the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway.

The NJTA's board voted to authorize three public hearings "to determine an appropriate capital plan and explore funding to support those capital projects," Tom Feeney, a spokesman for the agency, told Patch.

Tolls are the major source of revenue for the Turnpike and Parkway, and [NJ Advance Media](#) and [News12](#) said the proposed toll hike would be the first since 2012, when a 53 percent increase was approved.

"There is no specific proposal for the capital plan or the funding at this point. The Turnpike Authority staff is working on those," Feeney said. "They will be fully explained and explored in public, but there have been no final decisions made about what's going to be in the proposal, so I have no specifics to share."

Under the 2012 increases, toll rates on the Garden State Parkway increased from \$0.35 to \$0.50 for ramp tolls, from \$0.50 to \$0.75 for two-way toll plazas, and from \$1 to \$1.50 for one-way toll plazas. It is the third hike in tolls for the Parkway since its opening in 1954, and the seventh for the New Jersey Turnpike since that highway's inception in 1951.

The increases were voted on and approved as the second phase of a two-fold toll hike in October 2008, during the administration of former Gov. Jon Corzine.

Feeney said then that the toll prices were originally raised to support a decade-long construction projects package totaling \$7 billion, including a widening of the Turnpike and the Parkway south of Toms River. The package also included the agency's \$1 billion-plus contribution toward a new rail tunnel to cross the Hudson River.

However, former Gov. Chris Christie killed the rail tunnel project in 2010, claiming that the construction was certain to go over budget, and then redirected the over \$1 billion dollars in revenues to other state transportation projects.

Here's what else you should know:

- State health officials said they believe the virus is "community-spread" in New Jersey. "Community-spread indicates that the coronavirus is amongst us," Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli announced. **Read more: [Coronavirus May Be 'Community-Spread' In NJ](#)**
- The first person in New Jersey to die of the coronavirus was reported on Tuesday, March 10. **Read more: [First NJ Coronavirus Death, 4 New Cases: Governor](#)**
- The second person in New Jersey to die because of the illness was announced on Saturday, March 14. **Read more: [2nd Death Due To Coronavirus In New Jersey](#)**
- On Monday, March 16, state officials announced that a third person in New Jersey died because of the virus. **Read more: [3rd Death In New Jersey Due To Coronavirus](#)**
- Murphy announced that he planned to shut down all schools on Tuesday, March 17. **Read more: [NJ Schools Will Close Due To Coronavirus Outbreak: Gov. Murphy](#)**
- New Jersey's courts suspended all new jury trials until further notice, Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said on Thursday, March 12. **Read more: [Coronavirus Throws Monkey Wrench Into New Jersey Court System](#)**
- State Supreme Court Chief Justice Stuart Rabner announced on Saturday, March 14 that municipal court sessions will be suspended for two weeks, beginning Monday, March 16, to mitigate public exposure to COVID-19 coronavirus.
- The New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission said it's closing its offices for two weeks. **Read more: [New Jersey MVC Shuts Down Because Of Coronavirus](#)**
- The New Jersey Department of Corrections is temporarily suspending visits during the outbreak. **Read more: [NJDOC Suspends Visitations To State Prisons and Halfway Houses](#)**
- The state also said it will no longer label the positive tests as "presumptive positive" cases. They are now considered "positive" and "confirmed."
- State Police said they're also looking to locate two FEMA assistance centers – otherwise known as "pods" – where people can be tested. One will be at Bergen Community College in Paramus and the other will be located at the PNC Arts Center on the Garden State Parkway in Holmdel. **Read more: [Coronavirus Drive-Through Testing In Works For NJ](#)**
- Murphy said he's also mobilizing the National Guard to assist, providing services to help bridge "capability gaps," augment the police and local personnel in transportation and traffic control and support facilities such as hospitals that have hit capacity or run into medical and technology problems.

How It Spreads

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person. Someone who is actively sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others. That is why CDC recommends that these patients be isolated either in the hospital or at home (depending on how sick they are) until they are better and no longer pose a risk of infecting others.

There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19.

While the best way to prevent illness is to avoid virus exposure, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention always recommends taking preventive actions to contain the spread of viruses. This includes:

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipes.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://patch.com/new-jersey/gloucestertownship/s/h1xm7/turnpike-parkway-toll-hike-hearings-go-despite-coronavirus>

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Turnpike Authority plows ahead with toll hike, \$24B capital plan

By ***RYAN HUTCHINS***, *Politico*
03/17/2020 07:50 PM EDT

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority is charging ahead with public hearings this week on a proposed toll hike that would raise \$525 million a year and create a massive new capital plan it now says will cost \$24 billion over the next eight years.

Even as President Donald Trump is instructing Americans to avoid gatherings of more than 10 people and parts of New Jersey have begun to issue shelter-in-place directives, the agency that runs the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway says it sees no reason not to begin holding the public hearings.

"We need them in order to fund a capital program that will sustain tens of thousands of jobs in the coming years and help maintain a transportation network that provides a competitive edge for New Jersey in the regional, national, and global economies," spokesperson Thomas Feeney said. "These are uncertain economic times. It's important to move ahead with this process, and we're confident that we can do it responsibly and transparently."

On Tuesday, as Gov. Phil Murphy ordered the closure of all malls and pleaded with the public to practice social distancing amid the rapid spread of coronavirus, the agency quietly dropped its capital plan online [ahead of two required hearings](#) that will take place Wednesday in

Woodbridge and Camden. The authority is postponing one hearing that was scheduled for Thursday at Ramapo College.

The plan, spanning 45 pages, includes a long list of major projects, with 24 on the Turnpike and another 29 on the Parkway. The work ranges from pavement "preservation," lighting upgrades and median barrier improvements to bridge rehabilitations, widening projects and a \$900 million effort to convert all tolls on both highways to E-ZPass and pay-by-mail.

On the Turnpike, the agency wants to widen the roadway between interchanges 1 and 4 and on the Newark Bay–Hudson County extension on the mainline at Interchange 13. On the Parkway, the plan envisions numerous widening projects, as well as the "completion" of 10 interchanges.

To pay for the plan, the agency would raise tolls for the first time in eight years — boosting the usage fees by 27 percent on the Parkway and 36 percent on the Turnpike, applied equally across all the exits.

The authority says the tolls will rise an average of \$1.30 per trip on the Turnpike and 30 cents per trip on the Parkway. The average Turnpike trip costs \$3.50 and the average Parkway trip costs \$1.11. The cost of traveling the entire New Jersey Turnpike would rise from \$13.85 to \$18.85, and the price of traveling the full Parkway would increase from \$8.25 to \$10.45.

The toll hikes would produce about \$525 million in revenue in the first year, but the authority can raise tolls another 3 percent each year. That would produce about \$4.7 billion in revenue over the 8-year capital plan, assuming the current rate of usage.

Feeney said the agency would borrow to cover the remainder of the \$24 billion cost of the projects that's not funded through other sources.

"Most large-scale capital projects are bond-funded," he said. "The bonds are paid back over 30 years. The additional toll revenue pays the debt service."

The agency plans to livestream its public hearings on Wednesday and says it has extended the public comment period until April 23.

"The live stream allows us to continue the process while protecting public health and without limiting public participation," Feeney said.

It's unclear how the livestream would help members of the public who wanted to speak at the hearings, but feel uncomfortable doing so now.

Some were fuming about the Turnpike Authority decision to move ahead with the hearings. Jeff Tittel, the director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, called the move "shameful."

"This rogue and arrogant authority is out of control," Tittel said in a statement. "They don't care if people get sick, they just want to pave and widen their roads. This is a public be damned attitude. Instead of 'let them eat cake' they are saying 'let them wear masks.'"

Murphy, who has claimed to have had little advance knowledge of the toll hikes, did not object to the decision to move ahead with the hearings. The governor has not criticized the plan or offered any robust public comment on the proposal, which would produce more revenue for the state than his twice-rejected millionaire's tax.

Asked about the decision to forge ahead with the toll hikes during the viral outbreak, Murphy said at a press conference Tuesday that he approved of the decision so long as the agency followed his order to not allow more than 50 people to congregate together.

"I have very little insight into those hearings, other than I said it was important to me and us that they not exceed the limits we put in place, and I believe they are, as a result, livestreaming those hearings," Murphy said, not acknowledging the likely decline in public participation.

Turnpike Authority toll money has been tapped in recent years to support NJ Transit, the cash-starved commuter rail and bus agency. The governor's \$39.9 billion proposed budget [continues to divert \\$129 million](#) for that purpose. Senate President Steve [Sweeney has also announced a plan](#) to create a \$500 million annual dedicated funding stream for NJ Transit that would be paid for, in part, by dedicating \$125 million of Turnpike revenue to the agency.

NJ Transit has avoided any fare hikes for several years — a fact the governor has celebrated publicly — as its relied on an increase bucket of state support to pay its bills. The reaction to the coronavirus is likely to have a severe impact on the rail and bus agency; by Monday, ridership was said to be down 40 percent.

Accessed 5/5/20 at this link:

<https://www.politico.com/states/new-jersey/story/2020/03/17/turnpike-authority-plows-ahead-with-toll-hike-24b-capital-plan-1267492>

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NJ Turnpike Authority proposes 36% toll hike amid coronavirus crisis

Colleen Wilson, NorthJersey.com

Published 1:47 p.m. ET March 18, 2020 | Updated 7:39 p.m. ET March 18, 2020

The show must go on — and so, apparently, must the hearings for a proposal to increase tolls on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway.

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority hosted a 1 p.m. in-person hearing in Woodbridge and another in Camden at 6 p.m. Wednesday. Both were livestreamed so the public could watch from home, where people have been advised to stay to avoid spreading the coronavirus.

Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, criticized the agency for going ahead with the meeting when the public is largely staying home to minimize health risks and spreading germs.

"The NJ Turnpike Authority is bulldozing ahead with their public hearings in spite of the public health emergency. This is undemocratic and unsafe and unfair to commuters," Tittel said in a statement.

A number of [municipalities and agencies are navigating the murky legal waters](#) of adhering to public meeting laws while trying to maintain public safety. Some municipalities are rescheduling their public meetings; others experimented with virtual formats and public call-in lines.

Members of the public who attended the Turnpike Authority hearings in person were advised that precautions were being taken to enforce social distancing and sanitizing. The room was sanitized before the hearing started, the microphone was to be sprayed between speakers, and chairs were scattered apart from each other in the room.

Proposed toll hikes on the two major state highways would include a 36% increase on the turnpike and 27% increase on the parkway to support \$24 billion in capital projects over the next 15 to 20 years.

Turnpike Authority tolls last increased in 2012, going up 53% on the turnpike and 50% on the parkway to fund a \$7 billion capital plan, of which the major project was increasing the number of lanes on the turnpike.

The Turnpike Authority also proposes indexing future toll increases, meaning the agency could increase them each year but would cap hikes annually at 3%, avoiding large periodic increases, agency officials said.

A 40% discount for buses would also be standardized across the board.

The hearings come at a time of economic uncertainty and a day after the state unemployment [website crashed as hundreds of thousands have lost their jobs](#) amid the health crisis, with businesses being forced to close.

Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, chairwoman of the Turnpike Authority and commissioner of the state Transportation Department, said the decision to move ahead with the hearings despite the circumstances was, in part, to continue the monthslong process to approve the capital program funding that was started before the coronavirus took hold of the region this month.

"Not unlike other periods of economic downturn, public works projects sustain us in recovery efforts and help to stimulate a lagging economy," Gutierrez-Scaccetti said. "The proposed NJTA capital plan is amongst the strongest economic stimulators for the state of New Jersey."

Almost all of the 16 or so people who spoke at the hearings represented local unions or business organizations, and all supported the proposal because of the steady stream of jobs that would come with it.

"It is critical that this proposal be enacted. It is critical to the condition of our roads, bridges and transit systems, critical to the ability of our residents to travel throughout our state, and critical to the health of our economy," said Joe Fiordaliso, president of the American Council of Engineering Companies of New Jersey.

Dennis Brady, a Matawan resident, asked the agency to consider putting tollbooths up at every parkway entrance and exit, to avoid having people rerouting through neighborhood towns and roads to avoid a highway toll.

"Close the holes and save some local neighborhoods," he said, adding that he's supportive of the toll increases.

Ciro Scalera, a lobbyist and director of governmental affairs for the New Jersey Laborers Employers Cooperation and Education Trust, said in order to keep New Jersey competitive and attractive to businesses it has to keep people moving.

"If we're going to keep our economic competitiveness, if we're going to do the things that need to be done to provide our residents with jobs and safe commuting, then we have to make the kind of investment," said Scalera, a Berkeley Heights resident.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester, [proposed a plan last month that would annually dedicate multiple streams](#) of funding to NJ Transit, including \$125 million from the Turnpike Authority.

"We will examine that request and advise the administration as to what is a sustainable funding amount without jeopardizing any of the very important capital projects presented here today," Gutierrez-Scaccetti said.

Last year, the Transit Authority collected \$1.17 billion in toll revenue; its total operating revenue is \$1.86 billion.

Doug O'Malley, director of Environment New Jersey, said he would have attended a hearing on Wednesday but did not because of the advisories to stay home.

"We're not going to eliminate any traffic by making our highways bigger, and the price tag associated with the capital plan is monstrous," O'Malley said. "This is the time we need to invest in mass transit, especially as NJ Transit's budget is going to be severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic."

About \$16.7 billion of the capital plan would go toward "capacity enhancement," according to the presentation during the hearing.

A 45-page document on the Turnpike Authority's website includes a list of capital projects and investments the money from the increased tolls would fund, including converting to cashless tolling system-wide, investment in other technology like autonomous vehicles, and repairs to roads, bridges and medians.

To provide comments on the Turnpike Authority's plan, email njtapubliccomments@njta.com or mail them to Executive Director, New Jersey Turnpike Authority, 1 Turnpike Plaza, P.O. Box 5042, Woodbridge, NJ 07095. All comments must be submitted before 5 p.m. on April 3.

Here are some highlights from the proposed capital projects:

The most expensive single project in the plan proposes spending \$3.5 billion to build a new Laderman Memorial Bridge over the Passaic River to connect Newark and Kearny, and reconstruct the old one so it will have full shoulders.

Transitioning to an all-electronic tolling system on the parkway and turnpike would cost \$900 million, with planning and design taking 60 months and construction 36 months for each highway system.

A ramp that has been traditionally used only during professional football games or other major events at the Meadowlands complex would be opened for use at all times, and would be called interchange 19W.

A list of goals that went along with the proposed capital plan included investing in technology like predictive traveling and autonomous vehicles. "The Authority will continue to add roadway capacity, where possible; but will also implement technology solutions and modify our business practices to help improve mobility without widening the road," the plan said.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.app.com/story/news/transportation/2020/03/18/turnpike-authority-holds-hearings-toll-hikes-amid-growing-coronavirus-concerns/2863679001/>

NJ had toll hike hearings during pandemic — No opponent showed up to speak

*Michael Symons, New Jersey 101.5
March 18, 2020*

Sixteen people spoke about proposed toll hikes on New Jersey's two biggest toll roads, all of them in favor, at two public hearings held Wednesday amid a worldwide pandemic and social distancing that has ground the economy nearly to a halt.

Eleven people spoke at an afternoon hearing in Woodbridge and six at an evening one in Sicklerville. One person spoke at both. Most of the speakers represented unions or business organizations directly involved in transportation construction who back the \$24 billion in projects the plan would support.

Nobody opposed the hikes, though one resident at the afternoon hearing said more should be done to prevent drivers from entering or exiting by neighborhoods like his in places where they can avoid toll plazas.

Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti acknowledged the questions about proceeding with the hearings and toll hikes but said the economic uncertainty is a reason to move ahead with a plan long in the works that would sustain tens of thousands of jobs.

"Today we are experiencing the economic impact of COVID-19. Not unlike other periods of economic downturn, public works projects sustain us in recovery efforts and help to stimulate a lagging economy," she said. "The proposed NJTA capital plan is among the strongest economic stimulators for the state of New Jersey."

Others speakers concurred. Joe Fiordaliso, president of the American Council of Engineering Companies of New Jersey, said it's critical that the proposal be enacted by the Turnpike Authority board.

"You know, in light of everything we're dealing with in our nation at the moment, I do wish the timing of this hearing were different, as you indicated, Madam Chair," Fiordaliso said. "However our capital needs just can't wait."

Anthony Attanasio, president of Hawk Strategies and a former DOT assistant commissioner, said it's important to infuse money into the economy at a time of such uncertainty.

"Transportation investment is – and I'm biased – arguably the most important thing we can be doing in society. Health care, education and infrastructure, core elements of government," Attanasio said.

The authority says the average New Jersey Turnpike toll would increase from \$3.50 to \$4.80. The average toll on the Garden State Parkway would go from \$1.11 to \$1.41. Starting in 2022, tolls could increase with the rate of inflation, though no more than 3% a year.

Zoe Baldwin, director of government affairs and communications for the Utility and Transportation Contractors Association of New Jersey, said no one likes to pay more but everyone wants a better, faster commute.

"We're also very much in support of the increases being indexed to inflation but subject to a reasonable cap," Baldwin said. "This is a common-sense fiscal policy that was applied to the gas tax and should be applied here."

The plan calls for making permanent an Interchange 19W with direct access to the Meadowlands Sports Complex and the American Dream mall and entertainment complex without using Route 3. Gutierrez-Scaccetti said that's now available only when football is played at MetLife Stadium.

The biggest part of the plan is for \$16.7 billion in projects increasing the capacity of the toll roads, including widening the turnpike between Interchange 1 and 4, widening the Newark Bay extension between Interchanges 14 and 14C and widening the parkway between exits 80 and 83, 98 and 125 and 129 and 153. More than 40 projects are listed in all, 11 of them systemwide.

"These projects all replace and upgrade infrastructure that is well over 50 years old," said Greg Le Frois, a project manager for HNTB Corporation, the authority's engineering consulting firm. "They will improve mobility for commuters and truckers alike and provide a significant infusion of jobs into New Jersey."

Jerry Keenan, executive vice president of the New Jersey Alliance for Action, said the proposal will set up generations of economic success for state residents.

"This is really a day that will go down in history. It really is," Keenan said. "It's a dramatic, dramatic day. It reminds me of when they first got together to talk about let's build the George Washington Bridge, or let's build the Lincoln Tunnel."

The Turnpike Authority has extended its period for accepting written comments on the plan to Friday, April 3, due to the disruptions from the novel coronavirus.

Comments can be mailed to: Executive Director, New Jersey Turnpike Authority, 1 Turnpike Plaza, P.O. Box 5042, Woodbridge, NJ 07095. They can also be emailed to NJTAPublicComments@njta.com.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://nj1015.com/nj-had-toll-hike-hearings-during-pandemic-no-opponent-showed-up-to-speak/>

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Toll-Hike Plan for Turnpike, Parkway Gets Mixed Reviews

JOHN REITMEYER | MARCH 19, 2020 | NJ SPOTLIGHT

A plan to hike tolls on both the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike to help fund a \$24 billion highway expansion and maintenance campaign received vocal support from organized labor and the construction industry during public hearings held Wednesday.

But others who did not attend the hearings — which were held despite an ongoing state of emergency ordered statewide amid the coronavirus outbreak — raised several concerns about a plan to raise tolls across all vehicle classes by 36% for the turnpike and 27% for the parkway.

Critics, including a prospective Republican gubernatorial candidate in 2021, questioned holding the hearings during the health care emergency.

They also suggested attendance among the general public was likely depressed by statements Gov. Phil Murphy has been making about residents needing to stay home as much as possible [during the outbreak](#). President Donald Trump has also asked that any gatherings be no larger than 10 people at a time.

In all, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority (NJTA) [toll-hike proposal](#) calls for as much as \$24 billion in spending over 15 to 20 years, dwarfing the \$7 billion capital program that the agency has been working under for roughly the past decade.

The agency, which operates both toll roads, last raised tolls about a decade ago.

Major projects

The funding, raised by what the agency is calling "toll adjustments," would be used to underwrite a range of major projects, according to a [45-page summary](#) of the capital program the agency posted online. A series of parkway widening projects will cost more than \$5 billion, and a series of turnpike widening projects will run another \$6 billion. The capital plan also calls

for a \$2.86-billion bridge-replacement initiative spanning both highways, and \$900 million to ensure all toll plazas on both roads can accommodate electronic tolling or pay-by-mail.

Wednesday's two public hearings, held in Woodbridge in Middlesex County and Sicklerville in Camden County, were scheduled as a required precursor to the toll hikes being enacted. If the NJTA board eventually approves it, the toll for the average trip on the turnpike would rise from \$3.50 to \$4.80, and the average toll for parkway motorists would go from \$1.11 up to \$1.41. In addition, the NJTA is seeking to implement an indexing policy that would allow tolls to be raised by up to 3% annually, starting in 2022.

While questions were raised leading up to the hearings about whether it was a good idea to still take public comment on the new finance proposals amid the [state of emergency](#) Murphy ordered earlier this month, officials on Wednesday highlighted special accommodations that were made, including livestreams of both hearings that were made available on the turnpike authority's [website](#).

The NJTA is also accepting comments online via email at NJTAPublicComments@njta.com.

Investing in economy, infrastructure

State Department of Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti said during remarks at both hearings that the NJTA's capital investment proposal would help maintain New Jersey's competitive edge in the regional and global commercial marketplace. She also pitched the roadwork funded by the toll hikes as a potential fiscal stimulus during a time of major economic uncertainty, with the potential for creating thousands of jobs.

"The transportation network must continue to be strengthened, whether in good times or in tough times," she said.

When the hearing in Woodbridge shifted to public comments, Gerald Keenan, executive vice president of the New Jersey Alliance for Action, a coalition of labor and business groups that advocates for infrastructure investment, praised the NJTA officials as visionaries for drafting such an ambitious plan.

"This is really a day that will go down in history," Keenan said.

Roadwork is 'critical'

Joseph A. Fiordaliso, president of the American Council of Engineering Companies of New Jersey, also backed the NJTA's plans while saying he wished the timing of the hearing would have been different.

"It is critical that this proposal be enacted," Fiordaliso said.

During the hearing in Camden, John Robinson of the Carpenters Local 255 labor union was among several labor organization officials who urged adoption of the NJTA plan.

"We stand in support of this as it will create good jobs for our members and make our roads safer," he said.

James Mellett, an engineer with Berlin-based Churchill Consulting Engineers, also praised the agency and its new capital plan.

"This is something that is going to carry the state through a hard time," Mellett said.

'Irresponsible and undemocratic'

But even as the NJTA proposals drew accolades from those who attended the hearings, not everyone was pleased to see the agency moving forward on Wednesday.

Former state Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli — a Republican who has already declared himself as a 2021 gubernatorial candidate — took to social media to criticize Murphy after the governor told reporters on Tuesday that he had no problem with the public hearings being held as long as they were streamed online and the NJTA collected online comments. Murphy, as governor, has the power to cancel the toll hikes or scale them back, and Ciattarelli said all residents have a right to provide input publicly.

"Around the state, government meetings are being postponed and businesses are being forced to close down, yet Gov. Murphy approves of toll hearings taking place this week? Conducting these hearings in the midst of an international life-and-death pandemic is outrageous and wrong," Ciattarelli said.

Jeff Tittel, New Jersey director of the Sierra Club, said in a phone interview that his group's members would have attended the hearings if weren't for rules preventing them from participating in such gatherings amid a still-spreading pandemic.

Going forward with the hearings, even with online accommodations, was "irresponsible and undemocratic," Tittel said.

Bad timing

Regina Egea, president of Garden State Initiative, a right-leaning think tank based in Morristown, was also reached by phone. She questioned why the finance plan was being advanced at this time when financial projections are likely going to need to be revised in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, which some are suggesting will cause a recession.

"I'm sure the turnpike (authority) is going to need a capital plan," Egea said. "It's just the thoughtlessness in the short term of not taking a step back to reconsider."

Several people also connected with NJ Spotlight via Twitter on Wednesday to weigh in on the toll-hike proposal, including Brad Van Arnum of West Windsor.

"Glancing at the numbers . . . it does seem like the Turnpike toll increase is perhaps more than it should be, but the Parkway increase seems pretty reasonable," Van Arnum said.

"Raising money for capital projects is essential, and even with the new uncertainty of the coronavirus, I would rather see the Turnpike Authority have the money it needs long-term," he said. "So, count me as a supporter, though a lower Turnpike hike, or at least a slower phase-in, would be better."

Submit comments through April 3

The NJTA's deadline for submitting comments on the proposed toll hikes and capital program has been extended to 5 p.m., April 3.

In addition to emailed comments, the agency is accepting written comments by mail, courier or hand delivery, addressed to: Executive Director, New Jersey Turnpike Authority, 1 Turnpike Plaza, P.O. Box 5042, Woodbridge, NJ 07095.

NJTA spokesman Tom Feeny said the agency had received about 900 emailed comments as of 1 p.m. Wednesday. He also said the earliest the NJTA board could approve of the toll hikes would be April 28. According to NJTA rules, a public hearing must be held at least 45 days before any toll hikes can be levied.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.njspotlight.com/2020/03/toll-hike-plan-for-turnpike-parkway-gets-mixed-reviews/>

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NJ Turnpike Authority holds toll hike hearings despite coronavirus outbreak

By: David Hutter and Daniel J. Munoz

NJBiz

March 19, 2020 7:10 am

New Jersey's top transportation officials on Wednesday defended their decision to hold a hearing during the coronavirus outbreak, on what would be the first toll increase in nearly a decade for the state's two most heavily traveled highways.

That comes as Gov. Phil Murphy implements a ban on events with more than 50 people and U.S. President Donald Trump recommends gatherings stay below 10 people, all in a bid to starve the virus of in-person contact, which could provide it with new hosts.

Wednesday's hearing at the Woodbridge headquarters of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority – which oversees the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike, where tolls would be raised – featured a slate of labor unions and construction trade groups who all spoke in favor of the proposed increases.

No one at the meeting one spoke to oppose raising the tolls.

"We are experiencing the economic impact of COVID19. Not unlike periods of economic downturn, public works projects" help "economic recovery efforts," Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti said in her opening remarks at the hearing. "The proposed... capital plan is amongst the strongest economic stimulators in the state of New Jersey."

The increase would finance multi-year capital upgrades valued at \$24 billion for the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike, according to an NJTA presentation.

On average, tolls would go from \$3.50 to \$4.80 on the Turnpike and \$1.11 to \$1.41 on the Parkway. That would generate roughly \$525 million more each year for the agency, which currently makes \$1.6 billion from tolls annually, said NJTA spokesperson Thomas Feeney.

Increases would be indexed starting after 2022—meaning they would increase with the cost of living and inflation, capped at 3 percent a year.

Stop ahead, pay toll

Murphy declared a public health emergency on March 9 as COVID-19 began to spread across the state. Since then, the governor has ordered the cancellation of all events with more than 50 people, and the closure of most retail, hospitality and entertainment businesses.

But at his daily coronavirus press conference, the governor did not object to the NJTA's style of doing business.

"I don't know that I've got a strongly held opinion," Murphy said. "I did ask that two things be considered ... which is that they be livestreamed ... that the comment period be extended, given what we're going through."

The main hearing room had 50 people, and "another 30 or 40" in overflow rooms where the hearing was televised, Feeney said.

"With live streaming and an extended period for the public to submit comments as part of the hearing record, we believe we will be able to protect public health without limiting public participation," he said in a statement. "People will be able to learn about the proposal and make their feelings known without having the sole option of attending the meeting in person."

Still, Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, an environmental advocacy group, called the decision to hold the hearing amid the outbreak "shameful."

"This rogue and arrogant authority is out of control. The fact that the Turnpike Authority is going forward with these hearings in the middle of a crisis and public health emergency is deplorable," Tittel said in a statement. "They are live streaming the meetings, but this does not allow for public comments and many people don't have computers or are busy taking care of their families during this public health emergency."

Tolls last increased in 2012, going up 53 percent for the Turnpike and 50 percent of the Parkway, in order to fund a \$7 billion capital plan.

The 45-page plan calls for 24 long and short-term projects for the Turnpike and 29 projects for the Parkway, which would range in length from less than two years to a decade.

It includes a \$900 million plan to implement cashless tolling, and calls for lane-widening projects, pavement "preservation," bridge rehabilitation, median barrier improvement and the addition of a tolled Exit 19W near the Meadowlands sports complex.

Part of the budget Murphy laid out in February, and the New Jersey Transit financing plan that Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-3rd District, introduced, both call for moving tens of millions of dollars from the Turnpike Authority to plug holes at the transit agency. The end-game for both plans is to avoid a fare increase for commuters.

A second hearing will be held on March 25 at Camden County College at 6 p.m. The public comment period has been extended until April 3 at 5 p.m.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://njbiz.com/nj-turnpike-authority-holds-toll-hike-hearings-despite-coronavirus-outbreak/>

Turnpike Authority Hearings: An Insult to the Intelligence of the Public

By Fred Snowflack | Columnist | March 19, 2020, 1:29 pm | InsiderNJ

Amid an escalating medical crisis, it's "comforting" to know how determined some in the great Garden State are to conduct business as usual.

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority went through with plans to hold two public hearings on Wednesday on proposed Turnpike and Parkway toll hikes. These hearings ensued while just about all other meetings and public gatherings across the state are being postponed.

We have all seen news reports of mindless Spring Breakers cavorting on the beach in Florida, in effect giving the medical community a big "screw you."

Similarly, that's precisely how Turnpike officials are treating New Jersey motorists. It is unfathomable to think people would be up for commenting on any public issue when the state is virtually locked-down.

The plan is to raise Turnpike tolls 36 percent and Parkway tolls 27 percent to fund about \$24 billion in capital improvements over the next 20 years.

The wisdom of that idea is not the issue. Reasonable people understand revenue must periodically increase. The issue is holding hearings when no one – or just about no one – is paying attention.

Gov. Phil Murphy has other things on his mind these days. That can explain his rather dismissive attitude when he was questioned about this on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The governor urged a livestream of the hearings, which did occur, and also said room capacity would have to be limited to 50.

Unfortunately, Murphy refrained from saying something short and sweet like this:

"Holding public hearings now is ridiculous and the Turnpike Authority should postpone them."

And the governor did not bite when a questioner suggested the authority sees the crisis as the perfect time to "ram through" a toll increase.

Of course, the history of such things is illustrative of the “business as usual” approach.

Many recall that back in 2011, a steep toll hike on Port Authority bridges and tunnels was announced on a Friday afternoon in August. And multiple public hearings on the proposal were held in September – most of them on the same day.

This sordid episode, which was orchestrated by both governors Christie and Cuomo, raised tolls \$1 a year until they reached \$15.

Moving back to today, Diane Gutierrez-Scacetti, the state’s DOT commissioner, has been quoted as saying that capital projects must move quickly because we are entering a presumed economic downturn.

So it’s vital for the authority to get more toll revenue.

This is poppycock. If one wants to bring the coronavirus into the mix, how about the possibility a massive federal stimulus may be available to help fund these very projects?

In fact, Rep. Frank Pallone said as much in a briefing with the press on Wednesday.

What should be more annoying than the hearings themselves is the refusal of the authority to admit it is using a health crisis to limit attention and criticism.

Why insult the intelligence of the public?

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.insidernj.com/turnpike-authority-hearings-insult-intelligence-public/>

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Exclusive: NJ DOT commissioner talks proposed turnpike toll hikes and \$24B in projects

Colleen Wilson | NorthJersey.com | March 26, 2020

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority held publicly attended hearings, which were also livestreamed, last week as the coronavirus outbreak continued to escalate in the state.

The public was asked to weigh in on the agency’s proposal to increase tolls on the Turnpike and Garden State Parkway, index the fare increases and approve a \$24 billion capital plan.

Colleen Wilson of The Record and NorthJersey.com interviewed Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, chairwoman of the authority and commissioner of the Department of Transportation. The following is a condensed and lightly edited version of that interview.

Question: Are you concerned public participation was limited during the public hearings because people were not necessarily able to come in person and raise their concerns amid the governor’s work-from-home order?

Answer: If you look back to just the hearings we had for the toll increase in 2012, the hearings we had in 2008, the maximum number of speakers we had at any of them — there were three — I think was 34. And then the other two were less. That was raising tolls almost 95% on two roadways. [This year] we have gotten, I want to say, over 1,000 pieces of mail. So I don't think that it's limited people's ability to publicly comment, and that's email and U.S. mail.

Q: Will tolls be suspended or lowered while people are facing economic hardship, loss of business, loss of jobs, during this pandemic?

A: As far as I know that it's not been discussed as of this moment in time, but as you know, it is a dynamic situation that we're in. But that has not been raised as a topic at this moment in time.

Q: Is there an idea of when the toll increases would go into effect, and what else has to happen as part of the process there?

A: Under the statute, we have a minimum of 45 days from the date of the last hearing to the date we can implement tolls, but we've not set a firm date as to when tolls would be implemented. So really taking it step by step, we have to wait for the public comment period to conclude on April 3. And then after that we will begin the process of preparing a report, but we certainly can't conclude that process until we have all public comments in, and respond to the comments that have been raised. And then after that it would just be a decision about when it is appropriate to provide it to the governor's authorities unit for their review. The governor has to preapprove the increase before it can be voted on by the board.

Q: Can you walk me through the proposal to index tolls instead of doing a large increase every number of years?

A: The way the Turnpike Authority has managed capital is to do a sizable increase, get a lot of work done, stop. Do a sizable increase, get a bunch of work done, stop. And one of the biggest criticisms we get, especially from the credit rating agencies, is the fact that our process for capital improvement is truly politically driven. And so indexing is a fairly popular way in the tolling industry of managing the increased costs that we face over time, and the ability to continue to maintain capital improvements seamlessly with very little impact on a household budget. And so this would give people a little bit more certainty that they weren't going to be hit with these large-number toll increases every five, six, seven years. And if you look across the country, many toll facilities index their tolls now to make it a little bit more predictable for the work that they need to do, and certainly a little bit more predictable for the customer.

Q: In 2009, the 10-year capital plan was \$7 billion. Now the authority is proposing a \$24 billion plan. Why did the capital plan proposal jump so significantly?

A: So, if you ask me today, could you run a \$24 billion capital program in 10 years? The answer would be no, it just it's not feasible. But the whole point here is to not have an end date on projects. The Turnpike Authority developed a strategic plan — actually it was being developed before Governor Murphy took office, before I got here — and that long-term capital program had a view of maybe 20 or 30 years. That's why the number is so much different, and that's why it looks different than what we've done in the past. Because in the past, we confined ourselves to money and time, and what we're trying to do here is make it a little bit smoother so projects continue to run, and we don't have large gaps in getting important work done.

Q: There isn't a lot of mention in the strategic plan about goals to improve the agency's green practices or investments. Can speak to this: How you grapple with being more green but then also expanding capacity and traffic?

A: We're always going to have cars and trucks — hopefully they'll be electric at some point in time — but we're always going to be moving people and goods on pavement at some level. I just think that that's a reality. We're actively working on the full electrification of the [state] transportation passenger fleet and light-duty fleet. We have a project right now that involves the Turnpike Authority, South Jersey Transportation Authority, New Jersey Transit, and the New Jersey DOT to develop both the infrastructure and the specifications for the vehicles that we would need to flip out our whole passenger and light-duty fleet to electric. And so we're thinking in those regards. And again, a capacity improvement on the parkway may not mean new pavement from 129 to 152, it may mean something very different. It may mean that we look at some type of bus rapid transit systems or other transit opportunities that could help create less congestion but move more people. We just have to think that way, and no it's not been in the turnpike's mindset to do that. But, you know, the Senate president has called on the turnpike to continue to provide money to NJ Transit, and if we're going to do that, we can't be providing them money to go in one direction while the turnpike is going in a different direction. I've had people say that I shouldn't be the chair of all those agencies. And I would argue, to you, that having a consistency of a chair allows someone to see the whole picture, see what's happening there and then find a way to be the thread that brings them together to build the best transportation system, not just the one that's best for that particular agency. So we should be working together, and we are. We should be collaborating on projects, and we are.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.northjersey.com/restricted/?return=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.northjersey.com%2Fstory%2Fnews%2Ftransportation%2F2020%2F03%2F26%2Fnj-dot-commissioner-proposed-nj-turnpike-toll-hikes-projects%2F5079367002%2F>

Legislators seek halt to toll increases during health crisis

By David Wildstein, March 28 2020 1:58 pm, New Jersey Globe

Three Monmouth County legislators want the state to hit the pause button on hearings and plans to hike tolls on the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike during the coronavirus crisis.

"We are in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic that threatens our health and economy — now is not the time for Trenton to conduct 'business as usual' across the state and push through this unneeded policy while everyone is distracted," said State Sen. Declan O'Scanlon (R-Little Silver), Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso (R-Holmdel) and Assemblyman Gerald Scharfenberger (R-Middletown).

The Republican lawmakers said a toll increase “is not only highly inappropriate, but egregious to continue these controversial and costly plans that will only serve to increase the hardships New Jerseyans are bearing which will undoubtedly only grow over the coming months.”

“We should not and cannot increase the weight they are carrying. So let’s be clear and pull these proposals right now,” the legislators said.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://newjerseyglobe.com/legislature/legislators-seek-halt-to-toll-increases-during-health-crisis/>

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State letting lockdown diminish public oversight of big toll hikes

Editorial | Press of Atlantic City | March 30, 2020

A 2018 report from the Pew Charitable Trusts warned motorists that states were turning to toll roads “to fill treasuries and manage traffic.” It said the large toll increases were driven by stagnant revenue from gasoline taxes.

But although New Jersey increased its gas tax substantially in 2016 and set it to increase automatically from then on, the state is jacking up tolls on its major highways anyway.

While Gov. Phil Murphy and the Legislature could reduce, postpone or reject the increases, quasi-independent state authorities have done the dirty work of setting their size and proposing them — without sufficient independent outside auditing to inspire confidence that the public isn’t badly overpaying for highway improvements and maintenance.

And now, thanks to Murphy’s COVID-19 lockdown of the state to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, the public will have even less input on the biggest toll hikes ever.

Even though state residents have been ordered to remain at home and avoid unnecessary travel and contact, the South Jersey Transportation Authority is proceeding with public hearings Wednesday and Thursday, April 1 and 2, on its proposal to increase Atlantic City Expressway tolls by nearly 40%.

Credit state Sen. Chris Brown, R-Atlantic, for calling them out on this blatant disregard of the public’s role and interests. He said it was “unfair and unreasonable to expect the public to fully evaluate SJTA’s plan and offer substantive comment” during the pandemic emergency.

Assemblyman Vince Mazzeo, D-Atlantic, said the public hearings should be postponed and like Brown questioned whether a toll increase of such size made sense during this period of massive layoffs and looming recession.

The SJTA seems to be following the playbook of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority. While the public was consumed with the spread of disease in the state and nation and the steps taken to combat it, the NJTA proposed a 27% toll increase on the Garden State Parkway and at 36% increase on the N.J. Turnpike. It canceled one public hearing and proceeded with two others (Camden being the nearest), streaming them online.

What's worse, both authorities proposed automatic toll increases forever — 3% every year. That's more than 50% higher than the inflation rate the past decade, which is supposed to reflect the typical increase in the cost of goods and services. That sounds like a plan to create a increasing pile of money to be divided up by bureaucrats and the construction industry.

The projects to be funded by the toll hikes, mostly road widening and electronic tolling upgrades, may be needed and worthwhile. The SJTA plans to finally connect the expressway to Atlantic City International Airport, a long-sought improvement.

But the public hearings and toll proposals should be postponed. State officials can't let the pandemic reduce the insufficient scrutiny of them even further.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

https://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/opinion/editorials/state-letting-lockdown-diminish-public-oversight-of-big-toll-hikes/article_c8de4835-b872-51b1-b431-01611b445f1e.html

Lawmakers to Murphy: Put off N.J. toll increases until coronavirus crisis ends

Updated Mar 30, 2020; Posted Mar 30, 2020

By [Larry Higgs](#) / [NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

Six Republican state lawmakers and a congressman asked Gov. Phil Murphy to delay the process to approve toll increases on the states three toll roads until after the [coronavirus](#) pandemic is over.

"No one can make a sound argument this process is okay," State Senator Declan O'Scanlon, R-Monmouth, said. "The governor and the commissioner have the ability to stop it (until after the COVID-19 crisis is over) and have a reasonable debate with the people who are going to pay for it."

The [New Jersey Turnpike Authority](#) held two public hearings on March 18 and 19 that were live streamed and a vote could be held on April 28. The [South Jersey Transportation Authority](#) plans to livestream three toll increase hearings this week, where people can phone in and comment by following [instructions on the updated public notice](#).

O'Scanlon was joined by Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso, and Assemblyman Gerry Scharfenberger, all R-Monmouth and Senator Jim Holzapfel and Assemblymen Greg McGuckin and John Catalano, all R-Ocean, asked Gov. Phil Murphy and Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti to temporarily halt the toll increase process.

While the toll increase process meets the letter of the law, it fails to meet the spirit of the law, O'Scanlon said. That's because people who would normally be involved are preoccupied with how the coronavirus outbreak is affecting them economically or medically, he said.

"It's about public confidence in government ... There shouldn't be any major policy decisions made, especially when revenue is to be raised," O'Scanlon said. "They (toll road authorities) need to accept the things that can't be dealt with now, just the way we have to."

During his [Monday press briefing](#), Murphy was asked if he would postpone the South Jersey Transportation Authority hearings.

"When asked for my vote, I said stream these (hearings), no physical gatherings and give a toll-free number with a person to take peoples comment and extend the comment period," Murphy said. "Those were my most salient concerns."

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority [email comment](#) period closes on April 3. The South Jersey Transportation Authority [email comment](#) period was extended to April 20.

The [NJ Sierra Club](#) and a coalition of other environmental groups which also sent Murphy a letter asking him to stop the process that they called "undemocratic and unsafe and unfair to commuters."

The [National Motorist's Association](#) (NMA) also criticized the process and [asked drivers to email their toll increase comments](#) to the authority, even if they only have time to dash out a few sentences instead of a magnum opus.

"For both of these authorities, their non-transparent attempts, to put forth a new capital plan and associated toll hikes to pay for it, is the real tragedy, but I guess they are going by the "better to ask for forgiveness than permission" approach," Steve Carrellas, NMA state chapter policy director, said. "Whatever the case and whatever the need, they have been caught red handed."

U.S. Rep Jeff Van Drew, R-NJ, joined the chorus Monday evening asking for the hearing to be put off.

"South Jersey is hurting. The last thing we need right now are more proposals and hearings on how politicians from Trenton can best punish our citizens even more," Van Drew said in a statement. "Every ounce of resources in our state should be focused on defeating the hidden enemy we all have in common: COVID-19. I am asking that the SJTA cancel these hearings now."

Turnpike Authority officials argued that the \$24 billion capital program would translate to a needed economic stimulus project for the state in the wake of the economic effects of the coronavirus.

It could raise tolls on the Turnpike by 36 percent and by 27 percent on the Parkway. That means \$1.50 tolls at most Parkway toll plazas could increase to \$1.90 and the average New Jersey Turnpike toll would raise by \$1.30. Drivers using the AC Expressway could see a 37% toll increase.

Both authorities would index annual toll increases to an unspecified economic indicator starting in 2022 that would be capped at three percent a year.

But the increase could have a detrimental economic effect on residents who may have lost jobs or have a struggling small business, O'Scanlon said. Those issues and not the impending toll increase are the top thing on their minds, he said.

"We need people to have an ability to physically participate and be mentally able to address these issues," O'Scanlon said

The South Jersey Transportation Authority is proceeding on a similar track, with three public hearings scheduled on April 1 and 2 this week. Public comments can also be made by email or mail until April 20. Tolls were last increased in 2008

The Turnpike Authority canceled one of three hearings and live streamed the others, but there was no interactive method offered for people to comment. Those [hearings and capital plan presentations](#) can be watched on line, officials said.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.nj.com/coronavirus/2020/03/lawmakers-to-murphy-put-off-nj-toll-increases-until-coronavirus-crisis-ends.html>

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Is N.J. Trying to Sneak in Toll Hikes During Pandemic Crisis?

By [Daniel Nee](#) | March 31, 2020
Brick Shorebeat

Toll hikes on the Garden State Parkway, which local officials for years have said disproportionately affect Ocean County, could be approved amidst the coronavirus pandemic when residents are unable to attend hearings, a group of local legislators said.

State Sen. Jim Holzapfel and Assemblymen Greg McGuckin and John Catalano (all R-Ocean) released a statement calling for the halt of hearings and plans to increase tolls during the ongoing COVID-19 emergency. Hearings were held March 18, as the pandemic's wrath was just emerging in New Jersey, with little turnout to consider toll increases on the Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike. This week, online hearings will be held for similar plans for the Atlantic City Expressway.

A vote is planned for April 28 on the Parkway toll hikes. Tolls would be raised an average of 27 percent on the Parkway and over 30 percent on the Turnpike. Expressway tolls could increase by

a staggering 50 percent. The hearings also include proposals to make toll increases automatic each year up to 3 percent to keep up with inflation.

"We call on Governor Phil Murphy, the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Transportation, and the New Jersey Turnpike Authority Chair Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti to immediately stop any hearings, plans or discussions to increase our Parkway or Turnpike tolls at this time," the lawmakers wrote in their letter. "We are in the middle of a state-wide public health emergency that caused a massive economic fallout and thousands of jobs terminated. The timing couldn't be any worse for these hearings and we are vehemently against any increases at this time."

The Turnpike Authority (which also oversees the Parkway) did not offer any interactive way for the public to comment on its meetings that were broadcast online. Now, however, comments are being accepted via e-mail to NJTAPublicComments@njta.com or by postal mail or courier to:

Executive Director
New Jersey Turnpike Authority
1 Turnpike Plaza
P.O. Box 5042
Woodbridge, NJ, 07095

"We want our residents to have a proper say in any potential toll hikes that will affect the lives of commuters and businesses throughout the state," the letter went on to say. "It's the wrong time, period. These hearings must be stopped now."

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<http://brick.shorebeat.com/2020/03/is-n-j-trying-to-sneak-in-toll-hikes-during-pandemic-crisis/>

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Democracy in the COVID Era, Jersey style | Editorial

The Star-Ledger | Updated Apr 02, 2020; Posted Apr 02, 2020

There is a statute in New Jersey known as the [Sunshine Law](#), which gives the public the right to access hearings conducted by any committee, commission or council that performs a government function. Not surprisingly, the meetings that draw the most public participation are about toll hikes and fare hikes.

So it should go without saying that the best time to hold hearings involving huge toll hikes on the Turnpike and Parkway is not when New Jerseyans are stuck in their homes by state decree and terrified about what a global pandemic might do to their jobs, their families, and their lives.

Yet that's what the [Turnpike Authority](#) did a few weeks ago. Gov. Murphy had already ordered schools closed and slapped a ban on high-volume events when the Authority announced its \$24 billion capital plan, so with opposition essentially eliminated from the process, the Authority held two hearings on March 18.

Remarkably, the few people who showed up expressed their delight with a plan to raise the average Turnpike toll from \$3.50 to \$4.80 and hike the average Parkway toll from \$1.11 to \$1.41. Not surprisingly, nearly all of those people represented the construction and transportation trades and their affiliated unions.

But if you objected to the toll increases, you probably watched mutely from your laptop via livestream, without any call-in option to raise that objection.

Behold: Democracy in the age of COVID, Jersey style.

This doesn't mean the Authority doesn't need funding to fix our main arteries — nobody doubts that both need an extensive bridge replacement program, which will cost \$2.8 billion alone. Ditto for the South Jersey Transportation Authority, which was no less stealthy: The SJTA, also under Gov. Murphy's control, began public hearings with a call-in option Wednesday (another is scheduled for Thursday), but the details about their toll plan weren't posted on their website until Monday.

Given our present circumstances, how many people were tracking the [SJTA's intention](#) to jack the toll on the [Atlantic City Expressway](#) by a whopping 47 percent? Shouldn't the Harrah's minimum-wage casino cashier driving in from Deptford five times a week be given more notice that her commute will cost her another \$1,000 each year?

And when did \$16.7 billion budgeted specifically for Turnpike and Parkway road-widening become such a priority that we don't even discuss what that money could do for public transit projects, such as the Gateway Tunnel?

[This is not transparency](#). Even Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen) agrees, "It would seem that these hearings should not take place in this manner at this troubled time."

[Sen. Declan O'Scanlon](#) (R-Monmouth) is more blunt: "We have gone years without a capital program. And we can't wait another month or two? Give me a break," he said. "I have an acute understanding of infrastructure and the value of maintaining it. But even I haven't had a chance to look at this, and people who are panicked about their job and families probably haven't, either. This is ridiculous."

Department of Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, the thoughtful chair of both Authorities, admits that most of the Turnpike projects are long-range, but "at least a dozen" could begin as soon as funding is available. We can also appreciate her argument that these projects sustain economic development and thousands of jobs.

But those short-range fixes — "median barrier replacements, lighting and sign improvements, and bridge and drainage system upgrades" — could wait a few months while we all try to regain our sanity and propriety.

Regardless of a toll hike's merit, this is no time for the administration to treat taxpayers like drop-ins from the local wingnut outrage committee.

The governor has a lot on his plate, but here's the easiest task he'll have this week: He should invalidate the minutes from these hearings, effectively postponing discussions on toll hikes while all stakeholders are given a chance to catch up.

Transportation was supposed to be a priority for this administration, and the public has never been more invested in this issue — particularly with regard to public transit, which should be part of any discussion that involves the increase of traffic congestion and greenhouse gases. These agencies are obligated to make time for the widest possible public participation, and the month a pandemic crashes into our state is not that time.

Accessed 5/4/20 at this link:

<https://www.nj.com/opinion/2020/04/democracy-in-the-covid-era-jersey-style-editorial.html>

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N.J. transportation boss rebuts critics who say it's wrong to hold toll hearings during coronavirus

*By Larry Higgs | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com
Posted Apr 03, 2020*

Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti fired back at critics Thursday who said the agency shouldn't have held hearings on a proposal toll increase and \$500 million capital plan on the Atlantic City Expressway during the coronavirus crisis.

The commissioner departed from her usual remarks at the opening of a third and final public hearing that was being live streamed Thursday night.

"We don't take lightly the emergent nature of COVID-19," Gutierrez-Scaccetti said. "Moving forward with these hearings is not meant to be tone-deaf or to limit participation of the public."

Seven state legislators and U.S. Rep Jeff Van Drew, R-NJ, questioned why the hearings were held as the coronavirus outbreak peaks and called on Gov. Phil Murphy to postpone the hearings until after the health crisis is over.

State Senate Majority leader Loretta Weinberg, D-Bergen, also questioned the timing in an NJ.com editorial, in which she wrote, "it would seem that these hearings should not take place in this manner at this troubled time."

Gutierrez-Scaccetti said she believed the livestream call-in format of the Expressway toll hearings gave more people the opportunity to participate than the number who would have attended an in-person hearing.

Although earlier toll increase hearings for the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway held in mid-March, those didn't offer comment by phone capability. The hearing videos received 400 hits, which was a record for participation in her 30-years in transportation, she said.

"We are going to church by video, having court by video and conduct meetings by video," she said. "If anything...the new normal, out of COVID-19, may be virtual participation and limiting large public gatherings."

The mail and email public comment period ends at 5 p.m. Friday, April 3, for the New Jersey Turnpike Authority's toll increase and \$24 billion capital plan. The email comment period on the South Jersey Turnpike Authority's toll increase and \$500 million capital plan ends on April 20.

Gutierrez-Scaccetti reiterated earlier comments that the \$500 million capital plan would serve as an economic stimulus once the coronavirus crisis has abated.

While critics argue the process can be put on hold, she said, "I can promise you, as sure as I'm sitting in this seat that those that same individuals" will criticize the toll agencies for not getting important construction jobs on the street fast enough.

"When we flatten the curve (of coronavirus growth), attention will turn to strengthening the economy, we'll be able to use these investments," Gutierrez-Scaccetti said.

While some commenters suggested waiting for a \$2 trillion infrastructure plan that was mentioned by President Donald Trump this week, toll agencies might not be included in that package, she said.

Both toll agencies are supported by toll revenue and neither receive funding from the state gas tax, she said.

Neither the Expressway or Parkway and Turnpike capital plans can move forward until the hearing and public comment period are over, she said.

"This is not an easy time, government must go on," Gutierrez-Scaccetti said.

Her comments didn't resonate with the hearing's first caller who said she was "astounded" at officials "arrogance."

"I'm outraged you're trying to rush through this massive increase when people in New Jersey and the world are sick scared and dying," said Carolyn Rhodes of Manchester. "I think it is so uncaring and I am really suspicious of the timing. People aren't following this money grab. This has to be put on hold."

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Turnpike Authority capital plan is irresponsible | Opinion

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The New Jersey Turnpike Authority released a \$24 billion capital plan that will widen major segments of the NJ Turnpike and Garden State Parkway. They want to pave over environmentally sensitive areas and cut through neighborhoods, many of which are Environmental Justice communities.

This plan will add hundreds of miles of lanes, knocking down homes and promoting sprawl. What's worse is that highway widening doesn't eliminate traffic congestion, it just moves bottlenecks and overwhelms the roads that the highway feeds into.

They know that their plan is bad, so they hid behind the coronavirus to push it through instead of postponing the process to let the public participate. This money would be better spent improving and expanding NJ Transit.

Gov. Murphy says that he wants to be a national leader in reducing greenhouse gases, but that will be hot air if this proposal is approved. This is the biggest fossil fuel subsidy in the history of New Jersey. Conservative estimates show these projects would increase air pollution by at least 376,990.5 metric tons of CO₂ every weekday or 100,535,024.3 metric tons of CO₂ each year, and probably much more. Traffic will increase dramatically, and additional sprawl from these projects will mean even more cars on the road.

Many projects, especially in the Meadowlands and coastal parts of South Jersey, will go underwater or be subject to chronic flooding as sea levels continue to rise. This capital plan will undermine New Jersey's progress when it comes to mass transit, electric vehicles and clean energy.

The capital plan includes 15 widening or bridge replacement projects that will cost at least \$15.7 billion. More than 454 lanes will be added to the NJ Turnpike and Garden State Parkway, and this doesn't include smaller projects of extending lanes and ramps or fixing interchanges.

Tolls will increase by about 30 cents for the Parkway and \$1.25 for the Turnpike, and these projects will increase capacity by about 998,800 cars an hour and more during rush hour. Research shows that instead of reducing congestion, adding highway capacity increases traffic delays.

This means that the average Turnpike commuter will be paying an additional \$600 every year just to sit in more traffic on their way to work.

No environmental analysis or Environmental Impact Statement was completed, yet these projects will destroy hundreds of acres of wetlands and forests and cross hundreds of streams and rivers.

In the Meadowlands, they want to add 108 lane miles between Newark and East Rutherford, which will cost \$4.2 billion and cut through environmentally sensitive wetlands.

Widening projects in South Jersey will promote development, which means more shopping centers and warehouses. Construction and traffic will increase pollutants responsible for smog and ground-level ozone, like nitrogen oxides in a state where most counties are already receiving "F" designations from the American Lung Association.

Instead of looking at the environmental impacts of these projects, they are using toll money to get around the National Environmental Policy Act process that requires environmental assessments.

Many of the projects will increase traffic and ground-level ozone in communities that already receive a disproportionate amount of pollution. Three consecutive projects will widen 34 miles of the Garden State Parkway from Woodbridge to Paramus and cost \$4 billion combined. One of the projects would add 72 lane miles from Hillside to Clifton for \$2.5 billion, which would be better spent running a light rail from Edison up to Paramus.

In order to make space for these projects, the concrete walls along the Parkway in areas like East Orange will have to be moved back 45 feet on each side. They will have to tear down homes and apartment buildings in EJ communities like Hillside, Irvington, Newark and East Orange, causing mass disruptions.

They haven't demonstrated need for these projects, and no alternatives have been considered. Out of the hundreds of miles they are adding, not one mile will be for Bus Rapid Transit or dedicated carpool lanes. Instead of wasting money on highway widening, these funds should go toward expanding mass transit in New Jersey. They could also focus on other programs to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled and decrease traffic, like carpooling and vanpooling. Other alternatives include using existing roads for flex lanes and implementing traffic calming measures like metered merges.

The governor needs to hold the Turnpike Authority accountable and stop this capital plan from going forward. These projects not only hurt the environment and increase greenhouse gases, but the process itself is flawed and deliberately designed to keep the public from participating during the coronavirus outbreak. Many projects are in flood-prone areas and will be washed away with the next storm.

These funds should go toward expanding mass transit, BRT or dedicated carpool lanes. Their capital plan is speeding us backward into 1950s traffic jams. This is like the ghost of Robert Moses, paving over open space and EJ communities to make way for the automobile.

If Gov. Murphy really cares about climate change, Environmental Justice and moving to a green economy, he must stop this capital plan and help extend mass transit in New Jersey.

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