



Office of the Mayor

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July 22, 2016

Hon. Richard T. Hammer
Acting Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 600
Trenton, NJ 08625

**Re: Transportation Fund Trust Shutdown:
Replacement of County Route 518 Bridge over the D&R Canal, Franklin Township
Project Lead: NJDOT
Road Closed: July 6, 2016
Expected Duration of Road Closure: 31 days
Average Daily Traffic (ADT): 11,657
Detour Length: 9.6 miles**

Dear Commissioner Hammer,

When Governor Chris Christie issued Executive Order 210 declaring a State of Emergency and directed an immediate shutdown of all ongoing work funded by the Transportation Trust Fund, the work on replacing the Route 518 Bridge over the D&R Canal was stopped. Work ceased after the bridge had been torn up and made impassable. As a result, the bridge is now closed indefinitely. The Shutdown Order promulgated by your office, however, plainly requires the Commissioner of Transportation to keep a project active if it is essential for the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of New Jersey. I write on behalf of the residents of Montgomery Township to express our concerns about the safety risks caused by the bridge closure and to request that the work on the Route 518 Bridge be deemed essential and continued immediately.

The bridge closure endangers Montgomery's residents by significantly increasing emergency response times. In 2013, University Hospital of Princeton ("UHP") was moved from Princeton to Plainsboro, which is on the other side of the river. UHP is the primary hospital for this area with RWJ New Brunswick as the secondary. Rocky Hill and Montgomery First Aid Squads must add 9-25 minutes per call (depending on time of day) to reach UHP and even more time if it is a trauma requiring transport to RWJ Hospital in New Brunswick. Back up plans for a four-week closure were put in place but an indefinite closure puts the lives of Montgomery and Rocky Hill residents in danger.

We also are advised that the bridge closure impacts first responders serving the Griggstown and Kingston areas of Franklin Township. These areas are also served by Rocky Hill Fire and Rocky Hill First Aid and Rescue Squad, who are in many cases the first responders. Without the 518 Bridge they cannot respond. Backup has been arranged with Kendall Park First Aid and Rescue Squad and Kingston First Aid and Rescue Squad. Both of these organizations are capable but distance is further, travel time is increased and radio dispatch is more complicated because neither emergency response organization is in Somerset County. A prolonged 518 Bridge closure could put Franklin residents' lives in danger as well.

Moreover, the problem of increased emergency response times will be exacerbated as we get further into hurricane season and face the prospect of heavy rains. When it was open, the 518 Bridge was one of the last bridges in this area rendered impassable by flooding. Currently, the detour route around the closed 518 Bridge directs traffic north on Route 605. That road, however, is one of the first roads to be flooded out. The current plan of diverting the main traffic flow to a road that floods easily simply will not be workable in September when traffic flow increases by a third and heavy rains are more frequent.

Finally, the enormous increase in traffic in Montgomery resulting from the bridge closure has not only inconvenienced Montgomery residents but has created safety issues as well. Montgomery's Police Director, Robert Palmer advises, for example, that complaints and motorist incidents at the bridge over the Griggstown causeway have tripled since the bridge closure. That bridge -- a one-lane bridge serving traffic in both directions -- is a challenge under normal conditions. But, with the tremendous increase in traffic over the causeway due to the 518 Bridge closure, tempers flare and accidents and other incidents are more likely. Montgomery has the causeway under additional police surveillance, but the situation remains difficult.

For all these reasons, the Montgomery Township Committee adopted the enclosed resolution urging the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation to deem the work on the 518 Bridge essential and to continue that work as soon as possible. Every day of road closure and every minute of response time is critical when responding to emergencies. As such, Montgomery Township urges the State to resume work on the 518 Bridge as soon as possible because the project is essential for the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of New Jersey.

Hon. Richard T. Hammer

July 22, 2016

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If you wish to discuss the matter further, please contact me at the number above, or any of the following:

Donato Nieman, Montgomery Township Administrator
908-359-8211
dnieman@twp.montgomery.nj.us

Robert Palmer, Montgomery Township Police Director/Captain
908-359-2311
rpalmer@police.montgomery.nj.us

Lt. Tom Frascella, Montgomery Township Police
908-533-9332
tfrascella@police.montgomery.nj.us

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Patricia M. Graham
Mayor, Montgomery Township

cc: Mayor Phillip Kramer, Franklin Township
Mayor Jeff Donahue, Rocky Hill Borough

RESOLUTION #16-7-181 - REQUEST THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO DEEM THE ROUTE 518 BRIDGE PROJECT AS ESSENTIAL AND ALLOW FOR SAID PROJECT TO BE RE-STARTED AND COMPLETED

WHEREAS, On approximately July 7, 2016, Route 518 between Rocky Hill Borough and Franklin Township was closed to repair the bridge over the Canal; and

WHEREAS, Said closure was to take approximately 3-4 weeks before the work would be far enough along to re-open the road and significant demolition was done despite the upcoming Executive Order stopping said work; and

WHEREAS, On July 8, 2016, as a result of the Governor's Executive Order stopping all non-essential work because of the Transportation Trust Fund Authority funding issue, the project was put on indefinite hold, with the road remaining closed; and

WHEREAS, The Route 518 Bridge Project needs to be deemed ESSENTIAL and be completed to allow for the re-opening of Route 518 for the following reasons:

1. In 2013, University Hospital of Princeton was moved from Princeton to Plainsboro, which is on the other side of the river. UHP is the primary hospital for this area with RWJ New Brunswick as the secondary. Rocky Hill and Montgomery First Aid Squads must add between 9-25 minutes per call (depending on time of day) to reach University Hospital at Princeton and even more if it is a trauma requiring RWJ Hospital in New Brunswick. Backup plans for a 3 week closure were put in place but an indefinite closure puts the lives of Rocky Hill and Montgomery residents in danger.
2. Southern Franklin, primarily Griggstown/Kingston area, is also served by Rocky Hill Fire and First Aid mutual aid and in many cases as the first responders. Without the bridge they cannot respond. Backup has been arranged with Kendall Park and Kingston. Both of these organizations are capable but travel time is further and radio dispatch is more complicated because neither is in Somerset County. A prolonged bridge closure could put Franklin residents' lives in danger.
3. Route 518 is the only major crossing of the river other than Amwell Road capable of truck traffic.
4. Route 518 is the only major east west connector from Route 206 to Route 27 (and therefore to Route 1). Large trucks detoured on our Township roads is livable for 3-4 weeks but is dangerous if it is an indefinite detour.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED By the Township Committee of the Township of Montgomery, County of Somerset, State of New Jersey that it hereby requests that the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Transportation deem the Route 518 Bridge Project ESSENTIAL and allow for its completion as quickly as possible so that Route 518 can be reopened.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to Governor Chris Christie, the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation and the Executive Director of the New Jersey Transit Corporation.

CERTIFICATION
I HEREBY CERTIFY THE ABOVE TO BE A
TRUE COPY OF A RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE
TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF
MONTGOMERY AT A MEETING HELD

July 21, 2016

Township Clerk