



COUNTY OF MERCER

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March 1, 2012

Janna Chernetz, Esq.
NJ Advocate
Tri-State Transportation Campaign
350 West 31st Street, Suite 802
New York, NY 10001

Dear Ms. Chernetz:

I am in receipt of your letter dated January 12, 2012 raising concerns and providing suggestions to the currently proposed Concept Plans for County Route 571 (Princeton-Hightstown Road) in West Windsor Township. Please note that while similar concerns and suggestions were brought to the County's attention at the last Public Information Meeting on December 15, 2009 and in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) review process last year, comments generally praise the project for adding bicycle and pedestrian amenities in what West Windsor Township desires to be a "main street," mixed-use district near the Princeton Junction train station. In fact, the majority of commentators urged Mercer County to advance the project.

A project for reconstructing this portion of Princeton-Hightstown Road was twice previously placed on the TIP. In 1993, the West Windsor Township Council reversed its endorsement of a project that would have widened the road to 5 lanes. The Council reiterated its opposition to widening when the State listed a similar project in the 2002 Local Scoping program. West Windsor subsequently took the lead and in 2005 both its Planning Board and its Council endorsed a design for a three-lane section, including extensive bicycle and pedestrian amenities, following a thorough alternatives analysis and public outreach process. After very minor changes during Preliminary Design, the current TIP moves the project forward into final design. Significant changes to the design at this point will likely force the project to be dropped from the TIP and revert back to the alternatives analysis phase, possibly delaying implementation for years, if not precluding the project from ever receiving federal funding.

I wish to address some specific items raised in your correspondence. The suggestions posed by Tri-State Transportation Campaign are depicted in bold italic with responses prepared by my professional staff:

Lower the speed limit to 25-30 MPH

There are few, if any, elements of this design that would change whether we use a 25-30 MPH design speed or a 40 MPH design speed. In any case, Mercer County would conduct speed surveys once the project is completed and post the speed limit according to the appropriate statistical measures as required by New Jersey State Law.

Increase safety at intersections by providing pedestrian refuge islands and pedestrian-activated signals at all crossings

There are distinct advantages to constructing raised islands as opposed to designated left and two-way center left turn lanes, in terms of water quality, maintenance cost, etc. However, it is likely that such a proposal would be strongly opposed by the local business owners, who expressed a need for direct left-turn access. This was a principal reason the Township endorsed a paved center left turn lane in 2005.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as well as other federal and state design criteria require pedestrian-activated signals and other pedestrian accommodations at intersections. Constructing pedestrian refuge islands at the intersections could be considered, but limited publicly owned right of way may preclude Mercer County from doing so.

Include bicycle lanes throughout the project area

At the urging of West Windsor Township, Mercer County has agreed to include designated bicycle lanes as part of the project.

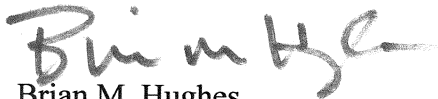
Provide visual cues that inform drivers that they are approaching a "main street" area

Mercer County would not oppose the inclusion of visual cues that motorists are entering a "main street" area such as street furniture, special signing, lighting fixtures, etc. Such details would be considered in the final design phase and would need to be reviewed and discussed with West Windsor Township.

Princeton-Hightstown Road is a designated Principal Arterial and accommodates an Annual Average Daily Traffic flow of 20,000 vehicles per day. It is a major east-west connector route in Mercer County, linking other major transportation corridors and activity centers including the New Jersey Turnpike, the Northeast Corridor via the Princeton Junction Train Station, US Route 1 and Princeton University. Without the proposed improvements to this roadway to enhance through traffic—including future Bus Rapid Transit vehicles—opportunities for our regional economic vitality may be jeopardized. In every project such as this, the final preferred alternative must be a compromise. In this case, regional mobility needs must be accommodated while enhancing safety for all travel modes.

I thank you again for your suggestions and concerns and we look forward to working with residents, business owners, community groups and local elected officials in advancing a project that enhances mobility and safety for all our road users.

Sincerely,



Brian M. Hughes
County Executive