1 PUBLIC HEARING ON TRANSPORTATION FUNDING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 2 ONE BERGEN COUNTY PLAZA, 5TH FLOOR 3 COMMISSIONERS PUBLIC MEETING ROOM HACKENSACK, NEW JERSEY 4 THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2024 COMMENCING AT 10:16 A.M. 5 6 7 THERE BEING PRESENT: 8 DOMINICK AZZOLINI, DIRECTOR 9 DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 10 JOSEPH CINQUE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 11 RODYN SANCHEZ, OFFICE MANAGER DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 12 13 DONNA RIGGI, PAYROLL CLERK DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 14 JODI KELM, DISPATCHER & CUSTOMER SERVICE REP DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 15 MILAGROS SOLIS, COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION GRANTS 16 ADMINISTRATOR 17 NEW JERSEY TRANSIT 18 ORESTES RIOS MOBILITY MANAGER 19 DAVIT TOPCHISHVILI 20 PLANNING ANALYST/COORDINATOR OF FEDERAL AND STATE AIDE 21 DIVISION OF SENIOR SERVICES 22 BRIAN NILAND, DIRECTOR DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS 23 KIM O. FURBACHER, CRCR, RDR P.O. BOX 213 24 ROCHELLE PARK, NEW JERSEY 07662-0213 25 201-906-9761 KIMOFURBACHER@GMAIL.COM

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1 DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to our public hearing. 2 My name is Dominick Azzolini. I am the 3 4 current Director of Community Transportation. 5 I. Pledge of Allegiance DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: At this time can we 6 7 please stand or sit in our seats and pledge 8 allegiance. 9 (At this point in the proceeding, the 10 Pledge of Allegiance is recited.) 11 DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Thank you. 12 II. Welcome, Introductions and Opening Comments DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: I would like to 13 extend a warm welcome to all of the attendees this 14 15 morning. Joining me today is our Department 16 Director, Mr. Brian Niland. Brian came aboard a 17 couple of months ago to fill a vacancy, and he is our 18 boss so we have to behave today. 19 Also joining me today is my Deputy 20 Director, Joe Cinque; my Assistant Director, Rodyn 21 Sanchez in the back; you've met Donna Riggi, our Payroll Clerk; and Jodi Kelm, our Dispatcher and 22 23 Customer Service Rep.

Today's meeting is our annual public

hearing. This is mandated by New Jersey Transit,

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which provides various funding sources for our division. This meeting pertains to the New Jersey Senior Citizen and Disabled Resident Transportation Assistance Program (SCDRTAP). This is funded by our casino revenue, 7.5 percent of which supports the paratransit system throughout the state. SCDRTAP benefits not only our county but all the counties, the 21 counties and several nonprofits. This year we are receiving \$3,159,063, which is an increase from

This meeting has been advertised in the Star-Ledger, The Record Herald News. Notices have been sent to all mayors and borough clerks in Bergen County, as well as the facilities and programs we serve, including our autism programs.

III. Report on 2024 Operations

last year's \$2.892 million.

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Just a little history on what we've done so far in 2024.

We've completed more than 160,000 trips, covering 812 miles. We've transported 11,732 dialysis patients, handled 8,266 wheelchair trips, and provided 12,624 educational trips, and facilitated 15,000 nutrition trips throughout the county; this is our Meals on Wheels program.

Additionally, we have transported 1,760

1 veterans to our VA Hospital in East Orange and other 2 veterans' clinics.

That was 2024.

IV. Reading of the 2025 Budget

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: At this time, I'm going to present our budget with my New Jersey

Transit water mug, which was so nicely given to us at our last presentation. I use this every night.

Thank you, Millie.

So our proposed operating budget is \$9,232,741, of which \$3,159,063 comes from New Jersey Transit and SCDRTAP. The county contributes \$5,118,768. We also receive \$200,000 from New Jersey JARC, \$50,000 from a third-party transportation contract (TNC), and anticipate \$150,000 from another federal grant, 5310.

Additional contributions include \$53,550 from Peer; \$26,000 from Veterans; \$445,360 from Title 3, which is our Meals on Wheels; \$30,000 from advertising; and \$50,000 from miscellaneous sources.

Last year, we set out goals to improve our services and accessibility to all Bergen County residents.

One goal was to work on improving EZ

Ride access for seniors, to meet the rising demand
for single-rider transportation.

We increased awareness and secured additional funding from SCDRTAP and the county to accommodate more seniors.

Another goal was to hire more Motor

Vehicle Operators (MVOs) to enhance transportation

access for seniors and disabled residents.

We have seen improved hiring rates, aided by increased advertising on vehicles and the county website.

There was also a need to hire an Assistant Accountant and a Safety Officer to enhance our division's efficiency.

A Safety Officer was hired to streamline accident reporting and investigations. We also utilized our radio dispatcher and customer service representative, Jodi, who now assists our accountant with data collection and reporting duties.

In order to enhance our scheduling system (CTS) to be more responsive to our dispatchers and schedulers and improve data collection, CTS has released several updates, making the system more responsive and more user-friendly.

We also introduced a new email address

for doctors' appointments, providing an alternative to faxing.

Currently we are working on the following initiatives:

Contract with private assisted mobility vendors to supplement our services. A spike in clients needing assisted mobility has strained our workforce, leading to increased on-the-job injuries.

We are planning on purchasing new buses to replace our aging fleet and acquire six passenger vans to expand our hiring pool to non-CDL hires and increase services throughout the county.

I would like to extend my gratitude to New Jersey Transit for their support, especially to Isabel Rojas, Janelle Rivera, and Millie Solis, who's in the audience today, along with Brian Miguel, who have been instrumental in our operations. Let's face it, without New Jersey Transit's help, it would cost the taxpayers of Bergen County a lot more money.

My thanks also go out to the County

Executive for entrusting me with overseeing the operation here at Bergen County Community

Transportation, the Board of Commissioners for their assistance and support, and my dedicated team, Joe Cinque, Rodyn -- Joe calls me Dominick Azzaleary.

1 When I first got to the agency, he was calling me Anthony, who was the old director, this went on for 2 months. That was okay, as long as he recognized I 4 was there, that was all that was important -- Donna; Julio, our accountant who is phenomenal; Jodi, I 5 cannot say enough kind words about her; along with 6 all of my radio dispatchers, my program coordinators, and our 68 fantastic drivers, all working together to 9 provide a very essential service to the residents of 10 Bergen County.

Thank you.

V. General Testimony

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DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: So at this time I would like to invite our guest speakers to share their remarks.

From New Jersey Transit, our representative is Millie Solis.

MS. SOLIS: Thank you.

Good morning. I am very pleased with the services Bergen County has been providing to individuals with disabilities and seniors. Your efforts to enhance accessibility and mobility for these communities have not gone unnoticed.

New Jersey Transit, in partnership with Bergen County, will continue supporting these vital

services, and I am confident this collaboration will further benefit our residents. Thank you for your dedication to these important programs.

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Thank you, Millie.

I didn't want to put Brian on the spot, but I'd like to have Brian, our Department Director, come up and say a few words about all he does for us and for Bergen County.

MR. NILAND: I wasn't told I was going to be speaking, but I just want to welcome everybody here and to echo the same words. I'm very proud to be director over this fine department. Before I started working for the county, I had no idea that all these services were offered, and it's just relentless hours, time, and dedication the people put in to making Bergen County look so good.

I thank you all for your support and Transit and everybody that helps out. We couldn't do it without you.

We're looking to further the department, purchase new vehicles. So we can get the CE on board with this, which I'm sure he'll get on board, but, again, I'm here if you have any questions, if you need anything. But these guys, this department runs itself. They do such a good job

1 so they make my job look so easy and they're really just a great crew of people. 2 3 So thank you again. 4 DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Thank you, Brian. 5 [APPLAUSE] DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: So at this time I'm 6 7 going to turn the mic over for only a minute and half 8 to Joe Cinque to say a few words. 9 I've come to know Joe over the last 10 nine months that I've been with Community 11 Transportation. He's a great individual, I truly love working with him, but he could be a little wordy 12 13 at times. So we are going to give him the mic, 14 somebody set their clock and ring a bell when it's 15 over. 16 Go ahead. There's a 17 DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE: 18 couple of people that I'd like to thank, but Brian especially and Dominick. I get crazy ideas and I go 19 20 to Dominick all the time. To his credit, he allows 21 me to do my thing. So I appreciate that, Dominick. 22 And poor Brian, I think I call him all

Orestes and the whole Senior Services team, they're a

But I do want to thank Davit and

the time. I think he's nervous when I call him.

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good partner, and New Jersey Transit. Rodyn, who I
also dump a lot on, but I appreciate it.

Now I think we just want to see if anybody wants to come up and speak.

Michelle.

MR. CROWE-PAZ: Hi. Good morning. My name is Michelle Crowe-Paz. I am a councilwoman in Mahwah, New Jersey. I am the council liaison to Mahwah Access for All, which is a commission funded by the town to help individuals with disabilities, mobility issues, access issues, etc.

I'm here on behalf of our committee chairperson, Johanna Baccan. I want to put in the record, she texted me and asked me to say this. So on behalf of Ms. Johanna Baccan, we'd like to go on record knowing, because just having these questions out there and hopefully answered today.

Okay. So with regard to Coach USA bankruptcy, and I think our representative from New Jersey Transit is here, do we know if New Jersey Transit will be taking over any of those routes?

So I wanted that asked.

Also too, the county community vans and the Uber program, will it be available to people with disabilities under the age of 60?

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                   And then also as well, inter-town
    transportation and how that works with grant funding.
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    That's also a conversation that we were hoping to
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    have, as Mahwah seems to be unique in that, for
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    whatever reason, geographically, etc., etc., Access
    Link does not serve the Township of Mahwah, nor does
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    it serve Ramsey or Allendale or Upper Saddle River,
    but that's a different conversation, but I do want
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    those concerns on record, please.
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                   So also again, what is the, you know,
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    open-mindedness of Bergen County Community
    Transportation perhaps coming to Mahwah to do a
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    presentation? So I also wanted that on record.
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                   I think I've covered everything in
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    Johanna's text, so I thank you all for your time and
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    hope that these questions could be answered, if not
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    here, then perhaps via email or at a future meeting.
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                   So thank you so much.
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                   DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE:
                                             Did you want
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    to answer, Ms. Solis?
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                   MS. SOLIS:
                              We'll get back to you that
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    answer.
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                   COUNCILWOMAN CROWE-PAZ:
                                             Thank you.
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                   DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: So the format, do
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    you want to address as best we can now and then move
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- 1 on to the next person who would like to say a few things? 2
- 3 DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE: I can address 4 some of it.
- 5 DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Rodyn, can you come up here too on the panel. 6

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- DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE: We know we're going to get more service up in Mahwah in that area. We know that's a little bit of a dead zone, not just 10 for us, it's just distance-wise.
- 11 COUNCILWOMAN CROWE-PAZ: Geographically that's just the way it is. 12
- 13 DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE: Yes, it's 14 tough in that area because of the distances.

We are right now, and it all comes back to the same thing, we were just talking about this the other day, is our driver shortage. We are addressing that with the six passenger, nine commercial buses, hopefully. And we are trying to work with Brian and the administration on how we're going to train the drivers to get CDLs, because there's a lot of problems. We have a contract and our drivers do have CDLs right now, and Dominick brought this up best, if we allow people not to have CDLs, the people that have CDLs may drop their CDLs,

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    saying "Why am I spending this money?"
                   So our goal is to have all our drivers
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    be CDL drivers eventually and that six passengers
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    would be a stopgap to train them and get them ready.
                   I don't know if that answers that
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    question. Was there another one?
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                   COUNCILWOMAN CROWE-PAZ: Well, also
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    too, I don't know if it should be interactive or not,
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    I'm sorry.
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                   DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE: That's okay,
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    you went through and I'm not sure I got all of them.
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                   COUNCILWOMAN CROWE-PAZ: Also too
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    acknowledging the driver shortage, that is an issue
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    also in our township.
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                   So just with regard to the CDL, if
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    somebody is aware of it, is it air brake
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    certification?
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                   DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE:
                                             N \circ .
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                   COUNCILWOMAN CROWE-PAZ: Because I
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    know, obviously, as you know, as you go up each
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    category --
                   DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE: Our category
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    right now is C or better. So C license, which is the
    lowest, with a passenger endorsement, that's the bus
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25
    license.
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                   So that's what we're going to train
    them on, but the problem is that the federal
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    government is involved with this, with
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    transportation, and they mandate that the drivers
    have to do a $5,000 -- it's about $5,000 when they
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    come out with the whole thing -- training that they
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    have to get, with the certificate. That's what we're
    trying to address as a county, how we're going to go
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    forward with that.
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                   COUNCILWOMAN CROWE-PAZ: Can there be
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    some funding in this to ease the financial cost?
    Because maybe that's also something that deters
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    potential applicants.
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                   DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE: That's what
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    we're going to talk about, because there are things
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    that the county does have for training people. How
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    they're going to do that is kind of beyond our level,
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    unless anybody else has something.
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                   COUNCILWOMAN CROWE-PAZ: Okay. Thank
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    you.
                   DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Joe, just come up
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    here for the panel and we'll have Donna bring up the
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    speakers.
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                   MS. RIGGI: Anna Leone, would you like
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    to speak?
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                   MS. LEONE:
                              No, I would not.
                   MS. RIGGI: Donald Yu.
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                   MR. YU: Okay. My name is Donald Yu.
     I'm from Korean American Senior Citizens of New
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    Jersey. We are located in Leonia.
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                   First of all, thank you for holding
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    this kind of public hearing.
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                   I believe that the transportation
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    service provided by Bergen County has been operated
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    for many years, but mostly Korean senior customers or
    members of our association either do not know about
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    this system, or, even if they know, I would say if I
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    ask our member customers come to our association to
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    get some help, I ask them, "Do you know there's a
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    transportation service provided by Bergen County?"
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                   I would say 75 percent said, "No, I
    never heard of it."
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                   And even the rest of the people say,
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    "Oh, I heard about that."
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                   "So did you call and get the service?"
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                   And they said, "No."
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                   I said, "Why?"
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                   Then they said, "Oh, they only speak
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    English."
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                   So especially the Korean seniors over
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70, 80, 90 years old, seniors, they have a severe language barrier. So when I make suggestion today is for better communication with other language spoken people, like especially Korean, Chinese and Japanese.

And I just heard that some towns in Bergen County, Asian population is consisting over 30 percent, and their service for those foreign language spoken people, not 90 percent I would say.

I personally saw Korean language brochure once about this transportation service, but I would like to suggest better communication with Korean language flyers and distributed to the organizations like us.

Number two is, early this year we have initiated a new program, it's called New Jersey

Health Service Information. That's 24 hours hotline.

We converted one of our landline phone number to the send point so that one of the staff member brings it home and answer the phone. And that's basically for two types of the people, number one, people who have emergency at night or even during the day, but if the person lives alone, you know, he fainted, doesn't remember where to call and everything, so he can press the button and ring the phone. Then we can connect to either a hospital or a clinic, and the

problem is how we going to bring the person. I'm

sure you can say, oh, you can call 911, but a lot of

Korean spoken seniors may not be able to call 911 and

talk to the operator.

Number two is people who still do not have health insurance. They are afraid to go to doctors, so they call this number and then we tell them, don't worry about it, we have a lot of clinics in Bergen County that they can serve you, treat you, and give you the medicine without the charges. So we try to educate these people.

So I also would like to suggest that if there's any funding to bring Korean seniors to our organization, to the clinic, to the hospital, we will be really appreciating that.

So those are the suggestions. And I'd like to have more communication with the Commissioners and with our association. Okay. I appreciate it. Thank you.

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Thank you, Donald.

So, Donald, on two of your points,
we're going to see if we can take our brochure and
have it translated into multiple languages and
available on our website. Most of our towns in
Bergen County -- obviously all the towns in Bergen

County know of our services we provide here. So the best way to find out about our services would be to either visit our website or just go to any of your mayor and council meetings and ask the mayor and council members what services the county provides or come to a meeting here, but the best way is just to explore the Internet, everybody has a website. And actually, speaking of the Korean language, we're actually interviewing and potentially hiring a Korean dispatcher to come work for us. So we're hoping that our on boarding process goes through with the background checks and we should have a member joining our team that could assist. Thank you.

MR. YU: Just one other question.

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Go ahead.

MR. YU: I would like to mention using the Uber and Lyft for the seniors. I would like to have more information on that.

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Okay. That's our EZ Ride program that we have. It supplements our services. When Community Transportation cannot provide the transportation as needed or if it's past our operating hours, EZ Ride fulfills those requirements for us, and if they call our office, we could explain how that system works. And I believe

1 our mobility manager is here, yes? MS. RIGGI: Yes. MR. RIOS: Here. 3 4 DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Orestes, can you 5 come up and just briefly give us a quick rundown and then we'll move on? 6 7 MR. RIOS: Sure. 8 So you would call Community 9 Transportation. They would like to see if there is a 10 bus available. If there isn't, they'll put you on EZ 11 Ride, and what will happen with EZ Ride is the person who's taking the trip will call EZ Ride the day of 12 13 the trip, and Uber or Lyft would come to pick them 14 And then once you're done with your appointment, up. 15 you call EZ Ride again, and an Uber or Lyft will come 16 to take you from your appointment back home. 17 As far as the language goes, EZ Ride or 18 Uber and Lyft, they're their own independent drivers. One really doesn't know what languages they will 19 20 speak or what they won't speak, but we can speak 21 afterwards for you to get more details on the program 22 itself. 23 MR. YU: Thank you so much. 24 MR. RIOS: You're welcome.

And we can speak afterwards about the

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1 other things.

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DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Thank you, Orestes.

MR. RIOS: You're welcome.

MS. RIGGI: Brian Fitzgibbons.

MR. FITZGIBBONS: Good morning. I'm Brian Fitzgibbons. I have been the president/CEO of Heightened Independence and Progress. I'm cycling into being a consultant. We're replacing me. But in that role, I have been on many of the committees throughout Bergen County, and one of the things that we do is we don't want to just isolate the information that we share with Senior Services. our role at the Human Services Advisory Council, we create a position paper on various things that affect people with disabilities who are over 60 and under 60, and of course the entire population of older Americans that reside in Bergen County, which is approximately, and I know the people here, I think you told me it was 227,000, but I figured maybe plus one, myself.

But in any case, I was going to say that our testimony that we do provide usually involves transportation, housing, and community care workers, etc., but I want to focus on the transportation.

One of the things that we do when we do our presentation on transportation is, number one, praise all of the strides that the Bergen County Community Transportation agency has made in the last several years. I've been more active in the last seven years and I've seen great improvement. I've always been impressed by the drivers that come back and forth to our center and how accommodating everybody has been. I also appreciate the fact that they've expanded into the whole Uber and Lyft thing with the EZ Ride, etc.

Transit that we think Access Link is great up to a point, but we'd like to see it revised and expanded to maybe include the heavy rail system and also to maybe rethink the buses coming in and out of Port Authority, that being the criteria. Many of them are very local in their focus when they do lots of local stops, and it might be better if we can rearrange how we think about those things.

But in any event, I would like to say
that I will continue to serve. I serve on the
Advisory Committee and I am very happy to do so. So
we will just continue to keep our eye on things and
to stress all the positive things that are going on

1 at the county and we thank you.

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Thank you, Brian.

MS. RIGGI: Thank you, Brian.

James Jung.

MR. JUNG: I really am honored to be a part of this hearing. My name is James Jung from AWCA, Asian Women's Christian Association, in Teaneck, New Jersey. We have 44 year history of senior activity center. We have like a more than 250 membership of Korean American and Japanese American, Chinese American, using their own mother tongue and also many different classes and activity.

You know, one of the Korean proverbs,

"crying baby usually get milk first". So my

frustration just like a crying baby. We have triple

difficulties, because, number one, we are not a

county running senior activity center and we are not

like adult day care center. You know, usually

although day care center, many senior who has

Medicaid and door-to-door service is very essential

for them, but we're independent and depend on

donations.

So one of our seniors, I introduce to EZ Ride program. I saw one of like our member use the EZ Ride program, and I want to just very proudly

"Don't worry about it, Bergen County take care of you, so let me just help you."

I called EZ Ride and the operator or dispatcher told me that you better call Ridgefield instead of like us, we do not provide from Ridgefield. I called Ridgefield, and I was like our location is in Teaneck, New Jersey, can you provide like transportation from Ridgefield to Teaneck. And the person said no, we only provide a once a week for grocery shopping transportation, that's it. So one of my seniors just getting called and she's supposed to take two bus line transfer, 166 and transfer another line to come to us. It takes one hour.

everything about like county transportation system, and I believe this is working for the seniors. And I really appreciate director and also New Jersey

Transit, but still I am a crying baby, so, you know, like a better way. You know, like already Mr. Donald Yu mentioned about like communications, that's one part. And I have to also like figure it out, there's a better way for our aging seniors who can just use easier way or some towns they do not provide.

So we feel like 250, our senior members, some of them, not many, but they really just

wanted to come to us but they have a problem with transportation.

Thank you so much.

4 DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Thank you very

5 much.

MS. RIGGI: Tess Tomasi.

MS. TOMASI: Good morning. My name is
Tess Tomasi. I am the Information & Assistance and
Care Management Unit Supervisor with the Bergen
County Division of Senior Services.

We have a longstanding, close partnership with Bergen County Community

Transportation, and we would like to take this opportunity to express our support for their application for funding from the New Jersey SCDRTAP program.

The Division of Senior Services

provides funding to over 40 different programs

throughout Bergen County, including senior centers,

congregate meals, physical and mental health

programs, and access to benefits. Without adequate

transportation, seniors are unable to take advantage

of these critical services. The senior population at

Bergen County is currently at 231,000, and we expect

that number to keep increasing for the next few

years. Community Transportation has been working diligently to meet the growing demand for their services by expanding their transportation options.

Even though the Division of Senior

Services provides some funding support to Community

Transportation, it is not nearly enough to meet the needs of our county's older adults, and we encourage the State of New Jersey and other funders to increase their support of Community Transportation to meet the growing need.

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: Thank you, Tess.

Are there any other speakers, Donna?

MS. RIGGI: Any other speakers?

that at the end of the meeting, my Deputy Director will individually speak with Brian and Donald and share business cards and probably setup a meeting where you can actually come to Bergen Community Transportation, come to our office, see our operations, and we can discuss your needs on a 1:1 basis and see if there's anything we can provide or any way we can assist for the services you're looking for.

Is there anyone else who would like to say anything?

COUNCILWOMAN CROWE-PAZ: Thank you for hearing us out.

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: It's always a pleasure and that's what these meetings are all about, hearing and listening to the public and gathering information and coming up with creative ideas. It all comes down to funding, funding, funding. You can't do anything without money, even if the baby is crying, the only way to get milk is to go to Shop Rite and buy the milk. It's all about funding, but we can do what we can with the drivers and with the staff we have.

Citizens Advisory Committee. I explained to them that we just hired three drivers. I was excited. So our numbers went from 68 to 71. And then I was told the next day that three drivers are retiring, so I'm back down to 68. So this is what we deal with day in and day out, the attrition, the retirements, and just the aging of our drivers.

So we could have 100 buses, but we need the drivers to drive them.

I think Joe wanted to say something. His time is one minute.

25 DEPUTY DIRECTOR CINQUE: I just wanted

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to mention to you, especially with the Korean

speakers, when you do use the EZ Ride, please

reiterate with the clients that they're only to use

the EZ Ride number we provide and not to take any

number from the drivers. If you could reinforce that

with your people when you go out and you mention it

to people about the EZ Ride program.
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DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: That's for security and service. The only number they should be using, like Joe said, is the EZ Ride number that's provided to them. There are always ways that people and individuals try to take advantage of seniors and people with disabilities, and we've been experiencing them, and we're just telling all of our clients to make sure they follow the protocol that we have in place and not to deviate.

Anyone else before we close this meeting?

(No response.)

VI. Closing

DIRECTOR AZZOLINI: In closing, I want to thank everyone for attending and taking time from your busy day to come to Bergen County and find a place to park.

But with that being said, I will

1 adjourn this meeting and we look forward to seeing you next year. 2 Thank you. 4 [APPLAUSE] 5 COUNCILWOMAN CROWE-PAZ: Thank you. 6 (Whereupon, the Public Hearing on 7 Transportation Funding for Senior Citizens and 8 Disabled Persons is adjourned at 10:45 p.m.) 9 The following statements were submitted 10 for inclusion in the official record: 11 "From: Colleen Diskin, Janet Sharma, and Shannon Lyons <cmdiskin@gmail.com> 12 13 <janet.sharma44@gmail.com> <shannond.lyons18@gmail.com> 14 15 "Sent: Thursday, October 17, 2024 9:00 16 ΑМ 17 "To: Community Transportation 18 "Subject: Public Hearing Testimony 19 "We thank you for this opportunity to 20 speak to the transportation needs of Bergen County's 21 older residents. We urge Bergen County to continue to fund and expand the mobility management services 22 23 and flexible ride options that have been created 24 through the county's Ride Connect program. 25 for affordable and flexible transportation options

1 | continues to rise as the population ages.

2

4

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21

22

23

24

25

Car-dependent regions like Bergen County are going to need to find ways to innovate and enhance the capacity of existing transportation services.

"The enhanced ride dispatching services offered through Ride Connect offers Bergen County the opportunity to tweak and tailor its transportation services based on the daily requests received from seniors and individuals with disabilities. Carefully tracking and analyzing usage data can assist the county and municipalities in re-designing services to respond to changing needs and norms. The County should widely share any transportation data collected through Ride Share and encourage leaders in Bergen's 70 towns to collaborate with Community Transportation to ensure municipal-run bus and van programs are also used to their fullest capacity. By endeavoring to better coordinate the use of all existing transportation options available to older and disabled adults, the County may be able to better maximize all of the region's transportation resources.

"In addition, senior and disabled transportation routes should never be viewed as static, and Community Transportation should

continually budget and plan for increasing rides and routes when demand increases, as it surely will for older adults going to senior centers and medical appointments. One idea to consider is dividing the County into transportation regions, using the 10 country-run senior centers as the central hub for regionalized Community Transportation bus and van routes that could be better tailored to the different destination needs and traffic patters experienced in different parts of the County. County and local transportation services are crucial lifelines to ensure older adults do not become socially isolated and can maintain connections to friends, family, civic groups and houses of worship.

"More flexibility is needed for seniors to travel in the evenings and on weekends and to destinations outside their town borders.

"As members of the Age-Friendly North

Jersey Alliance, we have worked for the past two

years to bolster communication and connections among
the many public-and-private-sector organizations that

serve the senior and disabled community. Our

bimonthly Age-Friendly Bergen Roundtable meetings

provide learning and networking opportunities. Many

of the attendees have stressed the need for more

```
1
    discussion and brainstorming on transportation
    strategies and solutions. These stakeholders and
2
    community leaders are willing and eager to work with
4
    county leaders to pursue new ideas and strategies,
5
    and we urge you to consider us as an important
    resource for collaboration. We thank you for the
6
    opportunity to offer input.
8
                   "Sincerely, Janet Sharma, Age-Friendly
9
    Englewood; Shannon Lyons, Generations for Garfield;
10
    and Colleen Diskin, Age-Friendly Teaneck."
                   (End of Statement.)
11
12
                           Jill B, <jillb419@yahoo.com>
                   "From:
13
                   "Sent:
                          Friday, October 11, 2024 12:47
14
    PM
15
                   "To:
                         Bergen County Division of Senior
16
    Services; Community Transportation
17
                   "Subject: Attention: Dom Azzolini Re:
18
    Public Hearing on Transportation Funding for Senior
19
    Citizens and Persons with Disabilities
                   "10/11/24
20
21
                   "Hello,
22
                   "I am unable to attend the meeting
23
    listed below, but it is my sincere hope that more
24
    funding can be applied to the Transportation
    Assistance Program. The department is in definite
25
```

need of more help and staffing, training, better organization, and communication between the department and the EZ Ride for Life services.

"Although I have had negative experiences, I am appreciative in naming just a few for their excellence in their assistance and attention (**Miriam George, Connie, Angie, Orestes, Joe Singe), I have to say the system needs to have more help in order to accommodate the needs of the seniors in our community.

"I am very sorry to say that I had an unfortunate experience regarding transportation which I had tried to arrange for my elderly, yet active, 95 year old uncle. It took me hours to get the information that I needed, get through the telephone lines, and get any transportation schedule in process. I was misinformed a number of times, causing more phone calls, emails, wrong extensions, etc. Ex.: I was told that the office my uncle had an appt for, that I must fax all appt info to Transportation before anything could be scheduled. However, I later found out, according to HEPA [sic] laws this would not be legal or even possible!..back and forth calls, between transportation and the doctor's office...hurdles to overcome.snags in the

1 | system..misinformation.

"I was notified, for the EZ ride services, that even though it was in the transportation schedule already, a phone call had to be made, approx 30 mins prior to the pickup time.

Tried calling from multiple lines, 30 mins prior...Result: It took over two hours, multiple calls, on hold time..to get through the line! "Just keep calling!".."Mondays are busy days!" were the responses!**Doctors appts which were made weeks prior, and now are unable to be fulfilled! This is a HUGE a [sic] problem!

"My main concern was, would my uncle
may be standing in the street corner for a pick u

[sic], after his appt, 4:30 pm when offices are now
closed...waiting for a ride home? Nonchalant

Response: "The phone lines are open the next day at
8:30!"..This doesn't address or even solve the
problem!

"To make matters worse, when I was finally able to get through on his FIRST scheduled ride, we were told the pick up would be within ten minutes,..it NEVER happened! No pick up..which caused my elderly uncle to wait on his porch step for over three hours, in fear he may miss the vehicle!

"Lack of communication between the transportation and EZ Ride"as I was told by the EZ RIDE rep! The following day!

"The SECOND appt, exactly my biggest concern, he was in the EZ Ride in schedule for pick up, made the call, actually got through after 45 minutes, was told the driver had only one other pick up, given car details, and would arrive in 15 minutes. The driver arrived over two hours later!

95 year old waiting and pacing in the office for a pick up car service - actually a disservice - is a true indication something is surely wrong with the system.

"THIRD dr's appt, in schedule, same runaround..causing three hour delay in pick up. How is this a safe and secure service for BC seniors?

"I'm not certain, how or why this service that is offered to seniors, & even boasted about - when the reality is it's a true disservice! There has to be a better way - with more options available - than EZ RIDE FOR LIFE, which is far from easy for seniors, in the long run! (Access one!)..Perhaps, the rider could be given the direct number of the driver, rather than going thru calls and waiting, when a return pick up is needed and

```
1
    already has been scheduled in the BC transportation
    system. Seniors cannot be waiting on street corners
2
    for a ride home for hours!
                   "Due to my frustration, I contacted
4
5
    Congressman Jospeh [sic] Gottheimer's office, in
    hopes that I could have an appt with him, as to help
6
    the transportation dept remedy occurrences such as
    these. Five calls with a promise to respond and still
9
    nothing! (Close to over a month ago..)
10
                   "Bottom line: More funding, more
11
    staffing, more organization, more training,..is a
12
    must! Presently the system is just not safe or
13
    reliable for the seniors in our community.
14
                   "I would be open to sharing my
15
    experiences, if further discussion is requested.
                   "Please feel free to contact me.
16
                                                      Thank
    you for 'listening'. ***I would appreciated an
17
18
    acknowledgement regarding the receipt of this email.
19
                   "Respectfully, Jill Barbarise
     (201-265-5105"
20
21
                   (End of Statement.)
22
                   "From: Renee Enker
23
    <enker.renee@gmail.com>
                   "Sent: Monday, October 14, 2024 6:46
24
25
    PM
```

```
1
                   "To: Community Transportation
                   "Subject: Fwd: Travel from New Jersey
2
    to New York - Ezride program problem
                   "I am an Ezride member. I am unable to
4
5
    attend the meeting on October 17.
6
                   "However, please see the letter I sent
    and the response I received below regarding the
    EZride program taking qualified seniors to medical
9
    appointments and to visit family in New York.
10
                   "Hopefully, you will be able to resolve
11
    the problem.
12
                   "Thank you, Renee Enker
    enker.renee@gmail.com, 201-370-7553"
13
                   (End of Statement.)
14
15
                   "From: Renee Enker
16
    <enker.renee@gmail.com>
                   "Date: Mon, Sep 23, 2024, 8:44 PM
17
18
                   "Subject: Travel from New Jersey to New
19
    York - Uber problem
20
                   "To: <Kmurthy@ezride.org>
21
                   "cc: vgallegos@ezride.org
    <vgallegos@ezridge.org>
22
23
                   "Dear President Murthy,
                   "I am an Ezride member.
24
25
                   "This past Friday and also several
```

- months ago, I called and requested rides to go from
 my home in Englewood to visit my son and
 grandchildren in Far Rockaway, New York.
 - "The agents took the information and placed the requests.

- "On each occasion, the drivers who arrived said "Oh no, I do not go to New York."
- 8 "I had to call back the agent 3 times
 9 on each occasion. They had to cancel each ride and
 10 submit a new request.
- "The drivers claim that they do not know their destination until they arrive at my home.
- "I am 80 years old and have been very

 frustrated with this system. This is not helpful to

 qualified seniors on fixed incomes.
 - "On regular Uber requests made online,
 I do not have this problem.
 - "After 3 aborted rides with your agents this past Friday, I finally 'gave up' and used regular Uber. They knew where I was going and I had no problem.
 - "The agents at ezride tried to be helpful. They said that their system does not permit them to specifically request drivers who are legally able to go to New York.

```
1
                   "There should be a way to simplify the
    system so that when requests are made to go to New
2
    York, only the appropriate drivers are dispatched to
4
    my home.
5
                   "Ezride is a good service but it is not
6
    working for seniors wanting to go to New York to
    doctor appointments or to see family members.
8
                   "I am sure others have had this
9
    problem.
10
                   "Please look into resolving this
11
    situation.
12
                   "Please fell [sic] free to contact me
13
    at 201 730-7553 or by email at enker.renee@gmail.com
14
    to discuss this matter.
15
                   "Thank you, Renee Enker"
                   (End of Statement.)
16
17
                   "Good afternoon Ms. Enker,
18
                   "Thank you for sharing your concern
19
    with Krishna; he forwarded your email to me for
20
     investigation and further action.
21
                   "At the outset, please accept our
    apologies for the inconvenience caused by multiple
22
23
    cancellations by Uber drivers. We followed up with
24
    Uber about this issue and were informed as follows:
                   "Some Uber drivers do not hold the
25
```

appropriate TLC license for accepting rides within

NYC. As a result, they will be forced to return to

NJ with no return ride. Therefore, they cancel the

trip upon finding out that the trip is for NYC.

"As a matter of policy applicable to all programs like EZ Ryde4Life, Uber does not disclose the destination while offering our trips to the drivers. This is to prevent any bias at the time of pickup. We are not in a position to change Uber's policy.

"In the future, for trips going into NYC, we will indicate this fact in the 'Driver Notes'. If the driver reads that information, hopefully, they will not accept the trip and allow other suitable drivers to perform these trips.

However, we are aware some drivers may not read the notes before accepting the trip, which will likely lead to the same confusion if they do not have the TLC license for NYC.

"We will continue to explore further for other options but, unfortunately, we do not have a better solution at this time. Thank you for bearing with us and allowing us the opportunity to meet your transportation needs.

"Best regards, Avnish Gupta, Esq., COO

```
1
    & General Counsel, EZ Ride, 144 Park Pl East,
    Wood-Ridge, NJ 07075 agupta@ezride.org.
2
                   "Check out our Impact Report 2023:
3
4
    Beyond the Journey to Work."
5
                   (End of Statement.)
6
                   "From: Phylis Burman
7
    <burman 12@hotmail.com>
                   "Sent: Tuesday, October 15, 2024 10:38
8
9
    ΑМ
10
                   "Subject: Comments for Oct 17th
11
    meeting Attn: Dominick Azzolini
12
                   "Dear Mr. Azzolini,
                   "I am a Bergen County resident who uses
13
14
    EZRide and am pleased with it. However, it is not
    available on Saturday evenings and, more importantly,
15
16
    on Sunday.
17
                   "I realize that the most important need
18
    is for doctor appts. Yet, family social functions
19
    and other recreational activities take place on
20
    Saturday evenings and on Sundays.
21
                   "So, I am urging you to extend the
    hours when Seniors can get rides.
22
23
                   "Thank you for your consideration of
    this matter.
24
25
                   "Yours truly, Phylis Burman, Wood
```

```
1
    Ridge."
                   (End of Statement.)
                   "From: Jackie Bakal
3
4
    <retiredprof14@aol.com>
5
                   "Sent: Sunday, October 13, 2024 6:16
6
    ΡМ
7
                   "To: Community Transportation
                   "Subject: Testifying: Attn:
8
                                                   Dominick
9
    Azzolini
10
                   "I read that there is a hearing about
11
    Transportation Funding and we can send written
12
    comments.
                   "I have been using Community
13
14
    Transportation the past couple of years to take me to
    the senior center in Garfield. Without them I
15
16
    wouldn't be able to go.
17
                   "I understand that Community
18
    Transportation also takes people shopping, doctor's
19
    appointments, physical therapy, etc. I haven't used
20
    it for any of that yet but I'm sure I will be in the
21
    very near future and I really hope you get the
    funding that you need because this is a great asset
22
    for all of us senior citizens and disabled people.
23
                   "Thank you."
24
25
                   (End of Statement.)
```

```
1
                   "From:
                          MS LM
    <mitchellleah26@gmail.com>
2
                   "Sent: Sunday, October 13, 2024 11:45
3
    ΡМ
4
5
                   "To: Community Transportation
                   "Subject: Re: Public Hearing on
6
7
    Transportation Funding for Senior Citizens...on Thurs
    Oct 17, 2024
9
                   "To Whom It May Concern:
10
                   "I cannot attend this meeting due that
11
    it is on Thurs which is the Jewish holiday of Sukkot
    -- Feast of Tabernacles. I feel that the buses that
12
13
    travel around Bergen County are not handicapped
14
    accessible enough for the safety of the seniors and
15
    disabled patrons that ride the buses. They do a much
16
    better job on the NYC buses. We need to do better to
17
    keep our passengers safe. So they can ride where
18
    they want to go and also travel medically with their
19
    ailments. Thank you for your consideration.
                   "L. Mizrahi, Daughter of Senior
20
21
    parents"
22
                   (End of Statement.)
23
                   "October 16, 2024
                   "Mr. Dominick Azzolini
24
25
                   "Bergen County Division of Community
```

Transportation, 178 Essex Street, Lodi, NJ 07644

2 Re: October 17, 2024 Hearing

3 "Dear Mr. Azzolini:

"I wanted to say how much I appreciate having Bergen Transport, as we all call it. I personally use the transport to go to ShopRite each week. The members of my support group utilize your services to attend. I am writing this letter to show my support for Bergen County Community Transportation to continue to receive funding. It is vital for individuals, such as myself, who want to maintain some independence.

"Recently, we hosted a representative from Bergen County Division of Seniors. Quite a number of issues came up for the blind and visually impaired. It would be very beneficial if your staff received Blind and Low Vision Skills Training. In addition, now that Lyft is utilized by your division, it would be most helpful if there was a check box for blind and visually impaired persons, as well as a check box for guide dogs. Many users of guide dogs have told me stories of being left as soon as the Lyft driver sees the dog. I am sure you agree that this is not acceptable.

"I am hoping that my comments are

```
1
    helpful in you securing funding. And, at the same
    time, I hope that some of this funding will go to
    addressing my community's concerns.
4
                   "Very truly yours, Debbie, The
5
    SightSeekers Group, 82 Elmwood Drive, Elmwood Park,
    NJ 07407, 917.816.2431,
6
    the sightseekers group@gmail.com, Debra I. Tester,
    Founder and Facilitator."
9
                   (End of Statement.)
10
                   "To the Committee for Senior
11
    Transportation
12
                   "I was more than pleased to read in the
13
    local Northern Valley Press about your upcoming
14
    meeting to discuss transportation for seniors that
15
    hopefully will include this Godforsaken corner of
16
    northeastern Bergen County!
                   "To my knowledge, no flyers were
17
18
    received here or by anyone I know - this was the
19
    first time most of us heard about your project and I
20
    tried to spread the news.
21
                   "Northvale has three senior affordable
22
    living apartment complexes.
23
                   "Exactly seven years ago today I moved
24
    into one of them (Franklin Villa on Franklin Street).
```

I was driving my 2008 Dodge Caliber without so much

25

as a thought for the day I would no longer drive.

Well, that time came this past March when I turned 93

3 and decided I was not comfortable behind the wheel.

"Now I'm trapped along with neighbors and friends who are in the same predicament or who soon will be.

"I believe Northvale's senior van is available two mornings a week and think it seats eight or ten people. It's quite a treat to be among the Tuesday passengers heading to the ShopRite in town on Route 303.

"But there's no way I can use that van for anything else - perhaps a regularly scheduled visit to a mall, haircut appointments, or even an opportunity to attend meetings such as yours!

"Friends and family are certainly generous and caring, but they have families and jobs and can't be 100% on call.

"Just as a simple example, I own three nearly new pairs of glasses I can't wear. The reason? Their proper fit needs adjusting and I haven't been able to coordinate appointments between opticians in Closter or Paramus and my own sources of transportation. Something you never worry about when you can get in your car and drive wherever necessary.

"I don't think there is a bus route
that goes through Northvale anymore - a far cry from
the days when I first moved here in 1960 from
Brooklyn. Buses ran regularly along Tappan Road,
Livingston Street and even Paris Avenue. The sad
part is we seniors are convinced no one cares.

"If I'm mistaken about local bus routes and any other comments I've made, I apologize.

"I don't know who/where to call with an inquiry regarding county vans to help us or even if that is a possibility.

"How odd that senior centers always manage to arrange day trips to casinos, or overnighters and longer trips, but rarely resolve the other transportation needs of our growing population of seniors.

"One way or the other, I wish the committee speedy success in their endeavor and hope that one day it will be much easier for seniors to travel within the county, especially seniors living here in Northvale. Most likely I won't be around to take advantage of any such improvements but I'm sure other senior citizens will appreciate your efforts to help.

"Sincerely, Mirian J. Piehler, Franklin

```
1
    Villa, 188 Franklin Street, Apartment 309, Northvale,
2
    NJ 07647, Phone: 201-768-6431
                    "P.S. - the e-mail address in the Press
3
    was incorrect."
4
5
                    (End of Statements.)
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
```

1 3 I, KIM O. FURBACHER, License No. 4 XIO1042, a Certified Court Reporter, Registered 5 Diplomate Reporter, Certified Realtime Court 6 Reporter, and Notary Public of the State of New 8 Jersey, hereby certify that the foregoing is a 9 verbatim record of the testimony provided under oath 10 before any court, referee, board, commission or other 11 body created by statute of the State of New Jersey. 12 I am not related to the parties involved in this action; I have no financial 13 14 interest, nor am I related to an agent of or employed 15 by anyone with a financial interest in the outcome of this action. 16 This transcript complies with 17 18 Regulation 13:43-5.9 of the New Jersey Administrative 19 Code. 20 Kim O. Furbah 21 22 KIM O. FURBACHER, CRCR, CCR, RDR 23 License #XIO1042, and Notary Public of New Jersey 24

My Commission Expires:

7/11/2029

25

#	178 [1] - 44:1	5	access [4] - 6:1, 6:8,	afterwards [2] - 20:21,
#	17th [1] - 41:10	3	11:11, 25:21	20:25
#XIO1042 [1] - 49:23	188 [1] - 48:1	5 [1] - 2:8	accessibility [2] -	Age [4] - 31:18, 31:23,
	1960 [1] - 47:3	5310 [1] - 5:16	5:23, 8:22	32:8, 32:10
\$	1:1 [1] - 26:20	5TH [1] - 1:2	accessible [1] - 43:14	age [1] - 11:25
0450 000 5 45			accident [1] - 6:16	Age-Friendly [4] -
\$150,000 [1] - 5:15	2	6	accommodate [2] -	31:18, 31:23, 32:8,
\$2.892 [1] - 4:10	20 0.40	00 14 05 04 45	6:5, 33:9	32:10
\$200,000 [1] - 5:13 \$26,000 [1] - 5:18	20 [1] - 2:16 2008 [1] - 45:25	60 [3] - 11:25, 21:15, 21:16	accommodating [1] -	agency [2] - 8:1, 22:4
. ,	2006 [1] - 45.25 201 [1] - 39:13	68 [3] - 8:8, 27:16,	22:8	agent [2] - 38:8, 49:14
\$3,159,063 [2] - 4:9, 5:11	201 [1] - 39.13 201-265-5105 [1] -	27:18	according [1] - 33:22	agents [3] - 38:4,
\$30,000 [1] - 5:19	36:20	6:16 [1] - 42:5	Accountant [1] - 6:13 accountant [2] - 6:19,	38:18, 38:22 ages [1] - 30:1
\$445,360 [1] - 5:18	201-370-7553 [1] -	6:46 [1] - 36:24	8:5	aging [3] - 7:10,
\$5,000 [2] - 15:5	37:13	0110[1] 00.21	acknowledgement [1]	24:22, 27:20
\$ 5,118,768 [1] - 5:13	201-768-6431 [1] -	7	- 36:18	ago [3] - 3:17, 38:1,
\$50,000 [2] - 5:14,	48:2	•	acknowledging [1] -	45:23
5:20	201-906-9761 [1] -	7.5 [1] - 4:5	14:13	ago. [1] - 36:9
\$53,550 [1] - 5:18	1:25	7/11/2029 [1] - 49:25	acquire [1] - 7:10	agree [1] - 44:23
\$9,232,741 [1] - 5:11	2023 [1] - 41:3	70 [2] - 17:1, 30:15	action [3] - 39:20,	agupta@ezride.org
	2024 [15] - 1:4, 2:7,	71 [1] - 27:16	49:13, 49:16	[1] - 41:2
'	4:16, 4:18, 5:3,	730-7553 [1] - 39:13	active [2] - 22:5, 33:13	ahead [2] - 10:16,
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'gave [1] - 38:19	43:3, 43:8, 43:23,	8	23:12, 23:17	aided [1] - 6:10
	44:2	9 roz 2:0 2:14	addition [2] - 30:23,	ailments [1] - 43:19
0	2025 [2] - 2:8, 5:4	8 [2] - 2:9, 2:14 8,266 [1] - 4:21	44:18	air [1] - 14:16
07075 [1] - 41:2	21 [2] - 2:17, 4:8	80 [2] - 17:1, 38:13	additional [2] - 5:17,	allegiance [1] - 3:8
07407 [1] - 45:6	213 [1] - 1:24 227,000 [1] - 21:19	812 [1] - 4:20	6:4	Allegiance [3] - 2:5,
07644 [1] - 44:1	23 [2] - 2:17, 37:17	82 [1] - 45:5	additionally [1] - 4:25	3:5, 3:10
07647 [1] - 48:2	231,000 [1] - 25:24	8:30!"This [1] - 34:18	address [6] - 6:25,	Allendale [1] - 12:7
07662-0213 [1] - 1:24	24 [1] - 17:16	8:44 [1] - 37:17	12:25, 13:3, 15:8, 34:18, 48:3	Alliance [1] - 31:19
	25 [1] - 2:18		addressing [2] -	allow [2] - 13:24, 40:14
1	250 [2] - 23:9, 24:24	9	13:18, 45:3	allowing [1] - 40:23
<u> </u>	27 [2] - 2:15, 2:15		adequate [1] - 25:21	allows [1] - 10:20
1,760 [1] - 4:25	28 [1] - 2:10	9 [1] - 2:14	adjourn [1] - 29:1	alone [1] - 17:22
10 [2] - 2:15, 31:5	29 [2] - 2:11, 2:20	90 [2] - 17:1, 17:8	adjourned [1] - 29:8	alternative [1] - 7:1
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