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# *Committee Meeting*

of

## ASSEMBLY TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

*“Testimony concerning transportation issues affecting South Jersey”*

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**LOCATION:** Wildwood Convention Center  
Wildwood, New Jersey

**DATE:** March 27, 2003  
11:00 a.m.

**MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:**

Assemblyman John S. Wisniewski, Chairman  
Assemblyman John J. Burzichelli  
Assemblywoman Linda Stender  
Assemblyman Jeff Van Drew  
Assemblyman Nicholas Asselta



**ALSO PRESENT:**

Nancy M. Lipper  
*Office of Legislative Services*  
*Committee Aide*

John R. McCarvill  
*Assembly Majority*  
*Committee Aide*

Jerry Traino  
*Assembly Republican*  
*Committee Aide*

***Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by***  
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,  
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

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**ASSEMBLYMAN JOHN S. WISNIEWSKI (Chairman):** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. If you would, kindly, get to your seats.

Good morning. My name is John Wisniewski. I'm Chairman of the Assembly Transportation Committee.

I'd ask you all to rise so that we may pledge to our flag.

(recite Pledge of Allegiance)

You could all remain standing so that we could have a moment of silence to remember our troops who are engaged in combat overseas.

Thank you.

Nancy, will you please call the roll?

MS. LIPPER (Committee Aide): Certainly.

Assemblyman Bodine is absent.

Assemblyman Asselta substituting for Assemblyman DeCroce.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Here.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: We can't hear you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: We don't have that many microphones up here, so let me move this one over.

MS. LIPPER: Assemblyman Asselta is present.

Assemblyman Van Drew substituting for Assemblyman Johnson.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: Here.

MS. LIPPER: Assemblyman Burzichelli.

ASSEMBLYMAN BURZICHELLI: Here.

MS. LIPPER: Assemblywoman Stender.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN STENDER: Here.

MS. LIPPER: Assemblyman Impreveduto is absent.

Vice-Chairman Gusciora, absent.

Chairman Wisniewski.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Here.

Does everybody have their microphones?

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for all attending, including my colleagues from the Legislature, some of whom have traveled great distances, and others who have not traveled such great distances.

This is an important day for the Assembly Transportation Committee, because it's going to give the members of the Committee and myself, as Chairman, an opportunity to hear from all of you about some issues of importance to South Jersey, in particular, Route 55.

What I wanted to do at the outset is establish some ground rules and inform you on how our Committee process works. If you wish to speak, there are slips available at the table in the foyer or up here. We'd ask that you fill out that slip so that, if you wish to speak, we will call on you. If your name is on any other list, don't assume that you'll be called on. We go by these slips that have been filled out. And we will call those in some order, and my hope is to have everybody who has signed up -- an opportunity to speak.

In order to do that, I would ask that you try and contain your remarks to within five minutes. I would, also, ask that if you have a long written prepared statement, instead of reading it verbatim, submit that to the Committee -- we will make sure that each member has an opportunity to read that -- and paraphrase.

And, finally, if what you're saying has been said one, or two, or three times before, I'm, certainly, not going to stop you from saying it again, but if you could abbreviate it, recognizing that the point has been made. But I do want to be fair to everyone and give everyone an opportunity to have their say.

The Committee agenda mentions South Jersey transportation issues. And the first item, the item of greatest concern, is Route 55. And once we've had an opportunity to hear from all of those individuals who have signed up to speak about that issue, if there are other issues affecting South Jersey transportation needs, we, certainly, would love to hear from you, as well.

I wanted to make it clear that this is an opportunity for me, as Chairman, to get an education from all of you about the pros and the cons and the issues that affect Route 55. This is one of the first of several Transportation Committee meetings that will be conducted throughout the state to discuss issues of importance to our various regions, so that this Committee, when we deliberate on legislation in Trenton, will have had an opportunity to hear, first hand, from the policy makers, from the elected officials, and, most importantly, the citizens. We recognize that it's probably not always easy to get to Trenton. So today we're bringing Trenton to you.

And with that, I would like to offer my colleagues an opportunity to make some opening statements. And I will first call on Assemblyman Asselta.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for hosting and bringing this Committee -- your Committee down here to South Jersey.

Can you hear me?

Let me first begin -- and I'm going to be brief, because this is all about letting you come to us and gather the input that you have. But most importantly, this issue -- and we know infrastructure brings economic viability. And I think this Committee knows that. And I think coming down here today, we will get a sense on how important building infrastructure in South Jersey means to the entire state, not just South Jersey, not just the 1st Legislative District.

And this particular highway has already proven to provide infrastructure and economic viability to the southern region, namely Gloucester County and Cumberland County. With the stoppage of that road at the edge of Cumberland County, we have not seen the type of improvements we need to see to make absolutely sure our area continues to grow.

And I think, today, we will, obviously, hear from different sides of that issue but, I think, most importantly, infrastructure improvements. And the point of this particular hearing is to make sure this Committee clearly understands -- and this community and region understands -- that we must continue to grow, infrastructure-wise, if we're going to provide the opportunities for our citizens in South Jersey.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for hosting this meeting down here -- very important meeting.

Thank you, again.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Assemblyman.

Next I'd like to call on Assemblywoman Linda Stender.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN STENDER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
Good morning to all in attendance.

I am one of the members that traveled a little bit. I'm from Union County. And I, specifically, made the trip because I felt it was important to come down and see and hear about the issues that confront this part of the state, because, certainly, as a member of the Transportation Committee, our intention and our goal is to work for improvements throughout the state. Because, indeed, they are key to our economic fortunes -- that investment in transportation infrastructure is really about our future quality of life and well-being.

So thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Assemblywoman.  
Assemblyman Burzichelli.

ASSEMBLYMAN BURZICHELLI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
Good morning to all, and thank you for coming out to be part of this.

What has been said thus far -- where we stand in recognizing the importance of good infrastructure-- I traveled from my home, which is in Paulsboro, this morning, and was behind two trucks on Route 47, after Route 55. (applause)

Now, the only advantage to that was the words I was using did not have to have more letters than four, so there was no strain on my vocabulary or intellect at that moment. (laughter)

That being said, we also understand both sides of this discussion, with regards to how we treat our land, how we treat our areas. And we're going to have that input today. We know we have to move forward.

But I'll say to all of you early -- because depending on how the flow of the meeting goes, I may be called away -- there are issues of money in the State that are a great problem. We, as taxpayers in New Jersey, recently invested, not by choice -- it was before many of us got there -- to build a light rail line from the city of Camden to the city of Trenton. We don't think it's going to wear out from use. It will be there for a long time. But you, as taxpayers, paid 100 percent of that bill with no Federal match. Probably when it's done -- maybe a billion dollars. Can you imagine if that billion dollars had been applied to a project that could have Federal matching money, or moneys where we only had to participate in maybe 20 percent with 80 percent Federal, how far that billion dollars would have gone, maybe, to help this? Because at this magnificent Convention Center we're sitting in, which is taxpayer money-- For this to be viable, people have to be able to get to it. And they want to get here and see something nice, and they want to travel and not be in bad places, with regards to putting a road in that does great damage.

So with the balance of what we have to do, environmentally, so we keep what we need to keep -- and how we have to move people -- that's -- our transportation plans have to be. So as we hear testimony today, we keep all that in mind, but we must move forward.

So without a long speech, I look forward to the testimony, although I think, maybe, we could predict the testimony. And as far as what the problem is, I think if we brought Ray Charles in, he could tell us what the

problem is. We've got a lot of people trying to get to one place at the same time, and it's hard to move a lot of people.

So we're very grateful you're here. This process works best when everybody's involved. And our mind's are opened -- of how to move about and do the best we can with what resources we have at the moment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Assemblyman.

And to conclude our opening statements by members of the panel, I want to introduce Assemblyman Jeff Van Drew, who is, perhaps, one of the principle reasons why this Committee's here today. It was through Jeff's tenacity and persistence that he convinced me to have a Transportation Committee meeting down here on this issue. And I want to thank him for that.

Assemblyman Van Drew.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: Thank you, Chairman.

I would just like to express, on behalf of all the residents down here, thanks to the Chairman. This is the second time in about a year that the Chairman of the Transportation Committee has been down here in Cape May County. And if that's happened in recent history, I sure don't remember it. And I think that shows a real commitment to South Jersey and our area. And we truly appreciate that.

This is a difficult issue. This is an issue that's been going on for many, many years. This is nothing new. It's nothing different. But hopefully, what is different today, is that we're going to turn a new page. And part of this, hopefully, will be that we can find some common ground. Maybe we can

find some common ground where the environmental community and those that want to see enhanced transportation opportunities, in some ways, can work together.

It is a difficult issue because of the regulatory issues, because of the environmental issues, because of the cost issues. And make no mistake about it, I've said it many times and I will continue to say it, it is a tell-the-truth issue, which means that we have to tell the truth. And what we're here today to do is to listen to the truth and find out how we can accomplish the goal, which is a safer route to Cape May County -- a safer route, a faster route, and a better route, without destroying the environment. And I believe that we can do that, and I believe that this is a very good forward step that begins that process.

So I want to thank you all for being here. And I know, equally as well, Chairman, that I think you indicated that this would probably be a meeting of approximately two hours.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: That's correct, Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: So I know that--

And just to reiterate, through the Chairman, what the Chairman said -- that there's a lot of people that want to speak. And where you think you're, pretty much, saying what has been said before, it would be useful to move on, because I've almost never seen so many speakers at one particular committee hearing in a long time.

Thank you, Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Assemblyman.

Moving right into the individuals who have signed up to speak, Freeholder Director Daniel Beyel.

Mr. Director, and whomever else you have with you.

We are preparing a transcript, and the microphones in front of you are the transcript microphones, and the small black ones are for amplification. If you would just identify yourself for the record when you speak, I'd appreciate it.

Thank you.

**FREEHOLDER DANIEL BEYEL:** Thank you.

I'm Freeholder Director of Cape May County, Daniel Beyel. I'm here with County Engineer Dale Foster and Freeholder Ralph Bakley.

I want to welcome you to Cape May County, and Wildwood in particular. We appreciate your willingness to come down and meet with the people at a more convenient location. So we thank you for that. And I encourage you, on your way out, that if you haven't gotten your summer rental or you want to buy your second home (laughter) that you will find people willing, in the lobby, to assist you.

One of the other hats that I wear is, I'm the Chairman of the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization. It's the four southern counties of Salem, Cumberland, Cape May, and Atlantic. And we plan the Federal and State transportation moneys and matching funds for addressing transportation needs in that region.

The Route 55 problem and the Route 47 corridor is the number one issue since I've been a member of that group now, which goes back almost eight years. Of anywhere in South Jersey, everybody recognizes that this

corridor needs to be addressed, as far as for safety, congestion, environmental protection, and for economic opportunities for the shore region.

We have authorized what we call a Shore Connection Committee, which was recommended by the Department of Transportation. They met for three years between Cumberland County and Cape May County. We came up with some short-term, intermediate-term, and long-term recommendations. It's been five years since that Committee has started it's work. It's still relatively active, but there have been no improvements constructed, based upon all the recommendations that were agreed to. So we're not too optimistic that normal planning means are the best to get a lot of things done.

But we did come up with one method. It was initiated through Cape May County. It's to make people take alternate routes off of county roads to get to the eastern side of Cape May County. And that was implemented by the county and, finally, supported by the New Jersey Department of Transportation. And it does make an impact.

Assemblyman Doug Fisher has a summer home in Avalon. He leaves from Cumberland County when he comes down. It takes him an extra hour. And he was the Co-Chairman, along with myself, of the Shore Connection Committee. And I'm sure (indiscernible) this morning knows that that's -- if he was here, he'd be jumping up and down, I think, to be part of the, hopefully, success of this project.

Also in the region, you have the South Jersey Transportation Authority, which operates the Atlantic City Expressway. They're very supportive of having some improvements in this corridor, because people who are traveling east from the Philadelphia region or Delaware region get on the

Expressway. It impacts, adversely, Atlantic County, because so many people are taking that route, to connect to the Parkway to come south, that it's having some impacts that they may have to address -- they wouldn't have to address if this -- other roadways had more capacity, and more people used them.

Second, I've been a Freeholder -- this is my 16th year -- and I've been an elected official in Cape May County for over 25 years. There's two issues in Cape May County that rub everybody the wrong way, and this is probably the number one issue. The second issue is the traffic lights on the Garden State Parkway. So when it comes to transportation issues, we've done a lot with what we have to work with, but I think we could do better at the same time.

The South Jersey Transportation Authority -- planning Organization, excuse me -- authorized some aerial photography of the summer season about three years ago. They took pictures of the Route 47 corridor at times of summer use. They sent the information to our planning organization, and the people put a note on their report saying that, "In all the years that we've been in business in New Jersey, and all the aerial mapping and pictures we have taken, this is the worst area of traffic congestion we have observed -- in this Route 47, Route 55 corridor."

One of the things that's distressing to Cape May County is that tourism is our number one industry here. And we're looking around and looking at other areas -- radius of about 300 miles -- is generally the market for the people who come to vacation in Cape May County and have second homes. But other states, such as Delaware-- They have constructed a new superhighway, Route 1, to take people from the northern part of Delaware to

the southern coastal areas of their state. Maryland -- Route 13 and 113 takes people from populated areas of Maryland -- directs them towards Maryland resorts in a more safer, quicker manner. Some of these people would normally be people, hopefully, that would come and vacation in New Jersey. Virginia -- we see the Chesapeake Bay Bridge tunnel has added dual lanes to assist their traffic capacities and to make it safer and quicker for people traveling in that vicinity. And the Virginia Beach area -- they've increased the expressway and the capacity in that area. And if you go down a little further south, you go to Chesapeake, Virginia. And they have just constructed a Chesapeake Expressway. It's a 16-mile long road that connects parts of Virginia, heading towards North Carolina, where people go to the Outer Bank resorts. It was opened in, I believe, the year 2001. It's 16 miles long, cost \$160 million, and it took 10 years to plan, permit, and construct.

So there's an awful lot of opportunity. And we're concerned that the other states are making improvements that are going to take those visitors, that normally came here in the past, to other destinations and may not bring them back. So I think New Jersey's going to be losing people, potentially, to other areas, because other states are viewing transportation needs as part of the local tourism and coastal economy requirement.

In Virginia, some of the concerns they had to address when they built that roadway, as far as wetlands or lakes, waters, ponds, and environmental concerns are not as rigid as they are in New Jersey, but they were able to get the permits necessary and do that. That's something, I think, that we have to do here in Cape May County and Cumberland County.

We need the cooperation of our two communities that are affected, one in Cumberland County in Maurice River Township and Dennis Township. We want them on board, and we want them advocates to change things.

In the summertime, people can't get in and out of their homes, because the traffic is just backed up so long that it's fruitless. And if there's an accident or medical emergency, to get emergency services people there -- who, in that area, are volunteers -- and then travel back down to this area, where the only hospital is in Cape May County -- in the Cape May Court House area -- it's very frustrating, and it's not what needs to be done.

I think in some of the design phases that have been proposed for Route 55 extension, we look at areas of 300-, 400-, 500-foot right-of-ways. We look at a lot of other types of construction that may not be suitable for this location. I think we need to rethink, in general, that -- smaller right-of-ways may be able to be constructed.

And I think, when you look to what can be done in Cape May County and what may be done in other areas of the state, I think you have to look at where you are today. You're sitting in a building that's east of the boardwalk, that's constructed on, probably, New Jersey's nicest and longest beach. It's in a Federal emergency management area, high velocity wind and water action zone, and we had to give exceptions in all the permitting process to construct such a facility here. And I think if you look at it's location, and if you look out towards the ocean, you see the Ocean City, Sea Isle, Avalon, Stone Harbor beaches that have washed down here and helped extend this out. You'll see that people in Cape May County are pleased to be part of the

solution here. But this was a very difficult problem to -- where to site and where to build. But I think this has really worked out well. And I think it shows that using some balance of doing something right, protecting the environment, and using some common sense, things can be done.

And I also would suggest, if you came in today on the Wildwood Boulevard, that you exit today on the North Wildwood Boulevard. If you look at how that road is constructed, that could be a good example on how to extend Route 55. It goes through a very environmentally sensitive area, but it's a very necessary route, and it's relatively compact in width. But I think it addresses the concerns that we want to see. And it's been done in the last 25 years. It took a long time to get the concept approved, the permits approved, and then the funding approved. It was over, I think, \$60-some million to do that. But I think there are some solutions, and there are some things that we can do using common sense.

So I think, today-- In the past, most of us thought that the progress was -- if we were an automobile in park, hopefully today, by having this hearing, we've moved to neutral, and now we want to go into drive gear number one, and, at least, start some positive planning, rather than just talking about a proposal, and get us to where we want to go. Because I think things are doable, and there's an awful lot of factors that, I think, are important. And there may be pending bills in the Assembly and Senate that we want to work with you to support.

But funding is a concern, timing of the funding. We recognize that. But I think if we can agree on what needs to be constructed, where it needs to be constructed at, what limitations we may have, and then look at

how to fund it, I think, at least, it would get us to think that we are going to be competitive for the future. Because with the budget dilemma that the State of New Jersey has, if we had more people working here, more people paying to acquire and invest in properties here, it will generate more income to the State of New Jersey and, at the same time, it's not necessarily expanding services to the people that, on a year-round basis, live here. We go from about a hundred thousand population to over a half-million population in the summertime.

So we appreciate your being here today.

And I'd like to ask our County Engineer if he could give you a brief synopsis of his concerns.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Sure. Thank you, Freeholder.

FREEHOLDER BEYEL: Thank you.

**DALE M. FOSTER:** Route 55 was conceived in the '60s to connect Philadelphia and its suburbs to Cape May's shore communities. Today, the four-lane divided highway of Route 55 begins at the Route 42 Freeway, in Gloucester County, and terminates in Port Elizabeth, in Cumberland County. At Port Elizabeth, all highway traffic is dumped onto the two-lane Route 47. Route 47 was built in the 1920s, and is best described as a meandering two-lane land-service roadway, having poor horizontal alignment incapable of handling freeway traffic.

The geography of Cape May County is unique in that it's a peninsula with salt-water boundaries for almost three-quarters of its perimeter. This poses a large evacuation challenge should a hurricane strike the community. Route 47 and the Garden State Parkway are not safe places in a

hurricane. They cross existing salt water marshes where flooding could strand motorists in their cars.

An Army Corps of Engineers' study predicts that the backup for evacuating Cape May County would be in excess of 30 hours. Even with the successful implementation of a reverse lane strategy on Route 47, we would only reduce the backup to about 20 hours. Unfortunately, this is not acceptable. As Cape May County, we have to ensure the safety of our visitors and our residents. Evacuation could also be required in the event of homeland security.

Cape May County's economy is almost exclusively dependent upon the tourism. The inordinate amount of tax dollars which Cape May County economy sends to Trenton and Washington, D.C., is not the primary justification for advocating the completion of Route 55. However, it is a major factor, due to our need to compete with coastal areas in the states to the south.

Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina are investing heavily in upgrading the roadways leading to their coastal areas, so as to provide a smooth, safe, and efficient means that has the capability to handle their tourism traffic.

If the trip to Cape May County remains long and difficult, an increasing number of visitors will opt for the other tourist areas. We must reduce our travel times, as well as increase safety and convenience for motorists, in order to maintain our status of a desirable tourist destination.

The completion of Route 55 is necessary, simply from the standpoint of the senseless deaths and maiming injuries from motor vehicle crashes that have occurred along Route 47. Many lives could have been, and

can be, saved if Route 55 is completed. It is a well-known fact that divided highways have a much lower rate of vehicle crashes than two-lane roadways.

Homeowners along the existing 47 deserve a better quality of life than the one that exists today. These homeowners are prisoners in their own homes on weekends and suffer from vehicle exhaust fumes, large amounts of litter, and harassment from long-delayed motorists. Because of the traffic congestion, these motorists -- these homeowners are unable to exit their driveways.

With the advances in today's design and standards, we can construct a roadway that will adapt to the environment, as well as address the safety, economic, and quality-of-life issues that have been neglected for far too long.

In summary, Cape May County needs and supports the completion of Route 55. Public safety demands it, motorists need it, and our tourism economy cries for it.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

And does Mr. Bakley have anything? (no response)

Thank you, gentlemen.

FREEHOLDER BEYEL: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Our next individual to testify will be Jody Carrara.

**JODY CARRARA:** Good morning.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Good morning.

Jody, I'm looking on your sheet here -- organization -- ANJEC?

MS. CARRARA: Yes, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

MS. CARRARA: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Just speak louder, please.

MS. CARRARA: ANJEC is in direct competition -- opposition to the extending of Route 55. There will be no economic benefits or social benefits.

The resort economies of Cape May County would not be assisted by these roadways. The municipalities in Cumberland, and those in Cape May -- a few of them -- would be negatively impacted, economically.

The highway would impact the master plans and rural characters of municipalities, and sprawl development might follow if any development were allowed.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: Can she get a microphone or something?

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: There is a microphone.

MS. LIPPER: Move the small, flat one closer to you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: The flat one to your left.

MS. CARRARA: All right.

The highway would impact the master plans and rural characters of municipalities, and sprawl development would follow if development were allowed on the exits. The land we're talking about is very fragile. Economic development would not follow this road.

The New Jersey Department of Transportation, in 1995, predicted that 62 houses would be moved in order to make room for the Route 55 extension. With the development in Cape May as it is now, the number will be higher. The extension of Route 55 will not alleviate congestion. What it will do is it will move that congestion. When you have congestion right now at Route 55 where it meets Route 47, that will be moved to the Garden State Parkway, the Barrier Island causeways, and Route 9. You will not reduce your traveling time.

The environmental impacts from the extension of Route 55 are incalculable. You would have 20 miles of a 300-foot roadway going through wetlands, forest. It would have to be a raised roadway in many areas.

Cape May County is very blessed with natural resource beauty and a very, very healthy economy. The road should not be extended at the expense of other economies. Cape May County -- what they should do is think of their future by recognizing the natural capacity limitations of their land, which is a peninsula.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Jody.

Do you have a copy of your--

MS. CARRARA: Yes, I do.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: --prepared remarks so that we can have them for the record?

Thank you.

Next I'd like to call Lew Ostrander, Cape May County Fireman's Association.

Lew, the flat microphone is for amplification.

**LEWIS OSTRANDER:** Yes.

Good morning, everyone.

I'm here representing the Cape May County Fireman's Association. My name is Lew Ostrander. I'm Deputy Fire Marshall of Cape May County. I'm also the Fire Official of the city of North Wildwood, so I do have a couple hats that I wear that this road will impact.

The main reason I'm here to speak to you today is to talk about the safety. One of the biggest problems that we have is in the event of an evacuation from this island. As you all know, during a storm we have to go off this island. And Route 47 is -- the way it's designed now, they're going to direct traffic one way out. Our biggest concern is we have to rely on outside forces to support us in the event of an emergency. If we have all the traffic impacted leaving -- if you put 200,000 people, in the summertime, on the road going out, it's going to be very -- it's going to impact our services to get people here to help us in a time of emergency.

Also, now, with the Homeland Security Act, and the planning that we're doing, we are, literally -- if you look at any map -- cut off from the world in the event of a major emergency. If the roadways are impacted by tourists leaving, we are going to be impacted by not allowing -- we'll be shut off from the National Guard coming to us with support, the State Police coming to us with support. All our outside agencies are coming from the Vineland-Trenton area to our destination. Without this valuable construction of Route 55, we are left with Route 47, Route 9, and of course, the Garden State Parkway.

But you can't use the Garden State Parkway as your main roadway, because it's impacted by the water that surrounds it on the east side. So if we were going to use the Garden State Parkway, we always have to plan for the worst case scenario, especially during a hurricane evacuation, of flooding. Contrary to what a lot of people know of the Garden State Parkway, there are areas that the wetlands come right up to the roadway. So that's a concern.

But overall, from the public safety end, our biggest concern during an emergency -- and especially now in the troubled times that we have -- is getting help to us from the outside. And without this needed highway, we're going to be impacted greatly, when we need that support, because of two things. If the Salem nuclear plant were to be destroyed, or something happened there, we have to get our people out of here. We all know that. And in the same breath, the emergency people that we have in Cape May County, Atlantic County, and Cumberland County -- they'll be impacted because we're their lifeline.

The mutual aid agreements that we have with all the counties in New Jersey-- All the fire services and all the emergency services -- we work together. So it works in reverse. If you're up in Cumberland County, and you have an emergency, you're going to rely on our forces in Cape May County to get to you to help. And that's going to be hampered.

And that's one of the biggest problems that we have right now, when we're dealing with planning, especially with the new homeland security planning that's going on, on a daily basis. We are, literally, cut off from the

rest of the state in some kind of an emergency, and that's where we're concerned.

The big thing that I wanted to end by saying is, I want to thank you for coming here, but we have to all put this in perspective. If we don't put this plan together, and we don't see the drawings of where this roadway is going to be, and we don't spend this needed money to do that funding, then we're all going to be here arguing about what's going to be destroyed or what's not going to be destroyed.

And the most important thing is that we get this planning done. Let's see a big map up on the wall of the actual drawings of where the road's going to go. Let's get all that finality done. And part of what you're here for today is to spend that needed money that we need to get this plan in place.

And that's why, from a public safety standpoint-- Planning is what we're at, right now. We're in the planning stages, in the 21st century, in a time when things can happen. Even though Cape May County is at the southern end of the state, our forces here impact the forces all throughout the state.

When we had to go up to New York-- We sent a lot of people from here to New York. We were thinking if that, New York, had impacted the Garden State Parkway, we would have been cut off. We wouldn't have been able to go and support the people in New York, and vice versa. Those people in New York -- if we're cut off here -- they won't be able to come to us to support us.

And I think we have to take into consideration the environment. We have to take into consideration the impact of lives that use the roadway.

But our big concern is the public safety forces using that roadway, and getting people out of here in an emergency.

And, again, I want to thank you for allowing us to speak here today. But, please, get the planning done, get the drawings done. Let us see, on paper, what we're actually looking at, so that we can, actually, tell the public out there if they are going to be impacted.

And, again, I thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Lew.

And we'll follow up with another Lou, Freeholder Lou Magazzu.  
Freeholder.

**F R E E H O L D E R L O U I S N. M A G A Z Z U:** Mr. Chairman, good afternoon.

If I may, I have copies.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Freeholder, I appreciate the remarks, and if you could paraphrase and summarize--

FREEHOLDER MAGAZZU: Mr. Chairman, I'll be happy to do that.

Let me first welcome all of you for -- welcome all of you to Cumberland County -- Cape May County I should say -- in South Jersey.

I know every one of you, so I hope my comments will still be viewed as reasonable and appropriate. (laughter) I appreciate the fact that you're all here.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: It's going to be hard to do.

FREEHOLDER MAGAZZU: Thank you very much, Assemblyman.

Assemblyman Asselta, that's why I'm glad you're from Vineland.

Anyway, let me just paraphrase, if I may, because I know you have many people here. The thrust of my comments, really, are in a couple of areas.

First of all, the economic development concept-- Route 55 began, literally, when I was a little boy. And for a long time, it was known as a road to nowhere. It went from Malaga to Port Elizabeth, two wonderful communities worth visiting at any time, but it did not reach it's purpose -- or meet it's purpose, which was to provide an opportunity for, in effect, a straight, direct shot to the shore.

It had enormous economic, positive benefits for our county. I will tell you -- and both Assemblyman Asselta and Assemblyman Van Drew, and Assemblyman Burzichelli from the third district-- The three of them are aware of what's happened in Vineland and Millville. And a lot of it is as a result of the Route 55 expansion and extension there.

Literally, an unemployment rate that used to be double the State national average -- that is now, pretty much, about the State national average -- literally having thousands of people on welfare, now in the hundreds of people. So we've seen positive impact, but it has not met it's original purpose and goal, and that is to be a connector to, certainly, the shore.

We, certainly, in Cumberland County, respect the environment. We love it. We don't want to have the types of sprawl that some parts of the state have. But we are also desperate to have an economic quality of life that parallels our environmental quality of life.

Assemblyman Asselta and I grew up in Cumberland County, in Vineland, and remember the bad days. We remember the unemployment rate

that former Congressman Hughes estimated to be, probably, at 20 percent, and the worst of it.

Your prior speaker spoke about safety, and I want to amplify that, if I may. For three years, I served as liaison for the public safety area in Cumberland County, as a Freeholder. And, literally, God forbid if there was a true, global type of emergency -- when I say global, I don't necessarily mean terrorism, I mean a hurricane or something like that. The ability to take people from the shore back to the mainland would be enhanced dramatically if you had Route 55. Said a different way, I think our ability to do that is reduced dramatically.

I guess the only other point, since I'm paraphrasing, is the-- Oh, traffic counts. There have been constant studies -- many studies. All you need to do is look at the traffic counts. And one of the things that I found almost paradoxical, with respect to the environmental impact-- We are hurting the environment in a real way with the backup of vehicles every weekend at Port Elizabeth. I mean, there is gasoline, there's fumes, there's backup. And I'm not a scientist, but as a layman, I said to myself, "I wonder how much damage we're doing to the environment, how much waste, literally, in that backup--" And it may sound funny, unless you look at the vehicles and you see the tie-up, not to mention the loss of hours. And when we talk about the quality of life, and enjoyment of quality of life, we're recognizing that when people are trapped in cars, they're losing that opportunity.

I've made the following recommendations, at the end of my statement, if I may.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Sure.

FREEHOLDER MAGAZZU: Number one, adopt the recommendation of the Shore Connection Study and build overpasses on the Garden State Parkway at the end, just north of Cape May, to relieve congestion at that pressure point. I would say, this came as a result of meeting with our planning department. This is not just coming out of my mind.

Two, follow through with intersection and road widenings throughout the Route 47 corridor, which have been proposed by the study.

Number three, construct a two-lane limited access highway from Weatherby Road in Maurice River Township to Tuckahoe, using the abandoned railroad right-of-way. Portions are already under State control, and the parts of Belleplain State Park which would be touched are not critical areas.

Most importantly, we need to act now and begin construction, rather than complete study after study and hold meeting after meeting with no concrete result. I'm not suggesting that's the case here. We appreciate that you're here. This type of attention, frankly, of the Legislature shows the importance that you attached to it. But from a point of view of those of us who have been life-long residents, there's a great degree of frustration, because there's been lots of talk, lots of study, and very, very little action.

The residents of Cape May and Cumberland County deserve more than an unfinished highway from the last half of the 20th century. We appreciate and respect legitimate environmental issues and concern raised by people who have those legitimate issues.

I believe, with all due respect, that they're not mutually exclusive issues. We are a smart enough State, smart enough people. And if we plan it,

I think, with the resources, we can, in the least intrusive way, finish the promise of Route 55, and I think that will help all of us.

And that's my final point. Someone might say, "Well, wait a minute. If Cumberland County's had all the benefit of Route 55 ending there, why do you want to connect it?" We have a regional economy in South Jersey, probably all over the state -- probably mid-Atlantic region -- but I can speak with some comfort about the regional impact.

How goes Cape May County and Atlantic County, so goes Cumberland, so goes Salem, so goes Gloucester, so goes Camden. We are all interrelated. What's good for part of the region is good for the entire region.

I want to thank you again for coming down here. It's great to see all of you, and I am particularly impressed that you came in April rather than June or July or August, where you could have taken the afternoon to go to the beach. So it shows tremendous commitment, and I thank you for that. I appreciate you being here.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Freeholder. Thank you for your comments.

Next, I'd like to call Dennis Keck, Assistant Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Transportation.

Commissioner.

**ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER W. DENNIS KECK:**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It's good to be here. And thank you for inviting me here today to speak on issues in South Jersey. Thank you, also, for the wonderful weather. It's just a pleasure to come down.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: I wish I could take credit for it.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: I wish you could, too.

I'm just going to paraphrase, quickly. A number of the remarks that I was going to speak on have been, already, touched upon. But I wanted to just mention, quickly, some of the things that we are now involved in, in South Jersey. And I want to touch on the Route 55 issue.

As an Assistant Commissioner for Planning Development, I will tell you I've been with the Department of Transportation for 31 years, and I have seen a number of studies on the issue of the Route 55 freeway in my career. Clearly, this is an issue that has a number of pros and cons associated with it, and it's, obviously, a difficult issue to try and address for the Department of Transportation.

Let's just talk about some of the things that we're doing right now in Cape May County. Many of you know, 10 years ago we spent over \$80 million improving the major access into North Wildwood, the Route 147 bridge -- key piece of infrastructure -- key because it provided good access into a barrier island. And we continued to do those types of projects today. We just recently completed, last year, the Ocean City Long Port Bridge, at a cost of over \$52 million.

Another major piece of infrastructure the Department of Transportation is starting the final design on, down in Cape May County, of course -- it's a structure which leads to Ocean City, just to the very north of this region here -- at the very northern tip of Cape May County. And, again, the cost of improving that structure -- which has been in existence for over 80

years, which is severely deteriorated -- at a cost of over \$220 million -- just one structure.

So the task and the importance of these are obvious. These are key access points to our barrier islands, and we need to address them. And we are doing that.

At the same time, we are looking at a number of other projects. Here in Middle Township, construction is underway, at a cost of over \$10 million, to widen a piece of Route 47, creating center turning lanes to improve traffic flow.

And, also, the Department is working on a number of design improvements throughout the State highway system. In Cape May County, almost \$20 million in improvements on Routes 9, 49, 56, and 47 are moving through our design pipeline, including bridge replacements, dam repairs, and operational and safety improvements.

Let's talk about the Route 55 issue for a second. Here we are in this era of resources that are scarce. Obviously, you listen to the Governor, and you're looking at \$6 billion deficits in our budget. Resources are scarce. And, clearly, the infrastructure is old. This is an old state. We have an aging infrastructure. We have a fragile environment. We have tremendous congestion. And all of those factors go into our decision-making and how we try to address transportation in our State.

I think we need to focus, really, on long-term rehabilitation, repairing, and repairing our transportation systems, and trying to, really effectively, make sure that our infrastructure is in a state of good repair.

With that, clearly, our policy today is to fix it first. Our primary focus of the Department's work, right now, in both South Jersey and across most of our state, is to maintain, rehabilitate, reconstruct our aging transportation systems.

At the same time, we can't forget about the other important issues that we face, in terms of smart growth, trying to address congestion, and improving mobility, as well as improving the quality of life for all of New Jersey's citizens. And when we look at South Jersey, and we look at this area -- and Dale Foster said it well -- and Chairman Beyel said it well -- that down here in South Jersey, we have a unique blend of rural, farmland, shore communities, open space, urban, suburban, and business centers. All of that makes it difficult, in terms of how we move forward on major, brand new initiatives.

Let's face it, much of the transportation system today is completed. And we are focusing much, much more today on trying to do what we can to repair what we have. At the same time, improvements are necessary. Congestion exists. We can't bury our heads in the sand and pretend it doesn't exist.

The last study on Route 55-- I can remember, when I started in 1971, our 1968 master plan, which was the first master plan the Department of Transportation ever put out, had Route 55 freeway completion in it. It was studied in the 1970s, it was studied in the 1980s, and it was studied in the 1990s. The last study that came out in 1994 -- the Department conducted a study of the proposed extension of the Route 55 freeway through this corridor from Port Elizabeth over to the Garden State Parkway. The study concluded

that the cost of such an extension would exceed one-half billion dollars -- this was in the early 1990s -- and that the environmental impacts would be severe.

This is one of the most ecologically sensitive and important areas in the East Coast, that you're going through. It is of interest to environmentalists throughout the nation. Among its many environmental attributes, it serves as one of the most important locations for bird migrations along the Atlantic Flyway in North America. And completion of the 55 freeway would require filling of up to 100 acres of wetlands. If you look at the region in the area that we were proposing this, depending on the alternative, almost 40 percent of the area is wetlands. So much of the high cost is because the type design you would have to do is to build a lot of this unstructured, more costly design, more costly construction. Yet, even with that, you would still be filling in over a hundred acres.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Commissioner, let me, if I may, just ask a question.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: The history of the designs and the studies for Route 55 goes on for several decades.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Is the issue, ultimately, one of money, or is it ultimately one of environment?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: I think it's both. Quite frankly, it's an issue here. When I'm talking about the direct impacts of the construction of a road, I'm simply talking about directly what would happen if we constructed this. I think you get into the other issues of what happens

to the neighborhoods, to the communities, to the counties along this corridor, as well. The indirect impacts, then, are caused by what happens to the induced growth that is caused by the construction of a route. So it gets into growth issues and other issues, as well.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Well, just-- I mean, the Department of Transportation does not get involved in growth issues. Simply, your agency, your department looks at projects, in terms of costs, environmental complexity. And my understanding is, the more complex it gets, environmentally, the more expensive it gets. So I mean, is it fair to say that because of the environmental complexity, this has become a very expensive project.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: Yes, sir. I think that's a very fair statement. Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: And has this ever been put into the capital plan, other than the studies that have been done?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: It's been put into the capital plan in the past for studies -- for study money, but that's it. It is-- We have never moved forward with any type of final design or right-of-way acquisition or construction dollars for this project, per se.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Okay, thank you.

Any other members have questions?

Assemblyman Asselta.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Yes, just one question, Mr. Chairman.

Have you been aware of alternative plans in the last three or four or five years that have been presented to, I guess, the past three commissioners?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: I am aware that there have been a number of discussions and alternatives that have been suggested, yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Do you have an opinion of those alternative plans?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: We had looked at, initially, in evaluating these-- There have been some -- almost a dozen different alternatives that were looked at at one time or another, everything from building a new freeway, four-lane freeway, to trying to improve and upgrade existing roads that could handle the traffic.

And your dilemma is, a lot of the improvements, even to improve existing roads, which could handle that traffic, has a lot of impacts because of the people that live in close proximity to those roads. And even those alternatives were very high cost and not always supported. But I am aware of a number of them.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: So, through the Chairman, as the Chairman mentioned, your job as professionals in the transportation area would be to find the solution to the problem.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: And even though there has been numerous alternatives presented, your department -- and you've been there 31 years, I believe--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: --31 years, and this issue has been, I guess, around half that time. You still haven't looked at any of those alternatives, to try to begin to solve the problem, so that maybe today we wouldn't be sitting here. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: I appreciate that members of the audience may like what somebody says a lot, or dislike what somebody says a lot, but if we could try to keep audience participation to speaking at the microphone, I think we'll be more productive today.

Commissioner.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: And just to answer-- I mean, these are difficult decisions. We have done work that indicated that these were difficult decisions, and that any alternative would be extremely expensive, and that it would have a lot of environmental impact. And when that was concluded, the decisions to move forward were not forthcoming. And, I mean, that's where we are today, quite frankly. They have not been forthcoming. What we have been doing is looking at how can we try to improve the existing system to make it operate better. And that we are trying to do, and are working towards. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: So through the Chair, just to end this, it's, in your opinion and the Department's opinion, through the past three administrations -- and this is not a political or partisan issue here -- it's an unsolvable problem, as far as the Department of Transportation is concerned, because of it's lack of initiative to attempt to solve in any such way.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: Through the Chairman, nothing is unsolvable. There are answers and solutions to this. It gets to the issue of your costs, your benefits, and the tremendous challenge that we face, statewide, to improve our infrastructure. It gets to your decision making on how we make decisions about where we spend our very limited resources, Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Okay, so--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: Those are really the issues. Nothing is unsolvable.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Okay. So to finish this, then -- then priority-wise, you've just established to me that South Jersey, Cape May County and Cumberland County is very low on the Department of Transportation's list of priority. And I'm not--

He's been there 31 years, Mr. Chairman, and I'm not criticizing any one administration, because we've dealt with this with a Republican administration for the last eight years, also.

So if that's going to be the position of DOT, to say it's not high on our priority list, because there are many difficulties associated with solving this problem, that's what we need to know.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Well, Assemblyman--

And, certainly, Commissioner, you can respond.

I think one of the problems -- and this is not a Democrat or Republican issue--

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: --because you're right, for the last 30 years, regardless of administration, there have been transportation issues like Route 55 here, or Route 92 in Middlesex County, or Route 206 in Sussex County, all of which, at some point, develop large environmental concerns, which translate into large dollar concerns. And it always has been a problem. We have a lot more need than we have will to execute, because the dollars aren't always there.

Commissioner.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: Mr. Chairman, I think you have summarized it in a nutshell. And, again, these are difficult decision. Obviously, this is one of the reasons why this project has been so difficult to make final decisions on moving forward on.

I will say, there is a lot of work, though, that is going on, as I mentioned, in South Jersey, as well. Clearly, there are some key infrastructure demands. When you spend \$225 million on one structure, and you have 6,000 structures in this state that you need to pay attention to, I would say that is saying something that, "Hey, we also need to pay attention--" And I can't think of a piece of infrastructure that is more critical than the access to our barrier islands, in particular. So those are some of the things -- when we look at what we need to fix -- that we need to really pay attention to.

As an engineer, I'd like nothing -- I mean, I like to build stuff. I do. But yet, these are difficult decisions. And, clearly, when you look at the environment-- I mean, this whole area is either within a CAFRA or within the Pinelands regulatory area. Again, if you look at the state map, and you look at all the green and orange and little squiggly lines that show wetlands on the

map, this whole area is just covered by those sensitivities. And I think that's what's made the decision so difficult here.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Commissioner. I would just ask that you remain with us for the remainder of the testimony, in case an issue comes up that you might be useful in either answering a question or providing additional insight on.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KECK: It would be my pleasure, Mr. Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

I'd like to next call, from the New Jersey Audubon Society, David Mizrahi. Did I get that right?

David, I hope I got your name right.

**DAVID MIZRAHI, Ph.D.:** I'll repeat it for the benefit of the panel and the audience today.

I'm Dr. David Mizrahi, Vice President for Research, New Jersey Audubon Society.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I'm here representing the New Jersey Audubon Society and our 20,000 members to assert our strong opposition to the proposal to extend Route 55 through Cape May County.

As you've heard from the Assistant Commissioner of DOT, this will have a tremendous impact on a large area of very sensitive habitat that's used by threatened and endangered species. It will destroy world-class natural areas, it will promote sprawl development, and impede the repair of many

roadways and bridges in need of immediate attention by diverting transportation funds.

As early as 1994, the Southern Jersey Transportation Planning Organization concluded, after a two-year study, that the need for a major highway project with year-round impacts, to address problems that occurred during a limited summer season, is questionable.

The wildlife, forests, and wetlands of Cape May County and southeastern Cumberland County, as many of you know, are among the best New Jersey has to offer. These wild areas are home to many threatened and endangered species, and provide critical habitat for migrant land birds. And these areas are not only important to the animals, but they're important to the region's thriving ecotourism industry. Many people come to this area not only to enjoy the beaches, but enjoy the wildlife that we've done such a tremendous job in protecting.

The extension of Route 55 will directly fragment and destroy nature preserves, including the Nature Conservancy's Manumuskin Preserve, Dennis Creek Wildlife Management Area, and Belleplain State Forest, to name a few. It will destroy over one square mile of habitat and pollute nine different waterways, including the Morris River, which is nationally recognized as a wild and scenic river. Indirectly, this project will promote sprawl, which is counter to the State's current Smart Growth initiative.

Each time we introduce the idea or introduce a major roadway project, it's done under the guise of easing traffic congestion. But in every case, or in most cases, major roadways, including the Garden State and

Interstate 287, have become arteries that foster urban sprawl and destroy quality of life and natural heritage.

These roadways have become clogged with traffic, so these are only temporary solutions, if they're solutions at all. They feature idling cars that spew harmful emissions. And although we have this same situation on Route 47, building an extension to Route 45 (*sic*), we believe, will amount to the same thing in just a few short years.

The Route 45 extension comes with a tremendous price tag. By all accounts, we're talking about somewhere between \$1.5 and \$2 billion for what we might realize in the short-term seasonal benefit.

We believe that the proposal is antithetical to the administration's bold commitment to Smart Growth, Transportation's Fix-it-First policy. And we support the Fix-it-First policy before we start to embark on new projects.

Clearly, we believe that this project should be removed in favor of sound planning that includes improving the existing roads and mass transit.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, doctor. I appreciate your testimony.

Just to keep our audience up to date, we have, in the space of an hour, been able to hear seven people testify. I'm going to try to speed the process by asking you to come up in groups that are similarly situated. I'm going to call three local elected officials to come up: Mayor Diane Sloan, city of Wildwood.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: Duane. (laughter)

You better not vacation in Wildwood, Chairman.

**MAYOR DUANE SLOAN:** What a difference a vowel makes.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: He did not go to the same grammar school that I did. That's all I can say.

Is Mayor Palombo, of North Wildwood -- Mayor Palombo -- and Committeeman of Maurice Township -- Franckle. And he is so much in favor of it, he's put four check marks next to it, in favor of it. (laughter)

Gentlemen, if you could all, please, make your points as well as you can and as briefly as you can, so that we can move through our agenda.

MAYOR SLOAN: I will be very brief, because I think most of what needs to be said, pro and con, has, really, already been said. But I do want to go on record. If any of you have tried to travel Route 55 and/or Route 47 on either a Friday night or Saturday morning heading southbound, or a Sunday afternoon heading northbound, you would realize that this is more than just an inconvenience. This is a situation that really is something that may spur people not to come back to this area. When you're stuck in traffic for four or five hours at a time, it leaves such a taste in people's mouths that they may not return to our town. It is not a matter only of convenience, it is a matter of economic viability. And I think we need to look at it that way.

And, secondly -- and this, again, is not a political statement. This is not a Republican or Democrat issue. But if this were occurring in any other district that was more populated and had more political clout than Cape May County does, it would not be allowed to continue. But here it has continued for 30 years. It needs to be done, needs to be finished, and it's unacceptable. And it would be unacceptable in any of your districts. It's unacceptable in ours, as well.

**MAYOR ALDO A. PALOMBO:** I'm Mayor Al Palombo, city of North Wildwood.

Ten years as Mayor, 40 years as a pharmacist in North Wildwood, I've never had the occasion to leave the island, except on a Memorial Day weekend on the way to Philadelphia to pick up a cruise ship.

I got to 47 and Dias Creek Road -- could not move for 30 minutes. I could not go right. The traffic was stacked up. There was no movement whatsoever. We had a time frame. Consequently, I had to make a left-hand turn back into Wildwood, back on the Garden State Parkway, traveling about 25 miles an hour.

The fear I have is, we've had hurricanes, we have numerous holidays where there's an enormous amount of traffic, and we just can't handle it. Route 55 must be improved. It's so important in every aspect. Certainly, economy is important, but safety is tandem. So, please, help us, at least form a plan of some sort. And let's get moving with this.

Thank you very much.

**NORMAN FRANCKLE JR.:** Norman Franckle, Committeeman, Maurice River Township.

I've been a resident in Maurice River Township for 50 years. I've played, I've grown up on the Maurice River, the Muskogee (phonetic spelling), the Manumuskin, and the Menantico. I am an endangered species right now, because 55 is not completed. (applause)

I see carnage from Route 47, where 55 meets, all the way into Cape May County. You see memorials for dead people. It's like driving through a cemetery.

We have to get 55 completed. It's an easy and a simple matter. I know other people won't say that. But if you went down to old Railroad Bed (phonetic spelling) and you went right through into Belleplain and Woodbine and to Route 9, it's unpopulated area, it's area that's owned primarily by the State of New Jersey, and it will not have that big of an environmental impact, in our opinion.

We have people that are in our community that cannot get out of their driveways. I know this has been stated before. It's a real quality-of-life issue for us, and it's a safety issue. If 55 was completed -- and it's only about 20 miles -- they could use the existing 347 and 47 in different places for a secondary area of egress during an emergency, but the primary would be Route 55.

The studies have been conducted for 30 years. I think the bureaucrats have made their money on the studies. I think it's time to move forward, and it's time to do it for our people that live and breath this every day.

Thank you very much for your time. And thank you for coming down here.

Thank you, Assemblyman Van Drew, for setting this up.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Gentlemen, just a question-- And I come from almost the other end of the state, so I wanted to get an assessment.

As leaders in your respective communities -- one of the issues that often confronts us, as legislators, when any type of project like this is brought about-- There are people who will say that it may change the nature of the

communities, change the nature of the area. You don't have a concern about Route 55 having that kind of impact?

MAYOR SLOAN: If I could speak as to the Wildwoods, Mayor Palombo--

I think that the only change that would occur to the Wildwoods would be a positive change. Our only economic lifeline is tourism. This would increase our tourism and allow us to compete more readily with other resorts. And we, frankly, need it. Cape May County has the highest unemployment in the State of New Jersey. This is needed not only for tourism, but, as Assemblyman Asselta had said, Cumberland County saw a great increase in their industry when Route 55 was completed all the way through. We think Cape May County can see the same thing, and we think it's very important, economically, to have this happen.

MR. FRANCKLE: Maurice River Township has gone in great strides to abide by the rules of the Pinelands Commission. We've developed hamlets, and we've developed villages, and they're all designations to do what the State of New Jersey wants of us. And if 55 was completed, and if you bypass these hamlets and these villages, which is very possible with the completion of Route 55, we can maintain our quality of life, and we won't have to put up with all this extra traffic.

We don't want to impede the traffic, we want the traffic to flow forward to Cape May. They welcome the traffic. We don't welcome the traffic. And 55 will bypass all of our little villages, and it would let us maintain our life in the Pinelands as best we can.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, gentlemen.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Mr. Chairman, real quick, just to add to Committeeman Franckle. When 55 was completed up to his point of his community, his community, at that point in time, was against extending that, and now there's been a complete reversal, and that should be noted for the record -- that community.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Assemblyman. It's appreciated.

The next group that I'd like to call up--

And I have to say, gentlemen, you did a good job at moving it along, so I'm hoping everybody will take your lead.

From the New Jersey Environmental Federation, Jane Nogaki; from the American Littoral Society, Leann Sitar; and from the Sierra Club, Dennis Schvejda.

Thank you.

**JANE NOGAKI:** Good morning.

I will be brief. My name is Jane Nogaki. I represent the New Jersey Environmental Federation, which is a statewide environmental organization with 90,000 members and 100 member-groups. We have, and will continue to, oppose Route 55 as being too costly, too environmentally damaging, and not a proven method of relieving congestion.

In our experience, and in the experience of transportation experts like the New Jersey DOT, more highways increase congestion, increase sprawl, increase local development, which will add trips and vehicle miles onto roadways that are intended to relieve congestion but, in fact, actually exacerbate congestion.

Others have gone before me -- the Audubon Society, ANJEC, and so forth -- explaining the environmental sensitivity of the area. It would be very difficult to design and build a roadway through the Pinelands' sections that would be disturbed. You only have to look at the extension of 295 up through Trenton, through the Hamilton marsh, and how long that construction process took and how damaging it has been. And, in fact, what has it done, cut 15 minutes off the trip into Trenton? That was a project that was through a very sensitive area. It took a long time to complete and has not, in fact, reduced congestion.

I live in the Marlton area. Route 70 and 73 come together. It's an area that's highly congested, and no matter of engineering is ever going to remove the fact that, in the morning, people go to Philadelphia, and eight hours later they come back through Marlton on their way to the suburbs. The same thing happens on weekends at the shore, and no amount of new roads can reduce that.

But there can be improvements made. We support the improvements that were recommended by the Shore Connection Study, the intersection improvements; the timing of signals; the timing of rentals so that not everybody is exiting on Saturday or Sunday, but that those are staggered. Those are the kinds of improvements that we would support.

And we think that this project is, again -- just to conclude -- too expensive, too environmentally damaging, and not getting at the essence of reducing congestion.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

Leann.

**LEANN FOSTER SITAR:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm Leann Sitar. I'm from the American Littoral Society. We are located out on Sandy Hook, so we're a coastal organization. We protect coastal habitat, and we work on coastal land use issues.

I've got copies of my statement, so I won't go into too much detail, but I would like to pick up on something that Assemblywoman Stender opened up with. We opened up with the concept that public investments are an investment in our future and in our quality of life, and that's true. And those public investments come in lots of different types. They come in road improvements, they come in road construction, they come in sewers, they come in all different kinds of development and growth-accommodating features.

One of the investments that needs to be made in this case is an investment in the preservation of the natural environment. You've heard from all of my colleagues here today that the natural environment that will be destroyed by this proposal is extremely sensitive. There are wetlands, threatened endangered-species habitat, several existing and proposed preserved areas.

Now, what I think we need to recognize is that Jody said we're blessed to have a quality of life down in this part of the state that others in other parts of the state, particularly where I'm from-- We don't have that. I drove here from Union County, myself, today, so I--

**ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI:** We could have car pooled.

**MS. SITAR:** We should have. I could have met you at the exit.

You come down to this part of the state, and you see -- and you take a deep breath, and you say, "Wow, there's something here to really appreciate and be enjoyed."

And I think that the DOT reports recognize that these things are of more value, alternatives to this expansion should be explored, and that we need to recognize that the Fix-it-First, I guess, mandate that's within the Governor's Smart Growth agenda is of primary importance in this case.

One of the things that the Governor has said, with regards to preserving our quality of life, is that we have to start the balance. There are going to be places where growth is appropriate, there are going to be places where development is appropriate, and there's going to be places where it just isn't. And I say to you today that this is a place where it just isn't appropriate.

The Littoral Society is opposed to this project, and thank you for allowing us to speak.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you very much.

Dennis.

**D E N N I S S C H V E J D A:** Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Dennis Schvejda. I'm the Conservation Director for the New Jersey Chapter of the Sierra Club. We have 750,000 members across the country.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: We can't hear.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: The flat microphone.

MR. SCHVEJDA: Well, I do have one of those flat mikes and a second one.

How is that?

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: That's fine.

MR. SCHVEJDA: Okay.

We have 23,000 members in New Jersey.

As we get further into this Committee hearing, it becomes more difficult to add fresh information. I did drive three hours to get here, so I would hate to just say, "Me, too," and then leave. I will be brief and quick, though.

Route 55 is more than a highway issue to Sierra Club. It's a transportation issue. If it's strictly the highway, we're basically opposed to it -- not basically, we are opposed to it for three reasons. One -- you talk about the money. The money is not there for it. Two, environmental constraints. From a natural resources standpoint, the constraints are enormous. In fact, on the entire eastern coast of the United States, there's not another highway that's being proposed right now that would be as damaging to the environment as this. The third is that there are alternatives.

I've heard various people here testify about congestion. Come to North Jersey. You can get stuck in traffic a half hour, almost any half hour you chose. There are plenty of highways and plenty of roads. You talk about building your way out. It's not going to happen. Route 287 was mentioned before -- in the early '90s it was opened up. Day one I drove it, there was nobody on there. Less than 10 years, it's a five-lane, both sides -- 10 lanes -- and it gets bumper-to-bumper every day for hours. They removed HOV lanes, they tried everything. You can't build your way out. So we have a transportation issue here.

What I can add, though, is to say that these various alternatives that have been put on the table-- The Sierra Club not only approves of them, we will help advocate for them. I think that it's a shame that these alternatives have been on the table for seven years or so, and they haven't been implemented. Let's get them moving. Let's start with that. If I could have a list of those, I'm willing to work -- the Sierra Club is willing to work with the proponents of this transportation issue and help to get these alternatives on the ground so you can get moving.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

Thank you, all, for testifying.

Next I'd like to call to testify, from the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, Robert Patterson; from the Greater Wildwood Chamber of Commerce, Andrew Ripp; and from the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, Jeffrey Gott. All of whom have indicated they are in favor of Route 55.

Gentlemen, begin.

**ROBERT PATTERSON:** Good morning.

Is this on? (referring to PA microphone)

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: The flat one is the amplification.

MR. PATTERSON: The flat one, all right.

Good afternoon, it is, I'm sorry.

Welcome to Cape May County on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce. We're happy to have you with us today.

I'm going to read a letter, if I may, into the record, for Congressman Frank LoBiondo, who is our Congressional Representative for the second district of New Jersey.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: As long as it's not more than one page.

MR. PATTERSON: It's not.

Frank, first, thanks you for inviting him to testify, and he regrets that he cannot be here, due to a voting session of the House of Representatives. But he would like to reiterate his full support for the Route 55 completion project.

And he states that transportation infrastructure projects can only be accomplished through a partnership at the Federal, State, and local levels. And as much as he would like to see this project happen, he cannot seek Federal funding until the New Jersey Department of Transportation places this project on its priority list and the State of New Jersey dedicates funding towards it.

And he thanks you for the invitation to be here.

I also have a letter from Senator James Cafiero, who regretfully cannot be here today. He welcomes you to Wildwood and is pleased to have you here to learn about Route 55.

He said that after listening to all the testimony today on the health, the safety, welfare, and environmental needs, you'll be convinced as to the merits of completing Route 55 and will add your support.

He is the proud sponsor of legislation, Senate Bill S-1727, that would allocate \$8 million for the design of Route 55.

His colleague, Assemblyman Asselta, has the companion bill in your house and asks Assemblyman Van Drew to join in this effort and add his support behind Assembly Bill A-2619, which is before your Committee. Together, we can make this roadway a reality.

Again, thank you for your time. Please take the message back to Trenton, that funding must be allocated to address the serious concerns associated with Route 55, where it dumps the traffic onto Route 47 and 347. (applause)

And I have one letter--

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Again, let us get through the testimony.

MR. PATTERSON: --from a resident who lives on Delsea Drive, in Eldora. She was coming today to testify herself, but fell and broke her shoulder, and has asked me to reiterate to you her thoughts and her husband's.

She and her husband are thoroughly in favor of extending Route 55 into Cape May County. Their names are Christian and Florence Schmidt, and they live at 1843 Delsea Drive, in Eldora.

"The main corridor of traffic empties out onto the south end of Route 55 in Port Elizabeth. To say that we live in hell from Memorial Day to Labor Day is an understatement. The traffic in front of our house is never ending, going at a snail's pace, inch by inch, to the light that is one mile to the south of us. This is the intersection of Route 47 and 347.

Every day, there are people asking to use our bathroom, taking a dip in our pool, or cooling off under our lawn sprinklers if they're running. It's like living in a goldfish bowl. A trip to the emergency room, to Burdette

Tomlin Hospital, meant getting an ambulance, because there was no way we could get through the traffic on our own.

Then we have the other side of the coin. What about the tourists, the people who are in these cars hour after hour? It might just come to the point where they go elsewhere for their vacation, somewhere without all this traffic. I see the people going down to whatever town they're going to, and I see them going home.

I work on an information center on the Parkway, and the cars back up there, too, because of the toll booths. People come into our office with a panicked look on their face asking for alternate routes. 'Well, you have your choice, either Route 9 or Route 47.' When you mention Route 47, they say, 'No way. I did that on my way down, and I'm not doing that on my way back.' Please give these people the option of another road. Give them Route 55.

Sincerely, Florence and Christian Schmidt, Eldora, New Jersey."

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

If you'd just state your name, first, so the record--

**J E F F R E Y H. G O T T:** My name is Jeff Gott. I am the Co-Chair of the Small Business Assistance and Economic Development Committee for the Cape May County Chamber.

In speaking on behalf of the 850 members of the Chamber, we certainly support the completion of State Route 55. All these members are, in some way, dependent upon the tourism industry. And it is a very competitive tourist market, as everyone knows. We cannot continue to ask our visitors to

continue to sit in traffic year after year and expect them to continue to come down here. The tourism industry yields over \$400 million in tax revenue to the State.

And I just wanted to speak in favor of the completion, on behalf of the Committee and it's members.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you very much.

**A N D R E W C R I P P S:** On behalf of the Greater Wildwood Chamber of Commerce and it's members--

You've heard that--

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Your name?

MR. CRIPPS: My name is Andrew Cripps. I'm the Director of the Greater Wildwood Chamber.

You've heard that tourism is the heart of our island, the heart of our economy. And right now, we have a clogged artery. Route 47 is a key artery to bring people to our island. And right now it's a problem that is only getting worse. It's a problem that can't be addressed with Band-Aids or with completely unworkable solutions like staggering rentals. It sounds like a great idea in a meeting, but it's completely unworkable, and unenforceable, and won't happen.

We are urging this Committee to recommend, to the administration, funding for a planning and design process that will take into account the economic impact, the impact on existing structures and neighborhoods, which would be even more devastated by widening the current road, or trying to make changes to the current road, than it would be by a new road, new Route 55 that takes the existing railroad beds.

We know there is an expense to this, but we believe that the economic impact to the tourism community -- is not just in the Wildwoods and Cape May, but on up the coast into Ocean City -- will more than compensate the State for that economic impact.

We would urge you to, again, recommend to the administration that this process continue.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Gentlemen, thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

Next I'd like to call up, from the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Don Kirchhoffer; from the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, Ted Korth; and from Cape Accountability, Linda Colson.

If, when you begin your remarks, you would just state your name for the record--

**DONALD KIRCHHOFFER:** I'll take the age advantage and go first.

My name is Don Kirchhoffer, and I represent the New Jersey Conservation Foundation. And I, as few of the other people here, will try and follow your directions and not repeat the things that others have said. I will give you a written statement that does say those things.

I was on the Shore Connection Committee, and I spent many hours and many evenings working with this. It was one of the better public processes that I went through. And I feel that the results of this report have not been adequately expressed to you, because I don't keep careful touch of everything. But this report gives a lot of traffic alleviation solutions in here, and these have been worked on, and I have seen some of them. And for people

to say nothing has happened -- and they're not -- DOT isn't working on it -- I think is a mistake.

I would like to just reiterate two or three things that I learned from being on this Committee. One, it's a 3 percent problem. It's a huge problem, there's no doubt. Everybody has talked about it. But it's 3 percent of the time. This study studied the congestion between 10:30 and 2:30 on Saturdays and 3:00 to 7:00 on Sundays. And you can go anyplace on the weekend--

I also work in Gloucester County. I talked to the people about 322. It's just as bad. It goes -- it takes another group of people across the state to the shore.

I disagree with the guy that just talked -- when there's absolute total rejection of changing the turnover days. If you reduce -- if you change by 50 percent the number of people that -- change the rental time, other parts of the--

Why is there feedback? (referring to PA microphone)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: We can't hear.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Just talk a little louder if you can.

MR. KIRCHHOFFER: All I hear is the feedback, and nobody else can--

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Can we do something about the feedback?

MR. KIRCHHOFFER: I think that the business community of Cape May, not paying attention to the turnover day, is a mistake.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: It's not working.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: I don't think it's working.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: How about the other mike? Now try it.

MR. KIRCHHOFFER: And, I guess, what--

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Just talk a little louder, if you could.

MR. KIRCHHOFFER: I guess, what I would urge you, more than anything else, is to look at this report. It's a good document. It's--

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: We have a copy of it.

MR. KIRCHHOFFER: You have a copy of it. It was a good process, it was painful and inefficient, but I think it worked, and I think it's got a lot of the solution.

I just would say, for the record, that New Jersey Conservation Foundation is against the extension of Route 55 for all the things that other people have said.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

**L I N D A C O L S O N:** My name is Linda Colson. I'm with Cape Accountability Civic Group. I live in Cape May County. I live in Cape May Court House. I enjoy our economy here, I enjoy our environment here. I live, and work, and play here. I have a business here.

I feel like I am between a rock and a hard place. I sympathize with the people who make their living here, and I sympathize with the people who

come here to play, and I also sympathize with our environment, because without our environment, we're nothing.

I oppose the extension of Route 55. If Route 55 is going to turn us into what the northern three-quarters of New Jersey has turned into, a cement -- paved over, cemented area with bumper-to-bumper traffic on every corner. That's not why people live here.

I have a prepared statement that I will hand in. But as I sat here and listened to everything that everyone's saying, I was sometimes happy, and sometimes glad, and sometimes angry, and sometimes sad. Gee, I didn't mean that to rhyme like that.

But at any rate, I'm very sincere about what I'm saying, as I'm sure everyone else here is. What I see happening here -- and I'm deviating from this statement -- but what I see happening here is what happens in Cape May County every time an issue comes up. The politicians get over here and the people get over here, and somehow, something gets lost, and we never get to agree on anything. The environment loses and, ultimately, the people lose. I've seen it happen many, many times. I hope I don't see it happen this time.

Instead of people starting to place blame on who should have done what over the past 20 years, why don't you hold hands with your committees and your commissions and fix it and make it work, and find out why it hasn't been done, instead of blaming people who, maybe, should have done it?

My statement says a lot of things that everyone else has said. I don't want to take up too much time, but it talks about the environmental disaster that the extension of 55 will cost. It talks about displacing small mom-and-pop businesses and residences. I sympathize with the people who live

along Route 47, and I sympathize with the people who live along -- or who travel along Route 47. But they've got to, somehow, come together and find an amicable solution. I live along a very busy highway here. I have a hard time getting in and out of my driveway. I deal with it.

My statement also talks about the BIG Map and the Governor's plans for Smart Growth. It talks about how our barrier islands suffer build out, right now. I don't want to see our mainlands suffer build out. Regardless of what people say, Route 55 is going to open up our cape to a barrage of development. And I'd like to see that not happen, if possible.

Cape May County -- as much as the politicians would like to believe you can treat us -- our area -- like you treat every other ordinary area in this state, or any other state, you have to face up to the fact that Cape May County is a special, unique place. The Nature Conservancy named it as one of the last great places, not in our state, not in our United States, not in our continent, but in the world. It's unique, it's special. There aren't many places like this left. We do not have the right to destroy it.

The Cape May County Chamber of Commerce calls it the goose that lays the golden eggs. And up to that point in time, I agree with the county chamber. But we need to, please, recognize that our goose here is the very beauty and charm of the environment and the community that an extension of Route 55 would surely change and destroy, never to be repaired. The tourists will no longer have a reason to come to Cape May County, and the goose will be gone.

I'm almost ready to finish up. I see you're anxious.

I will say that if someone soon does not respect and protect our environment and our economy -- we need to do both, and we need to do it together -- then no one here is going to have to worry about motel vacancies or selling T-shirts.

That's all I have to say.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

MS. COLSON: Thank you for allowing me to speak.

**THEODORE J. KORTH:** Chairman, members of the Committee, Ted Korth with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Can everybody hear him?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS FROM AUDIENCE: No.  
(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: I think when you put the two of them together it makes it worse -- is when you get the feedback. (referring to PA microphone) Not that I'm a technician, but if you separate them out and talk right into the mike--

MR. KORTH: How's that?

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: No, that doesn't work. Try the other ones.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: You can also move forward. We won't ask any questions or call on you if you're not-- It's not like school.

MR. KORTH: Ted Korth, with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance.

We'd like to state our opposition to the Route 55 extension for all the reasons you've already heard today -- additionally, because this affects the

Pinelands National Reserve. We'd like to point out that the design standards set out in the comprehensive management plan would be violated by the Route 55 extension, as would the policies of the National Environmental -- National Parks and Recreation Act, and the State Pinelands Protection Act.

The costs of this, socially and environmentally, are extraordinary, and there hasn't been any proof that it will solve your transportation issues. Route 55, we do not see as a magic pill. Your circulation problems, locally, remain completely unaddressed by it. And in summary, I'd like to submit a written statement for you to--

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Please do.

Thank you very much.

Just a technical note, for the speakers who are coming up. Our technically adept Assemblyman and our technician here are going to place them in strategic locations that they should not be moved from. Just speak loudly.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: I guess I'm good for something, right?

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Next, I'd like to call the President of Burdette Tomlin Memorial Hospital, Tom Scott; Cape May County Conference of Mayors, Mayor Suzanne Walters; and the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization, Tim Chelius.

Mr. Scott.

**T O M S C O T T:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I hope you can hear me. Is that okay?

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Speak loudly.

MR. SCOTT: I'll try to speak into the microphone.

Our hospital is the only hospital in Cape May County, and each year we see about 42,000 emergency room visits, each year. And, unfortunately, too many of those visits come from accidents on Route 47. Several people will die each summer in accidents there. I recall one unfortunate weekend a few summers ago, where five people died in one single weekend. And that is a horrible tragedy that should not have to be repeated.

Each summer, during our busy season, it is extremely difficult to get emergency vehicles to and from the hospital. On busy weekends like the Fourth of July weekend, or other busy parts of the season, it can take 60 to 90 minutes to get into or out of Cape May County. Our hospital does not offer every service that an injured person might need, so it is necessary to transport several hundred patients each year to regional hospitals in Philadelphia. When the helicopters are flying that works fine, but if the weather is bad, and it's too foggy, it's too windy, or it's a horrible rainstorm, the helicopters aren't flying. We must resort to ground transportation. And with today's standards, that is simply not acceptable. Minutes do, in fact, make a difference. They do save lives.

So we support the completion of Route 55, because we think it will save lives, and we think it's a great improvement in public health and service.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Scott.

**TIMOTHY G. CHELIUS:** Thank you, sir. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: And you're Mr. Chelius?

MR. CHELIUS: Yes, I'm sorry. Tim Chelius, from the South Jersey Transportation and Planning Organization.

And I will boil down my remarks to two quick points on the back, if I may.

I'd just like to address a couple of points lest they live on as misconceptions. And we, along with the DOT, sponsored the Shore Connection Committee work back in 1995 through 1996. And you do have those reports before you.

And I think it is important to point out that the Committee did support the completion of Route 55 as a long-term capital need for the region. The Committee recognized the environmental and financial difficulties, but in light of the emergency access, congestion, environmental issues, the Committee did, in fact, support the completion of Route 55.

Another part of that bottom line was that the Committee supported a series of short-term, medium-term, and long-term improvements. Unfortunately, since then, however, five years later, the short-term improvements still are, perhaps, five to 10 years away. So the Committee, certainly, did not anticipate that a short-term improvement would be a 12-year to 15-year project.

I'd also like to just emphasize that the SJTPO -- and we are the metropolitan planning organization for South Jersey under Federal law, and our responsibility, really, is to set the transportation blueprint for the region. SJTPO has always supported the completion of Route 55. And, in fact, this week, we adopted a resolution supporting the need for the completion of 55. And, if I may, I will leave that with the staff for distribution.

And I guess, finally, the only other point I'd like to make is that, perhaps, in dueling philosophies here, some at the DOT might say, "Our transportation system is complete. Now we must just maintain it." We would respectfully disrespect with the first point. In our view, the transportation system is not complete until Route 55 is completed.

So thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you very much.

Mayor Walters.

**MAYOR SUZANNE M. WALTERS:** Thank you.

Mayor Suzanne Walters, Mayor of the Borough of Stone Harbor, President of the Cape May County Conference of Mayors, and Past President of Cape May County League of Municipalities.

You heard my other elected officials earlier, and I won't reiterate what they had to say, but there are three things that I wanted to stress. One is the emergency situation. Should we be hit with a hurricane during the summer season, the thought of trying to evacuate Cape May County is a nightmare to every elected official. The completion of Route 55 would, certainly, go a long way to alleviating a lot of that problem.

The second is the environmental issue. There is not a doubt in my mind that working closely with DEP, EPA, Pinelands Commission, with all the agencies involved, that an environmentally friendly completion of Route 55 couldn't be accomplished. And we realize that this is not going to happen in a matter of years -- in a short matter of years. It's going to be 10 or 15 years before this whole process is completed. So the interim, short-term suggestions are needed to be done and completed now.

The third is the economy, obviously. You've heard from all of the other -- the Chamber of Commerce and the other elected officials. Tourism is the lifeline of Cape May County. And if we have people sitting for hours waiting to get here, they're not coming back, and it is going to negatively affect the entire county. So we urge you to complete 55.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mayor.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: One quick question.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Assemblyman, sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Mr. Chairman--

Mr. Chelius, just to clarify the Shore Connection Committee-- What was the makeup of that Committee? Was that a broad-based committee, or was it simply a one-sided type of committee?

MR. CHELIUS: Yes, Assemblyman, it consisted of elected officials, stakeholders in the area, and environmental groups, as well, including ANJEC, and the Sierra Club, and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, and Mr. Kirchhoffer's group.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: So, for the record, Mr. Chairman, I think this is important. Was there a vote taken after this Committee was finished, as to the acceptance of this report?

MR. CHELIUS: Yes, and in two respects. One was that the Committee did approve the report, and it was not unanimous with respect to those improvements that added a lot of capacity to the system. But the Committee did, in fact, vote to approve that report. And then, subsequent to

that, the SJTPO, itself -- which is responsible for the capital programming in the region -- did accept the Committee's report out.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN STENDER: Mr. Chairman, I have a question.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Assemblywoman Stender.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN STENDER: Thank you.

Mr. Chelius -- am I saying that right?

MR. CHELIUS: Yes, ma'am.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN STENDER: Thank you.

As the South Jersey Transportation Planning authority, you oversee the funding sources for much of the projects that go on.

MR. CHELIUS: Correct.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN STENDER: And yet you point out that you adopted this report and that, really, nothing's happened, in terms of the interim improvements. Could you-- Is that-- I'm curious as to how that fits in with the ability -- that if this was something that was endorsed, why you didn't put money into those improvements already.

MR. CHELIUS: Well, they have been, but they must go through a long process when Federal money is used, that involves a great deal of planning, and design, and so forth. However, there are groupings of improvements listed as short-term, medium-term, and long-term. And the short-term involved five intersections in the 55-47 corridor. Unfortunately, to this day, they are still in the early planning stages. And implementation of

those, design, right-of-way, and construction, if at all, wouldn't happen -- couldn't happen for another five years or more.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN STENDER: Okay, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Assemblyman Van Drew.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: Tim, thanks for being here.

This may be a question either for the Commissioner -- I know he was staying here -- and just for you, yourself. How much longer -- do you have any sense-- Some of those improvements that have been approved and, pretty much, have been universally accepted by all groups, including those that want to see a new 55, as well as the environmental groups -- how much longer do you think it would take, based on your past experience, to accomplish those goals?

And, secondly, it's a question for both of you, given the regulatory climate that exists -- not now, that has always existed -- given all the sets of circumstances, if dollars were available, considering the number of lawsuits and so forth that have been threatened, do you have any estimate on how long it would take to complete any sort of Route 55, which is a straight route that would take a path from the given terminus to the Garden State Parkway?

MR. CHELIUS: For a completion of Route 55, it would, necessarily, be at least 10 years, I would imagine, for planning, design, and right-of-way.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: Ten years, not in the design, but in the actual construction phase, as well?

MR. CHELIUS: Design, permitting, planning, and so forth. And these types of estimates, of course, are very, very speculative.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: At some of those past meetings that I was at -- and this is nonpolitical, because this is, again, the past administration, it wasn't this administration -- there were some members from the State, from the DEP and the DOT, that said just the permitting process itself could take a decade. Is that possible?

MR. CHELIUS: I'm afraid so. That could very well be the case. It would depend on the permits and the amount of information and planning that had already been done, and many factors.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: Okay. Thank you, Tim.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Any other questions? (no response)

Thank you for your testimony. I appreciate it.

MR. CHELIUS: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Next I'd like to call to testify, from the Greater Wildwood Hotel & Motel Association, Dan MacElrevey; from Ocean Property Management, Jim Yost; and from the Avalon Home and Landowners Association, Brian Reynolds.

Would you please come up?

Just state your name a second time as you begin your testimony, so the recorder can pick it up.

**D A N M a c E L R E V E Y:** My name is Dan MacElrevey, and I'm President of the Greater Wildwood Hotel & Motel Association, and I'm here today to speak on behalf of completing Route 55. And I'm speaking on behalf of our more than 400 hotel owning and business-affiliated members that are all, of course, deeply involved in our tourism industry.

Literally, half my lifetime, I've been listening about how this is going to be done someday. I'm a little upset to hear it's going to take another 10 years just to get the permits. But be that as it may, the safety--

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: That's what they said about this building, by the way.

MR. MacELREVEY: Yes, sir. (laughter)

The safety and health issues have all been addressed, and I will skip over those. I think the points were well-made. And I think, from that point of view, it's hard to deny this highway is essential. I would rather address some of the economic issues that face us in the Wildwoods, especially, but throughout Cape May County, because, as was said, this is a regional destination. I would add, though, that I hear about the difficulty of meeting the environmental requirements. We heard that Route 147 was impossible, then we heard it was pretty difficult, then we heard it could be done through process of mitigation, and it was done.

I do urge that you take Freeholder Beyel's suggestion and go out of Wildwood over that highway, and you will see that the area is still thriving, the highway is built, and it's serving it's purpose. And it has helped us greatly in times of storms, and it was a worthwhile investment.

Those of you that were down here a decade ago could see that Wildwood was on the verge of becoming an economic basket case. We're not proud of that, but that's a fact. Through the investment of the State, through the help of our local legislators and our State legislators, there's been some investments made here. And the local businessmen took a chance, they gambled, they made some investments. And as you saw today, we're now on

an economic -- a real upturn. But that's still very fragile. And until we get the transportation to support what's been done here, this downturn -- this turnaround could reverse itself very quickly.

I'll give you an anecdote, and then I'll let the other speakers continue. We had a group go down to the Baltimore Sun Trade Show three weeks ago. The Maryland, Washington, D.C. market is as important to us as the northern New Jersey, Delaware Valley is to our competition to the south. They have excellent highway connections. They are taking away our business. We, in turn, can't compete.

Our folks that went to the trade show were told over and over and over that people used to come here, they loved it here, they would like to come back, but it's hard to get here, and they're not going to park in traffic. So they're going to Virginia, they're going to the Carolinas, and they're going to the Maryland shore.

This distresses us. We want to see our upturn continue, and we ask you to support Route 55 and move it a little more quickly than 10 years for the permits.

And I thank you for your time. I will send a prepared statement to the Committee.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

**JOSEPH LOMAX:** I'm Joe Lomax, on your list. I was asked to take another individual's place.

I am the spokesperson for the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, an organization that represents 850 businesses here in Cape May County, in addition to businesses in Atlantic and Cumberland County. We

certainly appreciate your willingness to travel the great distance to be here and hear all sides of the need for completing Route 55.

You've heard quite a bit of testimony. We have prepared, for you, this document that you have. This document contains a position paper that I will, very briefly, critique. But in addition to that, there are letters of support from all of the municipalities for the completion of -- or for the solution of a very bad, and dangerous, and economically damaging situation, that being the Route 47-347 corridor. And most of those municipalities also support the completion of Route 55.

In addition, the freeholders of Atlantic, Cape May, and Cumberland County support the Route, as well as major businesses and organizations.

I would like to just highlight a couple of brief issues associated with the white paper that we presented. Number one, in a seven-year study, 1,387 accidents occurred, 695 injuries, nine deaths occurred within a seven-year period, not including the last two years. Up to 12-mile long traffic jams occur during high-use periods. Emergency services are a serious problem to that area.

When the highways across the United States were rated, the Cape May County environment was considered the sixth most dangerous place in the United States for evacuations, next behind the Florida Keys.

The evacuation issue, while it's been discussed to some degree-- We have 650,000 people here during the summer, we have over 100,000 residents, we have 37 schools, 11 nursing homes, a regional hospital, and over

5,000 citizens that cannot transport themselves -- senior citizens -- out of Cape May County.

There are absolutely no shelters for storm conditions in Cape May County. In a Category 1 hurricane, Route 47-347 goes under water. On all other category hurricanes, all roads in Cape May County are considered impassable. So there is no way to leave Cape May County.

In addition to that, we have the only Coast Guard base in the United States that provides recruits for our nation. In addition to that, they have the mission of overseeing the 40 percent of the East Coast oil that goes through the port -- the Delaware Estuary with the environmental sensitivity. Quick response to any disaster -- any natural disaster in that estuary is in the best interest of having a two-way highway that can provide access under all storm conditions. In a hurricane, if a tanker went ashore, we could wipe out the entire world population of the red knot if that occurred at the wrong time. So we need the response capability far beyond what would be considered just tourism.

In addition to that, I would like to say that the thousands of idling vehicles create very serious air and water pollution issues. Those waters are discharged directly from this old highway into the rivers and streams that feed our magnificent estuaries, our fisheries, and the Delaware Estuary, so that to leave 347/47 in its current state continues to do incredible damage to that estuary and environment.

Finally, I would like to say that Cape May County supports a \$3.64 billion tourist industry, over 80,000 jobs. We double the State average in unemployment rate. And in addition to that, we send \$429 million in tax

revenue to the State of New Jersey. Kiddingly, I told the last commissioner of Commerce, if we didn't have the liability of New Jersey -- sending our tax money to the State of New Jersey -- we could self-fund Route 55 and be a Monaco in three years. So taking that into consideration, what we really need is to make sure that the goose that lays golden eggs for the State, in terms of moneys to the State, really needs to be cared for.

Finally, I've done an analysis. My profession is the environment. I've done an analysis in Cape May County. You've heard the issue of sprawl. Eighty-eight percent of Cape May County, when it is finally built out, will remain an open space because of the 80 regulations, on five levels of government, that any development is required in Cape May County. We have Pinelands CAFRA. Pinelands CAFRA overlap state and Federal governments.

This project, in fact, can be fulfilled, can be completed with the appropriate safeguards, but it requires that we proceed ahead to the next step. We've heard a lot of rhetoric and a lot of concerns, and, obviously, we all want to address those concerns, because in the business community, our community and our economy thrives if the environment is a high-quality, clean environment.

So I would urge you to advance A-2619 through your Assembly Committee and support the Senate 1727, as well, so that we can have, for a modest cost -- we can advance this effort into the design phase, where we can look at the issues: the environmental issues, the community issues, the cost issues -- and understand them without any obligation to proceed ahead for construction until we fully understand what we're capable of.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Lomax.

**BRIAN REYNOLDS:** Thank you.

My name is Brian Reynolds. I am the Secretary of the Avalon Home and Land Owners Association. I'm also a retired environmental health, occupational health and safety professional.

I might preface my remarks by saying that AHLOA has, on a number of occasions, written to the Department of Transportation, written to various bodies in Trenton strongly in favor of the Route 55 extension.

You've heard from previous speakers about the concerns regarding evacuation of Cape May County in the case of an emergency. And that is one of our major concerns. Bear in mind a point that has not been mentioned today. There are something like 11 nursing homes with 1,800 patients in Cape May County. If we have to evacuate them -- assuming they can go by bus -- that's about 50 buses. If we're using the one-way traffic pattern, those vehicles cannot come back to help other people get out of the county.

We don't have much warning. The National Weather Service has indicated we're going to have five days warning of hurricanes next year. That ain't going to be so. If you listen to any weather forecast, they will tell you that they cannot forecast accurately what the track of the storm or a hurricane is going to be more than 24 hours out. Let's face it, even for today's weather, the National Weather Service, usually, is pretty -- very often wrong, 24 hours out. So when you get a hurricane or other storm situation, they just don't know how to handle it.

A hurricane, a couple of years ago, crossed Newport News, Virginia, at 8:00 in the morning as a tropical storm. That storm crossed

Avalon at 4:00 that afternoon. We don't have time on our hands when it comes to evacuation.

As a former occupational health and safety professional, I'm even more concerned about the effects of the pollution created by automobiles, unburned gasoline, oil fumes, and various other things that could be affecting the health, welfare, and quality of life of the people who live close to 347 and 47, as well as the flora and fauna in that area, because once that stuff gets into the air, if it comes back down again, it's going to have an adverse effect. And, of course, unfortunately, we're faced with penchant for SUVs, which gas guzzle and create even more problems from an atmospheric point of view.

American freedom is mobility, but with the traffic jams that we have on 347 and 47, during the summer time, people are pretty well locked onto their property or locked out of their property. They can't get in and out easily. And it's not just on a Saturday or Sunday. Last May, I went -- going north, fortunately, from Philadelphia -- or from Avalon to Philadelphia. There was an 8-mile traffic jam at 1:00 on a Friday afternoon from the light at 610 on Route 47 -- eight miles north going up to about mile-marker four on the Route 347. That has got to have a very adverse effect on the people who are living in the vicinity.

I think that short of improving and even mandating mass transit for Cape May County -- then we have to complete Route 55. The roads that are already in existence contribute to the pollution of the environment. Most of the traffic -- we would see it going on 55. The pollution is going to be moved, but I don't think it's going to be increased that much.

I would like to thank the commission -- the Committee for giving me the opportunity to say these remarks, and we thank you for coming down to Cape May County.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Mr. Reynolds, gentlemen, thank you for your testimony this morning -- this afternoon.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: Mr. Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: Just hearing some of the thoughts and the discussion of legislation, if I might, I would suggest, through the Chairman, that perhaps the Chairman, Assemblyman Asselta, and myself could work on a piece of legislation that, perhaps, would direct the Department of Transportation to see if there truly is a route and a technology that could be accomplished that would be acceptable and permissible. By that I mean, actually get the permits in some sort of a timely manner. If it is possible, how it would be done, and where that route would be. And I know we've discussed some of this in a round-about way before, through various other studies, but to directly access that question and see if there is an answer to it.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: I think that's an excellent suggestion. We have some more testimony to hear from people, both pro and con. But, Assemblyman, I think that's an excellent suggestion that Assemblywoman Stender, and Assemblyman Asselta, and yourself, and I can work on.

Thank you.

Concerned Citizens of Cape May County, Vilma Pombo. Vilma?

(no response)

**MARILYN L. MILLER:** Mr. Chairman, I need to get to work. And I'm on that list. Marilyn Miller.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: You know what? Yours was the next one that I was going to call.

Marilyn Miller, and Jim Carroll, and Karen Williams.

Marilyn.

MS. MILLER: Thank you.

I'm very frustrated, because had I not been required to listen to a lot of redundancy, I would have been able to ride my bike to work, which is what I usually like to do.

I have heard a lot of comments about pollution, and I wonder how many people on the board and in the audience are willing to change your lifestyle to decrease the pollution by: (a) mass transit, riding a bike, walking. I do that. I am opposed to the Route 55 extension.

I have been a North Jersey resident. I was born and raised in North Jersey up until 12 years ago, and then moved out of the state. I have lived in Myrtle Beach, I have lived near Rehoboth Beach, I have lived in the Toms River area, I am living here. Ever since I have been a child, I have been involved in traffic tie-ups -- as a child and then as an adult. This is nothing new, and building highways does not decrease the population.

I would have said more, but I want to get to work.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Ms. Miller.

Mr. Carroll, Ms. Williams.

**JIM CARROLL:** My name is Jim Carroll. I live in Green Creek.

I believe it is safe to presume that all here have heard the saying that all roads lead to Rome. They led to and from Rome for one purpose, commerce and trade. And it's exactly why merchants want Route 55 extended. It is not wanted for, as some alarmists proclaim, to evacuate in case of a storm. These proponents are using scare tactics. Shame on them for scaring little old ladies.

I have a tremendous amount of confidence in our emergency management personnel if the need ever arises for evacuation. If this monster Route 55 ever goes through, the negative impact on the environment and residents is quite obvious.

Also, industrial parks will spring up all along the right-of-way. Wawas and their ilk will spring up to support the parks. Some mall addicts want Route 55 extended so they can zip up to Walmart for a 40 percent off sale, not realizing that it costs \$.40 a mile to operate a car.

Sure, southbound motorists will arrive at their destinations quicker, their destinations being Parkway and barrier islands traffic jams. The billions, if we had them, would be better spent improving our existing roads. Highways are like schools. There's only two types, under construction and inadequate.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you very much, Mr. Carroll.

Ms. Williams.

**KAREN WILLIAMS:** My name is Karen Williams, and I really don't have a lot to say, because most of it has already been said. But I would just

like to go over my major points, basically, to add my voice to those that have gone before me.

I am not in favor of 55, primarily because of the environmental damage that it will cause. A lot of this environmental damage, in terms -- the pollution impacts can be mitigated and can be controlled for, but the loss of habitat is irrevocable. None of the habitats that would be destroyed, whether the route goes along the Delaware Bay and through parts of Belleplain State Forest along Delaware Bay, or goes more through the interior of the county -- none of those habitats could be regrown in the lifetime of anybody in the room, and I have my 11-year-old out of school, back there, to listen to all this today.

In addition, I have reason to be in many of the different barrier island communities during the summer, and have spent -- well, I'm local, and I know how to avoid it -- but if you're not local, you can spend just as much time in gridlock on the barrier island communities as you can on Route 47 getting here.

And the solution, I think, to the transportation issues that we have here in Cape May County involve reducing cars and reducing people's dependence on cars while they're here. And until those problems could be solved, you're just substituting one problem for another. In other words, getting people down to the barrier islands more quickly so that they can be stuck in traffic down there.

I have a lot of other things to say, but they've already been said, so I'm going to stop. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Ms. Williams, thank you. You didn't put what community you're from.

MS. WILLIAMS: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm from Woodbine, in the northern part of the county.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Woodbine.

Thank you very much.

MR. CARROLL: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Believe it or not, we are getting through this list.

I'd next like to call Francis McCall.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: He had to leave.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Jim Barrett, William Quinn, and Mike Porch.

**WILLIAM QUINN:** Good afternoon.

My name is William Quinn. I'm a resident of Dennis Township, Cape May County, and I'm grateful to share my experiences with Route 47.

A good part of Route 47, as you know, runs through Dennis Township, and my wife and I use it frequently, year round. We used it twice yesterday, so we have a lot of experience with its use.

On a recent trip to Philadelphia Airport, we were held up at the Route 83 intersection by a caravan of eight trucks. Truck traffic is not unusual. This was 5:30 in the morning, on a Thursday, in the wintertime.

Cape May County has no rail depots, has no seaports. We are supplied by trucks. So we need the trucks for our food, we need trucks for clothing, etc. The only way to get down here, for most of them, is Route 47.

We have, as you know, a lot of vacationers. I don't want to get into the number of people who come down. It's not as seasonal as one would think. There's a lot of programs that run in Cape May, there's a lot of programs that run in the other islands, that encourage people to visit our area. And many of them are environmental programs, and they're very worthwhile.

We have friends on 47. You've heard the story: They can't get out of their driveway. That's a true statement. They become prisoners. They have to learn to live with the traffic patterns. We have friends that live in historic homes who suffer the vibrations of heavy traffic and the damaging effect to their foundations.

Now, a lot of these combinations are traffic -- were brought to the elected officials in Dennis Township, who had responded by pressing the State to install traffic lights, and these were very effective. People now could get out of their driveways, they could enter Route 47 for their business, for shopping, to make their -- and keep their appointments.

The reverse side of that was the traffic lights now created mile-long backups during heavy peak times. So we fixed one problem and we created another. These, hopefully, aren't some of the solutions that are being looked upon to solve the 47 issues.

Let me tell you a quick story, and this really happened. We were in Williamsburg, Virginia, for Christmas this past year. We were asked to introduce ourselves -- where we're from. The couple next to me said, "I'm from Philadelphia. I used to vacation in Cape May. I go to Delaware. I don't like-- It was too much difficulty getting to Cape May." I did nothing to force that conversation. Believe me, it really happened.

I'm a practicing environmentalist. I teach gardening classes. I speak to garden clubs. I belong to birding and I belong to nature organizations. I work with some of the people that spoke to you today who were very good and very thorough about their knowledge of the environment. I also have worked with the Stockton Alliance. And if you're familiar with that program, it was a combination of people from industry and the environment seeking common solutions -- wonderful, win-win stories.

I firmly believe that nature can co-exist with people, I believe that a solution to 47 can come about, but I firmly believe, only if -- and I emphasize *if* -- people will work together in a partnership -- both the environment and highway designers.

In summary, my wife and I share 47's inadequacies. We use it year round. We know, as has been pointed out, when you live here, you know when you can enter 47, and when to use it and when not to use it. But what really scares us is, if there is ever a call for an emergency evacuation, and you've heard all the people who live here -- residents, hospital people, invalids, the workers, the seasonal workers, the vacationers, truckers, all have to leave at the same time. I don't think Route 47 -- this historic, scenic, basically paved-over colonial road -- if you go back to very old maps -- struggling to support us today, could never handle the traffic of the future.

So I ask you folks, sincerely, to take a look at the solution of this problem. And as an environmentalist, I ask for you to do that in that way, as well.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Quinn.

**J I M B A R R E T T:** My name is Jim Barrett. I'm a resident of Pierces Point, in Cape May County.

I'm a victim of the State's inaction on the extension of Route 55 for the last 30 years. I spent 22 years of my life driving back and forth on Route 47 and Route 55 -- the first 11 years to go ahead and bring my seven boys and my wife down to our summer home that we had at Pierces Point. And for an 11-year period, driving back and forth a hundred miles each way to Morristown, New Jersey, where I work as an engineer for Lockheed Morton. During that time coming home, just this past August, I was involved in a head-on collision on Route 47. I have been recuperating from that for the last nine months.

If you guys really want to know how much you need a divided highway coming out of this particular area, walk around on my leg for the last nine months. You'll understand exactly what we feel and exactly what we mean.

I totally support what Assemblyman Van Drew is saying, in the fact that something has to be done to improve the bandwidth of the roads coming in and out of Cape May County. And if the answer isn't the extension of Route 55, there has to be another answer. You can't keep putting the people of this county through the torture of driving back and forth, at 50 miles an hour, on an undivided highway.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

MR. BARRETT: You're welcome.

**M I K E P O R C H:** Good afternoon. Thank you for making the trip down to Wildwood.

My name is Mike Porch. I'm the Director of Main Street Wildwood. We're a downtown revitalization organization here in Wildwood.

This is, clearly, an issue of competing interests and issues.

I deal with redevelopment issues every day, and I can certainly envision the positive economic impact that a safe, modern, efficient highway would have for Cape May County. But I think it's important to underline that the positive economic impact would not only be to Cape May County, but to the entire state. Cape May County produces nearly a billion dollars in tax revenue every year, with almost a half billion going to the State of New Jersey every year. And I think that an investment in Route 45, particularly in these tough economic times for the State, would help to ensure that this flow of tax revenue continues to Trenton every year from Cape May County.

Also, I think many people spoke about the public safety issues. I mean, I think this is a real legitimate issue. I lived along the Jersey Shore, virtually, my entire life. I've lived in Seaside Heights. I was born in Atlantic City, lived in Ventnor, lived in Brigantine, Ocean City, and now, Wildwood the last six years. I've never felt more isolated than I feel here in Wildwood.

I'm also a member of the Wildwood Environmental Commission. And while I have great respect for the views that have been represented here by the various environmental organizations, I do think that environmental concerns, however legitimate, should not, necessarily, trump other legitimate concerns such as economic issues, and public safety issues, and also property rights issues.

So, in closing, I think that -- I'm confident that if you go ahead and appropriate funds for the design of this highway -- I'm confident that we

can come up with a design that balances the economic interest, the environmental interests, the public safety issue, and, also, the property rights of the owners in the area.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony.

Okay, next I'd like to call Douglas Jewell and Tom Leonard. They both left.

I'd like to call Adrian Vanaman.

Clarle Doran.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: Had to leave.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: He had to leave.

Jack Gibson.

And from the Seaside Apartment Number 2, Piero DiGiannomento. (phonetic spelling) Had to leave.

Gentlemen, why don't you start?

**ADRIAN O. VANAMAN:** Yes, my name is Adrian Vanaman, and I live in Port Elizabeth, on Route 47.

I'd like to, first, talk about the quality of my life for the past several years. The quality of life has been absolutely horrendous along that highway. The number of accidents -- and I'm talking about deaths. According to the *Atlantic City Press*, the Route 55 terminus and Route 47 has encountered approximately 13 deaths in the last 11 years. It's considered the most dangerous intersection in all of Cumberland County.

What would prevent that? The extension of Route 55 out into the Woods. What are we also confronted with there on Route 47 in front of my house, which is just a few yards away? Toxic fumes, which is air pollution, which is an environmental problem; noise pollution; light pollution. We have trash that's dumped on our front lawn. I like to keep an immaculate lawn, and I'm out there almost every day picking up cigarettes, Wawa coffee bottles -- cups, Coke bottles, cans, and beer bottles, and what have you.

The prize that I have picked up -- mind you this traffic is at a standstill all Friday afternoon, Friday evening, Saturday mornings, Saturday afternoons, Sunday mornings, Sunday afternoons, and Monday mornings. My prize has been-- It seems as though, the ladies, when they stop -- it's a very good time to change their baby's diapers. So I pick up used ones. That's an environmental problem.

The other thing, and you've heard about it-- When we try to get out of our driveway, many, many, many times -- I'd say 50 percent of the time -- we have to go north, make a U-turn in a very dangerous way, and go south. That is not necessary. This is 50 percent of the time.

What we want more than anything else is, at least, a bypass around Port Elizabeth as a start. Now, I think the whole thing should be finished, and I'm strongly in favor of finishing the entire 55 extension.

Another thing to consider-- This is no longer a summer thing. Every once in a while somebody will write in to the *Atlantic City Press*, "It's just a summer thing: June, July, and August." That's not true. It's an eight-month, at least--

I looked at the *Atlantic City Press*, and there was a picture showing the number of people that are on the Ocean City Boardwalk. It was filled. I talked to a lady here this morning. She said the Wildwood Boardwalk was filled. This is March. So these people are coming down. We have people that are coming down to bring economy in this area.

I'd like, for a moment, to talk about the cost. The old railroad bed is the logical way to go. I haven't heard that as an option yet, that is emphasized. It's the logical way to go.

Now, what is the cost of land around here in that particular area? I'm going to just address Cumberland County and the Maurice River Township area. There is a plot of land up there now for sale that's 500 acres. Now, it may have been sold. It's selling for \$1.5 million. That's \$3,000 an acre. Now, at 300 wide, Route 55 extension equates to 36.36 acres per mile. You're looking at about a hundred thousand dollars a mile to buy the land. That's not an astronomical figure, and that's along the railroad bed area.

I think the costs that are being put forward now is an expensive route to take, the one that apparently goes out into the marshlands. The better option, obviously, is the railroad bed, and I think it should be seriously considered.

Another thing that -- every time costs are brought up, I think it should be emphasized. It cost less to build the 28 miles of Route 55 here in South Jersey, in Cumberland County and Cape May County, than any other place in New Jersey and any place from Boston, Massachusetts, clear down to Washington, D.C. It's cheaper to do it here, and that's what should be emphasized.

Another thing that I looked at -- and that's the total acreage, perhaps, required for 20 miles of Route 55. And it's about 800 acres. Now, in the Pinelands, there's approximately 1 million acres. Divide 1 million into 800, and you get .08 percent. Now, that's the impact that it has on the environment, .08 percent.

Now, another thing, if the passenger trains and the freight trains were still using that old railroad bed, environmental issues would not even come up, endangered species would not even come up, wetlands would not even come up. The trains would be allowed to run there. Why can't we reactivate the same location for the extension of Route 55? That one has me baffled.

Jobs: Cape May County has the highest unemployment in all of New Jersey. It's 12.4 percent, according to the *Atlantic City Press*. Cumberland County has the second highest unemployment. It's 8 percent. I think that the Route 55 extension would help solve that tremendously. I think people being employed is extremely important.

Evidence of 55 helping the economy has been pointed out by Mr. Asselta. And that's the Vineland Industrial Park. Where is it? It's adjacent to 55. Where is the New Jersey Hospital being -- the new South Jersey hospital being built? Right next to Route 55. Take the Cumberland Mall. It's expanding, it's thriving. Where is it? It's next to Route 55. They're going to build a new Millville Mall, and Lowes is coming in there. T-fal -- where is it located? It's located right next to 55. Duran -- next to 55, Home Depot -- all of those job-providing companies are located there. It shows the importance of 55.

One of the other points -- Woodbine has the highest poverty level along the proposed Route 55. Fifty-five would help Woodbine.

Recommendation: One of the recommendations that I would like to put forth is for a responsible organization, a well-recognized organization, to hand out petitions at the end of Route 55, where there is a light -- and hand out petitions to all of the tourists who are stopped and ask them to vote for the extension of Route 55. And I believe you could capture millions, and I'm not exaggerating when I say millions, of people. And they would, overwhelmingly, vote for the extension of Route 55. That's one recommendation.

Another recommendation -- and that would be, on a Friday afternoon, a Friday night, a Saturday morning, a Saturday afternoon, and the same thing on Sunday and Monday -- hand out those petitions. Let's get the tourists to vote on it.

The other thing -- I think a sign ought to be put up there. "Honk your horn if you want 55 extended." (laughter)

That completes what I had to say, and I thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Question for the witness.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Vanaman.

Assemblyman Asselta.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Mr. Chairman, let me, first, thank Mr. Vanaman for coming forward and being so authoritative with his comments. And let me also tell him that through five commissioners: Commissioner Wilson, Commissioner Haley, Commissioner Weinstein, Commissioner Fox, and the current Commissioner, the railroad bed plan has been presented to them by this legislative delegation. There has been no

movement, no interest, at this point. And this would be an alternative, a compromise, which would be less expensive and less obtrusive on the environment. So your comments are well-received, and I just want to let you know that this particular plan, in conjunction with the South Jersey Transportation Authority, who played a large role in creating this alignment, and, obviously, the Shore Connection and Mr. Chelius here, who -- it was part of their recommendation to have this as an alternative. So it's well-documented, it's there, it has -- fell on deaf ears for the last six years.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Assemblyman.

MR. VANAMAN: Could I make one final comment--

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Briefly.

MR. VANAMAN: --relative to the old railroad bed?

I studied it strictly in Cumberland County down to the Belleplain, and I'm only familiar with that stretch of it. It will not interfere with one home, not one.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Vanaman.

Mr. Gibson.

**JOHN C. GIBSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman -- and the courtesy that you show by coming down here and listening to this important issue and, certainly, to the members of your Committee for their patience this morning and this afternoon on what is a vital subject to this area.

I support -- continue to support the completion of Route 55, and I want to emphasize that it is the completion. It's a highway that has been built, and there is still 20 miles yet to be built. We're log-jammed on that, and

that's the essence of what you're hearing today. I would emphasize that we are talking, in fact, to completing the original plan.

The DOT has classified Route 47 -- existing Route 47 -- as a failed highway. We've heard testimony from the DEP indicating that they're keeping up with the maintenance of their highways. While Route 47 is a failed highway, the alternative is the completion of Route 55.

It certainly goes without saying, no matter what alignment is chosen by the Department, it will have to be the least environmentally objectionable of any alignment that they come up with. That's the law. It has to be environmentally studied, and the alignment that can be constructed and, hopefully, will be constructed, will be the least environmentally objectionable of any.

The people that do, in fact, live along the existing highways are prisoners. You've heard that, and I want to, again, emphasize that. They are prisoners, and they deserve the relief that's long overdue.

There is carnage on the existing highway. Many, many deaths have occurred, and you've heard testimony to that.

I think the most important, at least, as far as I'm concerned, is the emergency evacuation that, someday, we may need in this area. Some folks have said that's an exaggeration. I don't believe it is. I believe there is a certain, serious limit to this area in the ability to evacuate if, in fact, we had a major hurricane during the tourist season. And it is documented. It is something that we deserve here. We deserve that relief, and the relief comes in the form of the completion of Route 55.

Last Monday night, I was privileged to attend a public hearing that was called in Maurice River Township. The issue was jobs at one of our State institutions, one of our prisons. Not one single person that testified at that hearing -- each and every single person that testified in that hearing was in favor of completing or keeping the prison in the condition it is now, not to diminish that prison. That was a united community. It was bi-partisan, it was united by our legislators, it was united by our public officials, and it was united by all the citizens in that area. That's the kind of united effort that we need to complete this work.

Thank you for your patience, and I appreciate all the testimony that you've taken today.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Gibson.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony.

Next I'd like to call Roy Mercier. Roy, are you still here?

(affirmative response)

Tony Eisele. Tony.

And Jay Ford.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: Left.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Left.

And William Gannon.

Please, if you'd state your name for the record.

**TONY EISELE:** My name is Tony Eisele, Wildwood Crest.

I would just like to say a word for the forgotten species, the little kids. For every kid in the back seat getting off of 55, when they ask, "Are we

almost there,” and every parent -- not many miles to go, but yes, it’s a long, long time to go.

That’s it.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

Sir.

**R O Y M E R C I E R:** Hi, my name is Roy Mercier. I’m just a general contractor down here.

Almost everything has been covered before. I just wanted to stress how aggravating it is to drive up 47. I mean, you talk about the accidents and stuff, and a lot of them, I really believe are caused by -- you’re going along, and you’re doing 50 miles an hour. You come behind somebody who is doing 20. You go around the bend, boom, they shoot up to 60. There’s no chance to pass. I mean, it’s just-- The road just drives me crazy every time I’m on it. You really have no choice if you’re trying to get to the Deptford area, and stuff like that.

To some of the speakers who said it won’t help the congestion-- Not being an engineer -- but I find that hard to believe, how two lanes in one direction won’t help, where you have one. If you go up to 73 or 70 -- some of those roads that were mentioned -- imagine them being a one-lane highway. The area would come to a standstill. Why are we the only ones in the state that don’t have a free, two-lane highway to go someplace?

And as far as the stuff springing up along the road, if it’s going through the wetlands area and stuff, they’re not going to be allowed to build super Wawas and things of that nature along the road. It would just--

And the railroad bed, I know, was mentioned many times. It was a point I had.

Environmental issues, I think, with today's engineers, and scientists, and stuff-- Why they can't go hand in hand and devise a road that's going to make everybody happy, and why it's taking so long is just beyond me. I'm in favor of it.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Mercier.  
Mr. Gannon, what community are you from?

**WILLIAM GANNON:** Wildwood.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Wildwood.

MR. GANNON: I have just two short comments.

I want to thank all of you for putting up with this many hours of sitting here. I know you have busy schedules. But I certainly do appreciate the opportunity to come speak in front of you.

The first comment I have is a painful one. About seven years ago, a very dear friend of mine died on that particular road that we're talking about. He had an option of going up the Parkway and taking the long way around, where he would have been safe, but he found a guy that fell asleep, hit him head on, and killed him. And I often think about that going up that road. And this gentlemen here said he got hit going that same route. It's a shorter route to work for some people. And he decided that day to take the shorter route, and that ended his life. I never forgot that, and I'll never forget it until the day I die.

But beyond that, I've been in many, many hearings throughout the years, and I've heard environmentalists' factors, and I've heard other scenarios.

I think, for 25 years -- is long enough to have had environmental problems, environmental statements from people. If we would have listened to those environmentalists 35 years, 40 years ago, there would be no Parkway today that you road down here -- I believe most of you came from North Jersey -- that you road on the Parkway. And if we would have listened to -- or had this impact from the environmental organizations -- there seems to be many of them -- there would be no Parkway, there would be no Turnpike. And I would like to know, from any one of you, what's the difference between Cumberland County environmentalists and Cape May County? I mean, they have an environmental problem there, don't they? And those people there made a decision. It just seems that we can't make that decision here. And it seems to be always the environmentalists that seem to stop it. They want to take us to court for every little thing that comes up and down the pike. Well, progress doesn't get done by taking people to court and arguing this case, that case, and whatever. Somebody has to strike a line and say, "This is the best thing for the public."

I believe the Parkway is a success story. I think the Turnpike is a success story, and they've dealt with environmental. It's not that you cannot deal with it. It's the fact that you have to stop these frivolous law suits brought by all these outside groups, and just move forward.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Gannon.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony.

MR. MERCIER: Could I ask a quick question?

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Sure.

MR. MERCIER: If this does come to the Parkway, has there been any thought about making the three lanes? Remember they added the extra lanes on the Parkway between the red lights to try to alleviate congestion -- of making the rest of the Parkway to three lanes or more, so if 55 comes into the Parkway, we don't have that congestion problem -- or maybe even making the whole bottom half of the Parkway part of 55 and getting rid of the tolls?

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: Mr. Chairman, may I--

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Do you have an answer, Assemblyman?

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN DREW: That has been discussed, but, frankly -- and the Chairman was here -- and we actually had a press conference on the Parkway, trying to commit resources just to get rid of the traffic lights. I mean, one of the major problems in the backup on the Parkway are the lights themselves. We're the only section of the Garden State Parkway that has those traffic lights. It's substandard. They should have never been put there. It was, again -- Cape May County was an afterthought, and that's why they ended up with traffic lights rather than overpasses when the Parkway was initially constructed. But that has been the major initiative, to try just to get the dollars to get rid of them. And once we do that, that would help, and, certainly, that would be another step. But I think that's a really important part of the process, because they are a safety problem, as well as a traffic problem.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: And apropos of that, right now, we're in the process of improving legislation to consolidate both the highway authority, which runs the Parkway and the Turnpike Authority, and that will save \$10 million a year. And that will be money, much needed, that

can be devoted to eliminating the great intersections that create bottlenecks on the lower part of the Parkway.

So I appreciate your question.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony.

We're coming down to our last four.

Assemblyman Asselta has promised not to make any more noise with his microphone.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: I'm a very noisy member.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Andrew McCrosson, Upper Township; James Raleigh, from Colts Neck; and Joseph Liptock.

**R U T H F I S H E R:** I also signed to make a statement, but you did not call.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Are you Ruth Fisher?

MS. FISHER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: You'll be next.

Are you Mr. Liptock?

**R O B E R T L A M C K E N:** No, I'm Mr. Lamcken.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Ms. Fisher, why don't you come up?

**A N D R E W J. M c C R O S S O N J R.:** Well, Mr. Chairman, as she's coming up, I'd like to wish you good afternoon, and members of the Committee, as well.

I too thank you for bringing Trenton to us and holding this hearing in this facility.

My name is Andrew McCrosson. I'm a Township Committeeman in Upper Township, the northern gateway to Cape May County.

I have recently had the opportunity to travel throughout this region. And during the course of numerous discussions, one of the major concerns most frequently voiced was the need to enhance our transportation infrastructure, and most particularly the extension of Route 55.

While serving my community as mayor, I, too, had the opportunity to participate with the Shore Connection Committee, and we need to do more than turn a new page, we need to open a new chapter, and we need to finally move this important project forward.

As I'm sure you well know, tourism is the number one financial engine that powers our regional economy. We need to create an efficient east-west corridor to allow visitors to travel into and out of our region. Unhappy, frustrated visitors do not return, and are more likely to visit other destinations.

The resort economy is dependent on a well-balanced and properly maintained system of transport. Freeholder Director Beyel, earlier, eluded to the North Wildwood Boulevard, Route 147, as an example of appropriate, and seriously needed, and well-designed roadway improvements. Certainly, reasonable compromises can be achieved to address both the transportation demands of the region while protecting our unique natural resources.

Previous speakers have voiced concerns regarding emergent situations and the willfully inadequate status of our transportation infrastructure to accommodate traffic volumes that would result from the need to evacuate the residents and visitors of this area, not to mention normal, everyday, emergency hospital trips.

We have heard the suggestion that the completion of Route 55 would simply shift the traffic delays to the Parkway and other barrier island causeways. From my vantage point, in Upper Township, at the top of Cape May County, I would argue from a personal observation that those Parkway and causeway delays exist already, and they exist precisely because the completion of Route 55 has been deferred.

While I have the floor, I would also add that supplemental means of transportation would aid in the relief of vehicular traffic, and I would urge your consideration, as well, of the rehabilitation of the north-south rail bed so as to enable the resumption of railroad service throughout our county, with a connection available through Winslow Junction and beyond.

And as Assistant Commissioner Keck suggested, nothing is unsolvable. That would include the completion of the extension of Route 55.

I urge your favorable consideration of A-2619 and its recommendation to the full Assembly for passage. The time for the completion of Route 55 has come, that time is now.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. McCrosson.

Ms. Fisher.

MS. FISHER: Yes, first of all, I represent a group called CAPE, Citizens Association for Protection of the Environment, so you must know that I'm totally opposed to this highway.

And I would first like to say that Commissioner Dennis Keck was a breath of fresh air here today, a surprise. I had no idea that his comments --

what his comments would be. And I am surprised that you viewed them with such suspicion or-- It's hard to say how you viewed them.

Mr. Van Drew, apparently you pressured for this hearing. I didn't realize that. You must be forgetting where you came from, Dennis Township, probably the community that would be most affected.

And I have been to hearings long before I lived in Dennis Township, when I lived in Upper Township, on 55, as long ago as 30 or 35 years ago, and heard renowned speakers such as Dr. Clark (phonetic spelling), Dr. Brookworth (phonetic spelling), who's property was donated to the Nature Conservancy, Dr. Shote (phonetic spelling), and former Freeholder Leon Schuck (phonetic spelling). All of these people are dead now, but their testimony lives on. And I'm sure you could acquire it, as well as that of David Watson, who lives, today, in Dennis Township.

I would urge you to compile all this, have it in your office so that anybody could review it, including Mr. Lomax's material, whatever he's -- the Chamber has paid him to prepare. And do that before you make any rash decisions today to support 55.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: We're not making any decisions today, we're here to hear testimony. And we've heard both pro and con.

MS. FISHER: Well, that's welcome news. It seemed to me that Mr. Van Drew was pressuring to roll into action today.

I would remind those that spoke, too, that accidents occur on super highways, horrible accidents occur on super highways, as well. And there

may be more of them if you-- I don't have figures on that. I just have my eyewitness.

I live on 47, and have lived there a long time. I've witnessed accidents. Dennis Township Rescue Squad, the fire company -- respond very quickly -- admirable men -- always work hard to ensure that there are no deaths, even when things are in terrible condition. But those -- the last one I saw was near a home that I was living in, and the woman was speeding in snow. That can happen on any highway. And I don't think it needs to be blamed on 47. Perhaps we need to lower the speed limit, do other things, rather than destroy so much of our environment to build this proposed highway.

With regard to the times we're living in, it seems almost unpatriotic to come here now to discuss a frivolous highway. We just bought a war. Is this a time to buy a highway?

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Ms. Fisher.

Mr. Raleigh.

**J A M E S T. R A L E I G H:** I'm Jim Raleigh. I've only been in New Jersey since 1972, and I've attended an awful lot of hearings about an awful lot of projects. I signed in today not knowing what the topic was going to be -- saying, "Build the railroad first."

This man here is the first man, in all of this testimony, that even brought it up. You haven't got all of the players here. There are people in Cape May township -- or in Cape May that want to see the train go up to

Winslow. We've had testimony the other way, that we used to have the Blue Comet line down to Winslow to take people to Atlantic City.

I've been involved in a number of projects, and in the State budget public hearings for several years. The Assembly Budget Committee came south to South Jersey in Vorhees last -- by the hospital -- last Tuesday, and I was in a dilemma as to which Committee I was supposed to be testifying to. But what I said to the Budget Committee, that's got to work out trying to balance a budget in these hard times, is we've got a major disconnect in New Jersey Department of Transportation. The bus department is run as an independent, profit organization.

New Jersey Transit happens to be responsible for all of the bankrupt freight lines. When New Jersey Transit was formed, New Jersey Transit assumed the legal responsibility for the right-of-way of all of the railroads for future commuter use. Now, they're trying to walk away from that in lots of places: Lacey Township, Marlboro, Aberdeen. They're trying to lease it out as a hiking trail, but it's only a lease.

The other disconnect is Conrail -- CSX, NSX, Conrail shared SX -- is treated as a private business. There's a minuscule amount of money in the budget to try and get trucks off the roads and onto the rails. If you put a \$25 exit charge off of 55 to help pay for putting the freight, to bring the milk into Cape May, on the railroad, you might get it paid for sooner, but New Jersey Transit rail doesn't care about competing against New Jersey Transit bus.

The question comes up in a bigger way -- of the lack of State planning. Commissioner -- excuse me, Governor McGreevey has appointed another commission to come up with the State Transportation Plan. But from

what I see, he's not considering freight. Freight is very important to communities like Lakewood and Lakehurst, for supporting military facilities. And I think we're going to have to share freight and passenger rail. But these mitigations from the Department of Transportation only work about half the time. And Commissioner Fox, when he was head of the Department of Transportation, last year, at the Smart Growth Summit, said, "The problem for the State Highway Department is built by the local and county planning boards, who accept all of these developments and then expect the State to fix them."

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Raleigh.

Ms. Fisher, Mr. McCrosson, thank you for your testimony.

MR. McCROSSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNEWSKI: And the last individual that we have signed up to testify -- yes, he's coming up from the back, from the New Jersey Council of Carpenters, Robert Lamcken.

MR. LAMCKEN: Good morning -- good afternoon now, I guess it is.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Bob, thanks for being here.

MR. LAMCKEN: I'd like to thank you for allowing me to speak here this morning.

First off, I'd like to go on record, as a carpenters' union of the State of New Jersey, we're in total support of the extension and completion of Route 55.

There's been much testimony here, pro and con, but what we all must realize is that in order to prosper, we must grow. It is a workable

roadway, and all those involved must work together, leaving out the word *no*, to find an evitable solution.

Cape May County and Cumberland County need the relief of the traffic congestion. The infrastructure, from the beginning of time, has always been a major component in commerce. Cape May County, along with the State of New Jersey, would certainly prosper with the completion of Route 55.

I thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Thank you for your testimony.

Is there anyone else who has signed up who I have not called? (no response)

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank all of you who have remained for being so attentive and patient. We've had over 40 individuals testify. Their input is important for the ability of the Transportation Committee to make intelligent decisions. We have several pieces of legislation that directly address 55, and those will be on the agenda for the Transportation Committee in the future. Your thoughts, your comments, your testimony will be valuable in allowing us to make a decision.

I want to thank Assemblyman Asselta.

ASSEMBLYMAN ASSELTA: Thank you, Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN WISNIEWSKI: Assemblyman Burzichelli and Assemblywoman Stender had to leave. I want to thank them. And I want to thank Assemblyman Van Drew for asking to organize this hearing today. I appreciate his input and his support on transportation issues.

And with that, we are adjourned.

**(MEETING CONCLUDED)**