



NEW JERSEY CHAPTER

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www.SierraClub.org/NJ

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

March 16, 2020

Re: Request to Postpone Public Hearings

Dear Mr. John Keller,

Governor Murphy has declared a State of Emergency and a Public Health Emergency in New Jersey because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to this, the New Jersey Sierra Club requests that the New Jersey Turnpike Authority postpone the public hearings scheduled for Wednesday, March 18 at 1:00pm and 6:00pm and Thursday, March 19 at 7:00pm. The public should have the right to comment on the proposed toll adjustments. We do not believe that it is fair to have these hearings continue when people do not want to leave their homes because of the coronavirus outbreak.

People across the state are struggling to adjust to the many changes and challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak. People are working from home, schools are closed, and Governor Murphy is putting in place a statewide curfew from 8pm to 5am. We do not believe that it is a fair process to hold public hearings when people cannot leave their homes. Many people in our state are immunocompromised or have friends and family who are. Attending public hearings will be viewed by many as an unnecessary risk to the health of themselves and their loved ones. Two of the public hearings are scheduled for the evening, which also means that people will risk breaking the recommended statewide curfew if they try to attend these events.

The proposed toll increases will go toward various highway widening projects, especially along the Turnpike in South Jersey. We are concerned that this will promote sprawl and traffic in areas that are largely undeveloped farm fields. High-density urban sprawl in the middle of beautiful, environmentally sensitive farmland in South Jersey is unnecessary. This will mean more schools and infrastructure, costing taxpayers even more money to pay for new roads, bridges, schools, and more.

Given the seriousness of the COVID-19 outbreak, we are concerned that the public will not have enough time to submit comments. We are also concerned that because of the social distancing recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, members of the public will not



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want to risk attending public hearings this week. Therefore, we request that the public hearings be canceled and postponed until after social distancing restrictions are lifted and the comment period should be extended. This is important to ensure public safety and to make sure that people have enough time to review the information and submit public comments.

If you have any questions, or if there is any additional information that I can provide, please feel free to call me at (609) 558-9100.

Sincerely,

Jeff Tittel

Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club

CC: Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, Kathleen Frangione, Matthew Platkin