



South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization

*Serving Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland,
and Salem Counties since 1993.*

Leonard Desiderio, *Chairman*

Benjamin H. Laury, *Vice Chairman*

782 South Brewster Road, Unit
B6,
Vineland, New Jersey 08361

www.sjtpo.org
(856) 794-1941
(856) 794-2549 (fax)

Jennifer Marandino, P.E.
Executive Director

John W. Risley,
Secretary/Treasurer

May 17, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

**Re: Letter of Support – RURAL Discretionary Grant Application
Corsons Inlet Bridge Rehabilitation Project
Upper Township, Cape May County, New Jersey**

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO), I am pleased to provide this letter of support for the Cape May County Bridge Commission's application to the United States Department of Transportation Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program (RURAL) for the Corsons Inlet Bridge Rehabilitation Project in Upper Township, Cape May County, New Jersey. The Corsons Inlet Bridge Rehabilitation Project is an excellent candidate for receipt of federal funds. Upon confirmation of receipt of federal funds, staff at SJTPO will work in coordination with NJDOT to incorporate the project into SJTPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and thus, the State TIP, and accomplish this in a reasonable time frame.

SJTPO is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) serving Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem Counties in southern New Jersey. SJTPO serves as a technical resource, provides access to federal transportation funding, and works to provide a regional approach to address transportation planning and engineering issues. SJTPO works with regional partners and agencies to advance transportation projects of regional interest. Goal 3 within SJTPO's Regional Transportation Plan, *RTP 2050*, centers on the "restoration, preservation, and maintenance of the existing transportation system" (www.sjtpo.org/RTP). With more than 280 bridges owned by NJDOT, counties, authorities, and local bridge authorities and commissions in the SJTPO region, bridges are one of the top assets of the regional transportation system. While SJTPO has no jurisdiction over these bridges, the regional agency's efforts include bringing awareness to the bridges that are deemed a critical need and assisting subregions with pursuing federal funding for bridge improvement projects.

The Bridge Commission has noted that the National Bridge Inspection Standards (NBIS) biennial inspections have identified the support columns and portion of the deck both as Priority 1 defects in past and current reports. With the replacement of the structurally deficient and functionally obsolete bridge being necessary at a high expense, SJTPO identified the bridge replacement as an Unfunded Critical Need

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in SJTPO's *RTP 2050* (www.sjtpo.org/RTP). As an interim step to full bridge replacement, the proposed rehabilitation project will remove the deteriorated column supports and deck, replacing each of the structural elements.

The Ocean Drive (CR 619) Bridge over Corsons Inlet (also known as Corsons Inlet Bridge) connects the north end of Sea Isle City and the hamlet of Strathmere to the southern end of Ocean City and is a critical asset to Cape May County. It is imperative to improve the existing infrastructure that supports the tourism industry and provides vital emergency access to coastal communities. Tourism is the lifeblood of Cape May County and the southern New Jersey region. The bridge supports the regional tourism industry through its access to a coastal community, one of a few that offer free beach access. The loss of the bridge would result in undue hardship with the elimination of the primary emergency evacuation route for the community of Strathmere and potentially isolates the community, causing significantly longer trips for residents, deliveries, and school children, and severs current emergency services (fire and medical) access.

This project will enhance economic development and tourism and improve important transportation infrastructure in the SJTPO region. These infrastructure improvements will improve mobility and access, helping to maintain community connectivity within Cape May County and prioritize preservation and maintenance of the existing transportation system.

SJTPO is pleased to be a partner in this effort, working with the Bridge Commission and Cape May County to advance this critically important bridge project. This project is not currently funded in the SJTPO TIP. Not all priority projects are included in the TIP due to state and federal funding constraints. As noted in SJTPO's *RTP 2050*, despite vast state revenue generated by Jersey Shore areas in Atlantic and Cape May Counties, localities face a heavy lift in funding major shore-oriented infrastructure investments, such as the replacement of the Corsons Inlet Bridge, though they may be valuable and effective in improving South Jersey's transportation network. Federal funding for this project is important.

As mentioned at the start of this letter, upon confirmation that the project has been accepted by the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) for federal funds, SJTPO will work in coordination with NJDOT to incorporate the Corsons Inlet Bridge Rehabilitation Project in SJTPO's TIP and subsequently in the State TIP. As the Executive Director of SJTPO, I support the Cape May County Bridge Commission's application to provide for structural rehabilitation of the Corsons Inlet Bridge, which is essential to South Jersey's tourism economy. I respectfully ask that you afford the Commission's USDOT's RURAL grant funding application due consideration.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Marandino, P.E.
Executive Director

JM:mb

c: Lewis T. Donofrio, Jr. P.E. Chief Engineer Cape May County Bridge Commission