1 PUBLIC HEARING ON TRANSPORTATION FUNDING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 2 HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM 3 THURSDAY, AUGUST 12 2021 COMMENCING AT 10:04 A.M. 4 5 6 THERE BEING PRESENT: 7 8 ANTHONY R. SUAREZ, ACTING DIRECTOR DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 9 JOSEPH CINQUE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR 10 DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 11 SUE FORZANI, OFFICE MANAGER DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 12 DONNA RIGGI, PAYROLL CLERK DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 13 14 JULIO VELASQUEZ, SENIOR ACCOUNTANT DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 15 ISABEL ROJAS, REGIONAL PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR NEW JERSEY TRANSIT 16 17 JOHN GOEZ, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COORDINATOR DIVISION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION 18 TESS TOMASI, T&A/CARE MANAGEMENT SUPERVISOR 19 DIVISION OF SENIOR SERVICES 20 21 22 23 KIM O. FURBACHER, C.C.R., R.D.R. P.O. BOX 213 24 ROCHELLE PARK, NEW JERSEY 07662-0213 201-336-6200 25

I N D E X

3	CDEAKED	PAGE	
4	<u>SPEAKER</u>		
5	Anthony Suarez	3, 33	
6	Tannahaa Taanana	1 2	
7	Lorraine Joewono	13	
8	Joseph Cinque	17	
9	Brian Fitzgibbons	17, 21	
10	Jacqueline Kates	18	
	Councilwoman Michelle Crowe Paz	2 5	
11	Joan Van Etten	2 6	
12	Isabel Rojas	2 8	
13	Austin Epstein	3 0	
14	Scott Reddin (Statement submitted)	3 0	
15		2.0	
16	Janet Connell (Statement submitted)	3 2	
17			
18			
19			

1 DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Welcome, everybody.

My name is Anthony Suarez. As some of you know, I'm the Acting Director at Community

Transportation for the County of Bergen.

At this time, would you please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

(At this point in the proceeding all rise for a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.)

DIRECTOR SUAREZ: At this time I would like to begin the meeting by welcoming everyone.

Also in attendance from my department is my Assistant Director, Joe Cinque; Sue Forzani, who's our Office Manager; and Donna Riggi, who is our Payroll Clerk.

This meeting is our annual public hearing which is mandated by New Jersey Transit, which gives the department various funding sources, but this meeting in particular involves the New Jersey Senior Citizen and Disabled Residential Transportation Assistance Program, also known as SCDRTAP. That money goes to a fund and that fund, 7.5 percent of it, goes to fund the paratransit systems of the state, all 21 counties, and some of the funds go to nonprofits. This year, we are receiving \$1,657,504, which is a decrease over the

\$1,685,543 we received last year.

This meeting has been advertised in the Star Ledger and The Record, Herald News, and we have sent notices to all of the clerks in all of the municipalities in Bergen County. We have also sent notices to the facilities that we service and we have sent notices to our autistic programs.

With respect to the amount of trips we did in 2020, that amount was 64,450. We drove 377,499 miles, and we transported 12,250 dialysis trips. We handled 2,981 wheelchair trips, and we transported 3,936 education trips.

We also transported 8,404 nutrition trips. The nutrition trips are the trips that were for the county nutrition centers. And we also transported 476 veterans to the VA in East Orange.

For some of you that do know, I've been Acting Director since July 2019, and some of the initiatives that I had started and that have been completed involve the following matters:

All of our buses are now equipped with new live cameras for the safety of our drivers and our passengers. We hired a company, after extensive research, Rosco, and our vehicles have been fitted with these cameras. We are able to view the buses

from our office in Lodi in realtime.

We are also able to view incidents that occurred on the buses during the course of a particular day and save those clips of the matter for future review. If an issue comes up down the line involving the driver or passenger concerning the safety or liability, we're able to view that. Thus far, the cameras have been very helpful.

Right now we are in the process of having our staff trained on a new scheduling system. This happened in 2019, when we did various interviews and research with the county IT department of the various vendors from various companies that provide the services, and we selected Tripmaster. We started on-site training with Tripmaster; however, due to coronavirus, the training and the implementation of the system was delayed and we anticipate resuming at the end of this month.

We have purchased many new vehicles for our workforce, and we have been able to purchase a number of new vehicles to replace some of older ones.

Prior to the pandemic, we opened several new routes to service some of the areas that needed transportation in the county, specifically the Fort Lee/Cliffside Park area and in the northern part

of the county.

We also increased the use of advertising on our buses and we promoted the census on our buses.

We entered into a contract with EZRide covered by grant monies that have assisted those who needed services at times that we were unable to provide coverage through Uber and/or Lyft, and the service was also used to transport individuals during the pandemic for vaccine shots.

We're still looking into entering into a contract with Logisticare in order to expand our service and reimbursement for others who need our services. That was delayed due to the pandemic.

We have also been using a professional grant writer since I was able to come to Community Transportation to assist in not only continuing to apply for monies that we had received in the past through grants, but also to obtain new leads for other grants and assist in the funding of our department.

When the coronavirus hit in March 2020, we adapted and significantly changed direction, as to the needs and direction of the department for the health and safety of our employees and our customers.

The County Executive expressed the importance of taking this seriously from the beginning, even before others gave the virus the serious attention it deserved, and, as a result, our staff was significantly reduced at one point and so were our services, but we've continually increased to go back to the point where we were before the pandemic, as we open up for these services. And during the pandemic, we even provided more services which involved driving individuals to vaccine sites. We had actual buses that we utilized to take residents of Bergen County to vaccine clinics and we also served as a shuttle bus at New Bridge. they were running their vaccine clinics, we had permanent drivers there to transport individuals who were unable to get to the site because of whether they were in a wheelchair or they needed assistance, so it made it a lot easier for them to get a vaccine shot.

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During the height of the pandemic, certain classes of our employees who were not working at the department, and our schedulers, Jenny and Elaina, juggled, as best that they could, the routes and the rides with who we had working and what needed to be done, and they did a great job, along with the

1 rest of the staff.

We've also continued to have a mandate to keep the office as spaced out as possible, while during the pandemic some of our employees were working remotely, I guess during the height of the pandemic, because in some ways this is still going on.

So ensure safety in the office, we do have mandates that the county had filtered to us that are being followed, which involves wearing masks in the building, social distancing, Plexiglass to separate the dispatchers, constant sanitization, following CDC guidelines per posters, which include hand washing for 20 seconds.

Our drivers are also following CDC guidelines and are supplied with face masks for themselves and their passengers who don't have one, which is required, and our buses are sanitized on a regular basis, and temperatures of all passengers and employees are checked daily.

At one point, we had buses only transporting one individual to a site. Now, per the county Health Department, we're able to transport with 50 percent capacity for dialysis, chemotherapy, and food shopping.

You have to remember, we're not like other transportation businesses, because our people are in some ways compromised with their health or their age, so we take an extra precaution there. We also installed separators for the passengers on each bus, and have barriers installed for our drivers to separate them from our passengers.

Gowns and face shields are also provided to drivers, and we have strict capacity limits for our Hackensack shuttle.

Our Meals on Wheels program is very active and significantly increased during the pandemic. Unfortunately during the pandemic, we also had a vandalism problem with our buses on the site.

There was actually, from what I know, a rash of thefts of catalytic converters of buses and cars during the pandemic. Many of our buses were affected and vandalized. They stole catalytic converters. We had to replace a lot of them.

So we had to have cameras installed and now it's a lot more secure. We should have had cameras on the site in the beginning, but they're there now monitoring the parking lot, and locking gates were also installed to protect the county's assets on-site. That's locked nightly.

I want to commend my employees in the department, the staff who worked through the pandemic and are still working hard through this pandemic. My recollection is we did not shutdown during the entire time, we continued our services, even though at one point they were limited, but we still did what was important for these people, getting them to their doctors, getting food to senior citizens, and doing other things that assisted the elderly and the infirm.

Our daily activity is consumed with health and safety issues, not only for our employees but also for our customers. We followed specific protocols related to their health and safety, and we obtained the proper PPE that is needed for our department to operate.

We have also partnered with some towns, this is starting to really take effect during the pandemic, to provide assistance with PPE on their own buses. That was where we would not only assist in telling these towns what we were doing to give them some guidance with respect to protecting drivers and passengers and passengers from each other, but we also actually took their buses at certain times and we installed the equipment ourselves.

Our staff, Aris and Mel, they did a great job. They really stepped up, and we helped a lot of towns that needed the help because they didn't have the resources. We loaned buses to these towns when they weren't able to have a bus in service so that they could provide the service to their passengers.

Like I stated before, we ran a vaccine shuttle at New Bridge during the pandemic and other vaccine clinics. We did one in Ridgewood and one in Woodcliff Lake to assist seniors in getting transportation.

At this time I'll read you the budget.

Our proposed total operating budget is \$8,502,131.

From New Jersey Transit and SCDRTAP, we get \$1,657,504. The county's contribution is \$5,757,363. We also receive money that runs the Hackensack shuttle in the amount of \$118,680. And we have 5310 monies we are anticipating in the amount of \$175,000. We have Peer monies in the amount of \$70,000, and Veterans in the amount of \$26,000. Title 3, which is our Meals on Wheels program, and that is \$437,584. Advertising in the amount of \$30,000. And we have a miscellaneous budget item for

\$50,000.

With that being said, I want to thank

New Jersey Transit for all they do with respect to

funding for the department.

I do want to point out Isabelle Rojas and Janelle Rivera, who since I got there made me feel very well accepted with New Jersey Transit. And Brian, you know, you all do a great job there, and I don't think you get the recognition from the state that you really do deserve because of the work that you have to do over there. My main contacts at the department, they have also assisted in our department being able to obtain several vehicles donated, which has saved the County of Bergen thousands of dollars.

I also want to thank Jim Tedesco, the

County Executive, for his trust in me and the other

people who run the department, which is a very

essential service for Bergen County and especially

under these circumstances. The Board of

Commissioners for their support and their help, along

with Joe, Sue, Donna, and everyone else in the

department that helps us run smoothly.

I don't know if the County Executive is on the line, I didn't see him, but obviously he's invited to say a few words whenever he wants.

I will at this time open the meeting up
to the public for public comment. I don't know if
anyone wants to say anything.

If you do speak, please state your name and your title and what department you're with.

I see Lorraine, her hand is raised.

Loraine, just state your name and spell it, and just set forth your position.

MS. JOEWONO: Okay.

I would just like to read a statement from the Division of Senior Services, and I will also send it over to you so it can go into your minutes.

The Bergen County Division of Senior Services, Area Agency on Aging, also ADRC, Aging and Disability Resource Connection, was established in 1966 under federal legislation and the Older Americans Act.

The Division of Senior Services is the primary planning, coordinating, and funding agency for senior programs and services, promoting the well-being of health and independence of Bergen County's more than 228,000 older adults.

Currently, the Division of Senior

Services provides Older Americans Act Area Plan

contract funding to support 28 organizations and 43

programs, including the Bergen County Community

Transportation.

These programs help older adults, individuals with disabilities over the age of 18, and their caregivers to access the complex, long-term care community-based health and human services.

Transportation has always been one of the top priority service areas in the Division of Senior Services. And the seniors, caregivers, service providers and other advocates frequently cite transportation as the most acute unmet need for older adults in Bergen County. The topic of transportation is a recurring concern at the division's annual public hearings, needs assessments, and service provider meetings. The lack of transportation options has become a serious issue for older adults who cannot drive.

Municipal transportation services are restricted to specific destinations or trip purposes within their own municipalities, and many seniors forego at least some trips because of lack of transportation.

While many of the seniors use the Bergen County Community Transportation programs to get to their funded services, senior activity centers and other locations, there is an acute need for more transportation options for program participants to fill in the gaps in services.

effort to serve seniors. However, with 228,000 seniors spread over the 246 miles of Bergen County, it is not always possible to get seniors where they need to be, no matter how vital a service.

The Division of Senior Services recognizes that having mobility enhances the quality of life for older adults, and we continue to advocate for more convenient, affordable, and accessible transportation in the county.

The current transportation system in Bergen County has an array of public and private transportation services; however, navigating these services and understanding the different transit providers' operating hours, geographic service areas, cost and eligibility for specialized transportation services can be very challenging, especially for our seniors.

Another barrier is that many seniors

are not tech savvy enough to use smartphones to access timely transportation information and schedule and pay for rides.

In response to the growing need for a more cohesive system, the Division of Senior Services continues to advocate for expanding its pilot program, a partnership with Community Transportation and EZRide, and also encourages to develop a one-stop travel information and planning service provided by a mobility manager, a system serving as a transportation resource center and offering a single point of contact, one call/one click transportation services in order to help seniors find information available on transportation options, to navigate and locate transportation, and to provide access to services such as EZRide, Ride for Life, those programs where Community Trans or other providers are not available to accommodate their request.

We want to thank the administration and the Division of Community Transportation and all their workers who work very hard to support and collaborate, and are looking forward to better serving and addressing the needs of Bergen County's older population.

Thank you.

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                   DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Okay. Anyone else
    have any statement they'd like to make?
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                   MR. CINQUE: Yes, Anthony. It's Joe
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    Cinque.
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                   I just want to thank Lorraine and Joan
    and Adam for all the things they do at Senior
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    Services to help us to be a good partner in this
    whole thing. We are going to move forward, if this
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    nightmare ever ends of this pandemic, with trying to
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    get some of the towns involved in helping with the
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    transport as well, so there would be another option.
    In other words, towns that have buses maybe assisting
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    each other and crossing town boundaries to help.
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    once we get that, we're going to try to move into
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    that, but we do want to thank Joan and Lorraine and
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    Adam for all the things they do.
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                   MS. JOEWONO: Thank you, Joe, because
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    you were in the trenches with us during the whole
    COVID, and Joan and Adam were remarkable.
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                   MR. CINQUE: Yes, they really were.
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                   DIRECTOR SUAREZ:
                                     Any other comments?
                   MR. FITZGIBBONS: Yes. Some of us at
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    the top have our hands raised. I'll defer to Jackie
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    and I'll go after her.
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DIRECTOR SUAREZ:

Yes, Jackie.

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MS. KATES: Thank you very much.

I'm Jacqueline Kates, project advisor to Age-Friendly Teaneck. I am speaking today as a representative of the North Jersey Alliance of Age-Friendly Communities. Our communication coordinator, Colleen Diskin, has probably already emailed these comments to you, I hope so. If not, we will have them to you later today.

Our alliance includes age-friendly initiatives in six Bergen County towns: Englewood, Fair Lawn, Garfield, Ridgewood, Teaneck, and Westwood.

We thank you for this opportunity to speak to the transportation needs of Bergen County's older residents. As you know, it's been a challenging year and a half, and the pandemic has provided ample insight into the crucial role that transportation plays in the health, safety and well-being of non-driving and mobility challenged older adults.

As we all continue to learn from and respond to the changing circumstances of some of Bergen County's most vulnerable older residents, we would like to urge you to view this moment in time as an impetus for transportation innovation.

As we testified last year, our alliance, prior to the pandemic, had been engaging in a survey of local communities, senior bus and van programs. That survey demonstrated that many towns had vehicles and ride programs not used to their fullest potential.

We suggest the county also study these programs with the hope of finding ways to foster more collaboration among communities, which in turn could help expand ridership and increase cost efficiencies.

In addition, we encourage Community

Transportation to explore strategies being used

elsewhere in New Jersey and around the country to

expand the reach of its older adult transportation

services.

We commend the Bergen County Division of Senior Services for its launch in February of a program using EZRide's Ride for Life ride hailing service to transport older and disabled adults for vaccine appointments. We're gratified to hear of plans to expand the program to offer rides to doctor's appointment, senior centers, grocery stores, and other crucial needs.

The Bergen County Division of Senior Services program is just one example of the type of

potential public/private collaborations that could enhance the county's ability to meet the need of its growing older adult population. There are many more examples around the state and country that could be piloted in Bergen County, many of which are discussed in a New Jersey Department of Transportation report released in May, "Understanding the Transportation Mobility Needs for an Aging New Jersey Population."

Survey and other data in this report

make a compelling argument for avoiding "one size

fits all" transportation strategies, particularly

when seeking to serve a mobility challenged

population.

While the report takes a statewide

lens, many of its recommendations offer a framework

for how a county such as Bergen, with its diverse

population and diverse geography, can design a

transportation system that would better meet the

growing demand for more accessible and flexible ride

alternatives. Key suggestions include: Increasing

promotion and support of ride dispatch technologies

and ride hailing programs, expanding coordination

between statewide transit services and local transit

services to provide seamless service across borders,

and redesigning bus networks to ensure adequate

service to areas with high concentrations of older adults.

The community leaders in our alliance stand ready to work with county leaders to pursue new ideas and strategies.

And, once again, we thank you for the opportunity to offer input.

DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Thank you, Jackie.

MS. KATES: I'm going to thank you for attending one of our group meetings.

DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Okay.

MR. FITZGIBBONS: I'm Brian

Fitzgibbons. I am the president and CEO of
Heightened Independence, a progress center for
independent living, but in this capacity I am
representing the HSAC Adult Services Committee to
offer the testimony. And I'll read it.

Good morning. My name is Brian
Fitzgibbons, Chair of the Bergen County Human
Services Advisory Council's Adult Services Committee.

The Adult Services Committee targets the needs of adults age 60 and older and individuals with disabilities who are 18 or older. The goal is for these individuals to live at home as independently as possible for as long as possible,

1 | rather than in more costly long-term care facilities.

As part of the planning for older adults, we recognize that transportation poses the greatest challenge in the planning process.

Remaining home as long and as independently as possible implies the ability and the resources to travel to meet basic needs.

Bergen County government's Community

Transportation Program provides this service to those who need it. Director Anthony Suarez should be commended for his responsiveness at every level during the pandemic.

As a guest of the Adult Services

Committee meeting earlier this year, he brought the group up-to-date on new equipment, vaccination of the drivers, and the vaccination efforts to get people vaccinated, sanitation protocols, improved dispatching system, and the gradual full return of the service.

It should be noted that the delivery of the county's Meals on Wheels program was modified but functioned throughout this shutdown.

I currently serve on this committee, the Bergen County Workforce Development Board, the Bergen County Division on Disability Advisory

Committee, and participate in several age-friendly initiatives, and the topic of transportation is always cited as the key element for every program. Whether it concerns getting to a work program, a medical appointment, or a social event at a senior center, the question "How will I get there?" is always raised.

needs are further complicated by the need for accessible vehicles to handle wheelchairs and scooters. Bergen County Community Transportation does a fine job accommodating the needs of these individuals, but the needs to plan trips far in advance limits spontaneity, and, very often, discourages participation. It is clear that the services need to be expanded to serve more people, as the need is ever increasing.

The Adult Services Committee continues to support Bergen County Community Transportation, but also encourages partner transit agencies to think more creatively. New Jersey Transit's Access Link is a great service for those with disabilities, as it shadows the local bus routes. However, we continue to recommend that Access Link expand their routes to include the shadowing of New York bus routes and

trains, which create more options for our residents.

A typical example is NJT #165. While its run starts out in New York's Port Authority, it eventually becomes a local route throughout Hudson and Bergen Counties. Many more people could be served, if this route was considered.

We employ the transit connector that operates in the loop around Hackensack and feel that it could serve as a model for other areas of the county, particularly where large concentrations of people with disabilities live, like Lehmann Gardens in Park Ridge and Orchard and Crescent Commons in Allendale. Perhaps partnership with jitneys operated by the municipalities can serve as a shuttle service to get to Access Link pickup points.

We also encourage innovative entities such as Uber and Lyft to further expand the menu of available transportation options to include accessible vehicles and to possibly create a partnership with the Veterans Administration to create businesses for disabled vets who operate their own accessible vehicles with wheelchair lifts to offer rides for those with mobility issues. This could be a win/win for both parties.

If we continue to share ideas, we can

successfully tackle the transportation challenges
that confront our seniors and disabled every day in
Bergen County.

Thank you for the opportunity.

DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Thank you.

Michelle Paz.

COUNCILWOMAN PAZ: My name is Michelle Paz, and I represent the Mahwah Access for All Commission as the council liaison and also as a special needs parent.

Our Mahwah Access for All Commission acts in an advisory capacity to the mayor and council of the Township of Mahwah to the concerns of barrier-free facilities, disabled or access challenged persons, employment practices, general and specific compliance with the requirements of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and recreational opportunities.

The commission serves as advocates in the township to help enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and access-challenged persons so they can participate to the fullest extent possible in everyday activities in the community.

So that being said, to follow-up on Ms.

25 | Joewono's, Ms. Kates', and Mr. Fitzgibbons' points,

1 I'd like to ask that New Jersey Transit respectfully consider expanding Access Links routes to shadow the 2 commuter route that goes through Suffern, New York, 4 all the way down to the Port Authority, traveling on Mahwah's main thoroughfare, Franklin Turnpike, before 5 it hits Route 17. The Short Line Bus has been in 6 contract with the Township of Mahwah for a while, but I'm asking in these COVID challenged times that New 9 Jersey Transit have a more open mind and additional 10 ways to serve their communities, especially those 11 with special needs, those who are elderly, and those who are transportation challenged. 12

I thank you for your time and attention, and appreciate everything that New Jersey Transit has been doing to serve our community to the best of their ability during the COVID pandemic.

Thank you.

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DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Thank you, Ms. Paz.

Joan Van Etten.

MS. VAN ETTEN: Yes. Hi.

My name is Joan. I'm a parent of a special needs adult at the Opportunity Center in Fair Lawn.

Many of the clients are aging, as well as many of the parents, and there are eight clients

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    who receive service at Bergen County. I'm wondering
    when you anticipate being able to resume driving
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    them?
                   DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Joe, correct me if I
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    am wrong, did we say it would be September 13th?
                   MR. CINQUE: We are going with a
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    tentative date of September 13th, but keep in mind
    they just brought back the task force for the
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    coronavirus because of the delta variant and we
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    haven't gotten a decision on how many we will be able
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    to transport. Right now, like Anthony said, we're at
    50 percent. That may change, depending on the
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    findings of that commission through the Health
    Department and all. So tentatively the 13th we
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    should be gearing up to go back, unless something
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    comes down the pike only because of the delta
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    variant, you know, it being so contagious to people.
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    I don't anticipate that, I just don't know.
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    13th is our tentative date.
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                   DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Did you get that,
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    Joan?
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                   MS. VAN ETTEN: Yes.
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                   DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Anticipate the 13th,
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    unless unforeseen circumstances stop that.
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MS. VAN ETTEN: I quess we will find

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- 1 out. How will we find out exactly?
- 2 DIRECTOR SUAREZ: I would think we are
- 3 | going to be in communication with the facility that
- 4 | will probably speak with you directly, so along those
- 5 lines.
- MS. VAN ETTEN: Yes.
- 7 DIRECTOR SUAREZ: If everything goes as
- 8 | planned, you'll be properly notified.
- 9 MS. VAN ETTEN: Okay. Thank you.
- 10 DIRECTOR SUAREZ: You're welcome. Hope
- 11 | you have a nice day.
- MS. VAN ETTEN: You too.
- 13 | DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Would anyone else
- 14 | like to speak? Is that the last raised hand? Would
- 15 | anyone else would like to say anything?
- 16 MS. ROJAS: Hi, Anthony. It's Isabel
- 17 | Rojas from New Jersey Transit. I just wanted to add
- 18 | a few comments.
- 19 I just want to thank everyone for
- 20 attending today's meeting. It's been a challenging
- 21 | year and a half, and I definitely commend the
- 22 | leadership at Bergen County Community Transportation
- 23 | for all they've done for the residents of Bergen
- 24 | County with so many challenges in their way. They
- 25 | really did their best to step up and continue to

serve the focused population here for this funding,
which is seniors and the disabled.

I, as their liaison, will continue to work diligently with Bergen County to assist and provide the support for those needs for what I understand is the expansion of services, though I definitely understand that that is very much needed in a county as populated as Bergen County. There's a lot of need there, and hopefully moving forward we can try to work on maybe more innovative projects to provide that expansion, but I just want to commend everyone and thank you so much for offering me the opportunity to be able to speak.

I hope everyone stays safe and we can continue to expand services and allow more individuals on those vehicles, because I know it's very crucial. The services are there to enhance the quality of life for these individuals, not only medical services but a multitude of services, so that you can continue to have that quality of life while you age in place. So thank you for the opportunity, Anthony.

DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Thanks, Isabel. Thanks for everything you do.

MS. ROJAS: Thank you.

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                   DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Austin, did you want
    to say something? I don't know if you were trying to
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    say something? I see your screen popped up and it
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    was surrounded by something like you were going to
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    speak. Did you want to speak?
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                   MR. EPSTEIN: I do want to say
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    something. As I view the current need --
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                   DIRECTOR SUAREZ: You are having
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    technical difficulties.
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                   Some of what you said got cut out, but
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    I am hoping to see you at the Citizens Advisory
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    Committee next week live.
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                   MR. EPSTEIN:
                                Okay.
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                   DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Does anyone else want
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    to say anything?
                   MR. EPSTEIN: Yes.
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                   I am glad to be here.
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                   DIRECTOR SUAREZ: Good. It will be
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    nice to see you. We're having our Citizens Advisory
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    Committee Meeting live for the first time in over a
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    year at Bergen County One, so I think that's before
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    the end of the month.
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                   (The following statements were
    submitted for inclusion in the official record.)
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                   "My name is Scott Reddin and I am the
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Chairman of the Bergen County Senior Services

Advisory Council. I also work at an active senior center in Englewood.

"The numbers speak for themselves.

Seniors who don't drive end [up] having less trips to their doctors, less opportunities to shop or eat out and 64 percent fewer visits to friends or family.

"The need for county transportation is obvious. Before the pandemic started, so many seniors depended on transportation that was safe and reliable and would take them directly to their destination. Yes, sometimes seniors have to leave for their destination an hour before their exercise class or doctor appointment, but it is better than not having transportation at all. In certain areas of Bergen County, there are basically no transportation alternatives.

"The numbers show the need, but as a person who is at a senior center every day, I cannot stress how important it is for seniors to be able to get out of their homes. I know how happy our seniors are when they are able to exercise with others, but more importantly, get a chance to talk to other people. Before the pandemic, our seniors would love to just hang out and socialize. We know for a fact

- that for many seniors, except for an occasional doctor visit, coming to the center was literally the only time they would leave their homes during the week. The county transportation system was a
- "I am sure that during the hearing you

 will hear story after story about how this is a

 program that works. Our tax dollars are being used

 for a good cause and used wisely. There is no reason

 to change the funding for this program."
- 11 (End of Mr. Reddin's written statement.)

godsend.

- "My name is Janet Connell. My
 husband's name is Matthew Connell. I am 80 and my
 husband is 84.
 - "The county and the Westwood van have been a blessing for us. Matthew Connell has had cancer and heart disease and surgeries for both. He has neuropathy in his feet that causes numbness so he is no longer able to drive. I drive locally, but don't drive on highways or long distances. Since we are on very limited fixed incomes, if we had to call taxicabs or try to use Uber, we could not afford that at all.

"Many of our days, as with many

```
seniors, are spent attending doctor's appointments, testing facilities, etc. The van service is truly a godsend for us. The drivers have always been courteous and helpful. Since we also don't have family members close by, that's not an option for us.
```

"We respectfully request that you recognize the urgent need for the van service. We have lived and paid taxes in Bergen County for over 55 years and appreciate that we have the van service available to us. Please do no take it away or make it more difficult to use. Consider that life becomes more difficult and frustrating for us every day.

"Thank you for your time and giving us the opportunity to comment.

"Jane and Matthew Connell

"30 Carolyn Street, Apt. 1

"Westwood, NJ 07675"

(End of Mrs. Connell's written

19 | statement.)

DIRECTOR SUAREZ: All right. So if there's nothing else from the public, I'm going to close the meeting to the public, but I just want to say that I hope you all stay well and healthy, along with your families. Hopefully we get through this new variant quickly and it doesn't affect as many

```
people as they are saying. I wish the best to you
1
2
    and your families and your coworkers and for everyone
    that works in this field. I want to thank you
    personally for everything that you've been doing
4
5
    throughout the pandemic.
                   With that said, I'm going to end the
 6
7
    meeting. You can stop the recording, and see you all
     soon.
8
9
                   Thank you.
10
                   COUNCILWOMAN PAZ:
                                       Thank you.
                   MS. ROJAS: Thank you, Anthony.
11
12
                   (Whereupon, the Public Hearing is
13
    adjourned at 10:42 a.m.)
14
15
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1 3 I, KIM O. FURBACHER, License No. 4 5 XIO1042, a Certified Court Reporter, Registered Diplomate Reporter, Certified Realtime Court 6 Reporter, and Notary Public of the State of New Jersey, hereby certify that the foregoing is a 9 verbatim record of the testimony provided under oath 10 before any court, referee, board, commission or other 11 body created by statute of the State of New Jersey. 12 I am not related to the parties involved in this action; I have no financial 13 14 interest, nor am I related to an agent of or employed 15 by anyone with a financial interest in the outcome of this action. 16 17 This transcript complies with 18 Regulation 13:43-5.9 of the New Jersey Administrative 19 Code. 20 21 22 KIM O. FURBACHER, CRCR, CCR, RDR 23 License #XIO1042, and Notary Public of New Jersey 24 My Commission Expires:

7/11/2024

25

#	3	24:22	25:19	array [1] - 15:18
		accommodate [1] -	affect [1] - 33:25	assessments [1] -
#165 [1] - 24:2	3 [2] - 2:5, 11:23	16:18	affected [1] - 9:17	14:17
#XIO1042 [1] - 35:23	3,936 [1] - 4:12	accommodating [1] -	afford [1] - 32:23	assets [1] - 9:25
	30 [3] - 2:13, 2:14,	23:12	affordable [1] - 15:15	assist [5] - 6:17, 6:20,
\$	33:16	ACCOUNTANT [1] -	Age [2] - 18:3, 18:5	10:20, 11:11, 29:4
•	32 [1] - 2:15	1:14	age [6] - 9:4, 14:7,	assistance [2] - 7:17,
\$1,657,504 [2] - 3:25,	33 [1] - 2:5	Act [3] - 13:20, 14:2,	18:9, 21:22, 23:1,	10:19
11:17	377,499 [1] - 4:10	25:17	29:21	Assistance [1] - 3:20
\$1,685,543 [1] - 4:1		Acting [2] - 3:3, 4:18	Age-Friendly [2] -	Assistant [1] - 3:12
\$118,680 [1] - 11:19	4	ACTING [1] - 1:8	18:3, 18:5	assisted [3] - 6:6,
\$175,000 [1] - 11:21	43 [1] - 14:3	action [2] - 35:13,	age-friendly [2] - 18:9,	10:9, 12:12
\$26,000 [1] - 11:22		35:16	23:1	assisting [1] - 17:12
\$30,000 [1] - 11:25 \$437,584 [1] - 11:24	476 [1] - 4:16	active [2] - 9:12, 31:2	agencies [1] - 23:20	AT [1] - 1:3
\$5,757,363 [1] - 11:18	5	activities [1] - 25:23	Agency [1] - 13:17	attendance [1] - 3:11
\$5,757,365 [1] - 11.16 \$50,000 [1] - 12:1	อ	activity [2] - 10:11, 15:3	agency [1] - 13:22	attending [3] - 21:10,
\$70,000 [1] - 12.1 \$70,000 [1] - 11:22	50 [2] - 8:24, 27:12	acts [1] - 25:12	agent [1] - 35:14 Aging [3] - 13:17, 20:8	28:20, 33:1 attention [2] - 7:4,
\$8,502,131 [1] - 11:15	5310 [1] - 11:20	actual [1] - 7:11	aging [3] - 13.17, 20.6	26:14
	55 [1] - 33:9	acute [2] - 14:14, 15:4	Allegiance [2] - 3:6,	AUGUST [1] - 1:3
0		ADA [1] - 25:17	3:8	Austin [2] - 2:13, 30:1
•	6	Adam [3] - 17:6,	Allendale [1] - 24:13	Authority [2] - 24:3,
07662-0213 [1] - 1:24		17:16, 17:19	Alliance [1] - 18:4	26:4
07675 [1] - 33:17	60 [1] - 21:22	adapted [1] - 6:23	alliance [3] - 18:9,	autistic [1] - 4:7
	64 [1] - 31:7	add [1] - 28:17	19:2, 21:3	available [4] - 16:14,
1	64,450 [1] - 4:9	addition [1] - 19:11	allow [1] - 29:15	16:18, 24:18, 33:10
	_	additional [1] - 26:9	alternatives [2] -	avoiding [1] - 20:10
1 [1] - 33:16	7	addressing [1] - 16:23	20:20, 31:17	
10:04 [1] - 1:3	7.5 [1] - 3:22	adequate [1] - 20:25	Americans [3] - 13:20,	В
10:42 [1] - 34:13	7/11/2024 [1] - 35:25	adjourned [1] - 34:13	14:2, 25:17	
12 [1] - 1:3 12,250 [1] - 4:10	77 17 202 1 [1] 00:20	administration [1] -	amount [7] - 4:8, 4:9,	barrier [2] - 15:25,
13 [1] - 2:6	8	16:19	11:19, 11:20, 11:21,	25:14
13:43-5.9 [1] - 35:18		Administration [1] -	11:22, 11:24	barrier-free [1] - 25:14
13th [5] - 27:5, 27:7,	8,404 [1] - 4:13	24:20	ample [1] - 18:17	barriers [1] - 9:6 based [1] - 14:9
27:14, 27:19, 27:23	80 [1] - 32:14	Administrative [1] - 35:18	AND [1] - 1:2	basic [1] - 22:7
17 [3] - 2:7, 2:8, 26:6	84 [1] - 32:15	ADMINISTRATOR [1]	annual [2] - 3:15, 14:16	basis [1] - 8:19
18 [3] - 2:9, 14:7,		- 1:15	Anthony [8] - 2:5, 3:2,	become [1] - 14:19
21:23	Α	ADRC [1] - 13:17	17:3, 22:10, 27:11,	becomes [2] - 24:4,
1966 [1] - 13:19	0.1.10	adult [3] - 19:14, 20:3,	28:16, 29:22, 34:11	33:11
	a.m _[1] - 34:13	26:22	ANTHONY [1] - 1:8	begin [1] - 3:10
2	A.M [1] - 1:3	Adult [5] - 21:16,	anticipate [4] - 5:17,	beginning [2] - 7:3,
	ability [3] - 20:2, 22:6, 26:16	21:20, 21:21, 22:13,	27:2, 27:18, 27:23	9:22
2,981 [1] - 4:11	able [14] - 4:25, 5:2,	23:18	anticipating [1] -	BEING [1] - 1:6
20 [1] - 8:14	5:7, 5:20, 6:16, 8:23,	adults [10] - 13:25,	11:20	Bergen [38] - 3:4, 4:5,
201-336-6200 [1] -	11:5, 12:13, 27:2,	14:6, 14:15, 14:19,	apply [1] - 6:18	7:12, 12:14, 12:18,
1:25	27:10, 29:13, 31:20,	15:14, 18:20, 19:19,	appointment [3] -	13:11, 13:16, 13:24,
2019 [2] - 4:18, 5:11	31:22, 32:20	21:2, 21:22, 22:3	19:22, 23:5, 31:14	14:4, 14:15, 15:2,
2020 [2] - 4:9, 6:22 2021 [1] - 1:3	accepted [1] - 12:7	advance [1] - 23:14	appointments [2] -	15:9, 15:18, 16:23,
2021 [1] - 1.3 21 [2] - 2:8, 3:23	Access [6] - 23:21,	advertised [1] - 4:2	19:20, 33:1	18:10, 18:14, 18:23,
21 [2] - 2.6, 3.23 213 [1] - 1:24	23:24, 24:15, 25:8,	advertising [2] - 6:3,	appreciate [2] - 26:14,	19:16, 19:24, 20:5,
228,000 [2] - 13:25,	25:11, 26:2	11:24	33:9	20:16, 21:19, 22:8, 22:24, 22:25, 23:11
15:8	access [5] - 14:8,	advisor [1] - 18:2	Apt [1] - 33:16	22:24, 22:25, 23:11, 23:19, 24:4, 25:3,
246 [1] - 15:9	16:2, 16:15, 25:14,	advisory [1] - 25:12	area [1] - 5:25	27:1, 28:22, 28:23,
25 [1] - 2:10	25:21	Advisory [5] - 21:20, 22:25, 30:11, 30:19,	Area [2] - 13:17, 14:2 areas [6] - 5:23, 14:11,	29:4, 29:8, 30:21,
26 [1] - 2:11	access-challenged	31:2	15:21, 21:1, 24:9,	31:1, 31:16, 33:8
28 [2] - 2:12, 14:3	[1] - 25:21 accessible [5] - 15:15,	advocate [2] - 15:14,	31:15	best [4] - 7:23, 26:16,
	20:19, 23:10, 24:19,	16:6	argument [1] - 20:10	28:25, 34:1
	20.10, 20.10, 24.19,	advocates [2] - 14:13,	Aris [1] - 11:1	better [3] - 16:22,

20:18, 31:14 between [1] - 20:23 blessing [1] - 32:17 board [1] - 35:10 Board [2] - 12:19, 22.24 **body** [1] - 35:11 borders [1] - 20:24 **boundaries** [1] - 17:13 BOX [1] - 1:24 Brian [4] - 2:8, 12:8, 21:12, 21:18 Bridge [2] - 7:13, 11:9 brought [2] - 22:14, 27:8 budget [3] - 11:13, 11:14, 11:25 **building** [1] - 8:11 **Bus** [1] - 26:6 bus [7] - 7:13, 9:6, 11:5, 19:3, 20:25, 23:23, 23:25 buses [15] - 4:21, 4:25, 5:3, 6:3, 6:4, 7:11, 8:18, 8:21, 9:14, 9:16, 9:17, 10:20, 10:24, 11:4, 17:12 businesses [2] - 9:2, 24.21

C

C.C.R [1] - 1:23 call/one [1] - 16:12 cameras [5] - 4:22, 4:25, 5:8, 9:20, 9:22 cancer [1] - 32:18 cannot [2] - 14:20, 31:19 capacity [4] - 8:24, 9:9, 21:15, 25:12 care [2] - 14:9, 22:1 caregivers [2] - 14:8, 14:12 Carolyn [1] - 33:16 cars [1] - 9:16 catalytic [2] - 9:16, 9:18 causes [1] - 32:19 CCR [1] - 35:22 CDC [2] - 8:13, 8:15 census [1] - 6:3 center [7] - 16:11, 21:14, 23:6, 23:8, 31:3, 31:19, 32:2 Center [1] - 26:22 centers [3] - 4:15, 15:3, 19:22 **CEO**[1] - 21:13

certain [3] - 7:21, 10:24, 31:15 Certified [2] - 35:5, 35:6 certify [1] - 35:8 Chair [1] - 21:19 Chairman [1] - 31:1 challenge [1] - 22:4 challenged [6] -18:19, 20:12, 25:15, 25:21, 26:8, 26:12 challenges [2] - 25:1, challenging [3] -15:23. 18:16. 28:20 chance [1] - 31:23 change [2] - 27:12, 32:10 changed [1] - 6:23 changing [1] - 18:22 checked [1] - 8:20 chemotherapy [1] -8:24 Cinque [3] - 2:7, 3:12, 17:4 **CINQUE** [4] - 1:9, 17:3, 17:20, 27:6 circumstances [3] -12:19, 18:22, 27:24 cite [1] - 14:13 cited [1] - 23:3 Citizen [1] - 3:19 **CITIZENS** [1] - 1:2 citizens [1] - 10:8 Citizens [2] - 30:11, 30:19 class [1] - 31:14 classes [1] - 7:21 clear [1] - 23:15 Clerk [1] - 3:14 **CLERK** [1] - 1:12 clerks [1] - 4:4 click [1] - 16:12 clients [2] - 26:24, 26:25 clinics [3] - 7:12, 7:14, 11:10 clips [1] - 5:4 close [2] - 33:5, 33:22 Code [1] - 35:19 cohesive [1] - 16:5 collaborate [1] - 16:22

collaboration [1] -

collaborations [1] -

Colleen [1] - 18:6

coming [1] - 32:2

COMMENCING [1] -

13:18

19:9

20:1

1:3 commend [4] - 10:1, 19:16, 28:21, 29:11 commended [1] -22:11 comment [2] - 13:2, 33:14 comments [3] - 17:21, 18:7, 28:18 Commission [3] -25:9, 25:11, 35:24 commission [3] -25:19, 27:13, 35:10 Commissioners [1] -12:20 committee [1] - 22:23 Committee [8] -21:16, 21:20, 21:21, 22:14, 23:1, 23:18, 30:12, 30:20 Commons [1] - 24:12 communication [2] -18:5. 28:3 communities [3] -19:3, 19:9, 26:10 Communities [1] -18:5 community [4] - 14:9, 21:3, 25:23, 26:15 Community [13] - 3:3, 6:16, 14:4, 15:2, 15:7. 16:7. 16:17. 16:20, 19:11, 22:8, 23:11, 23:19, 28:22 **COMMUNITY** [6] - 1:8, 1:10, 1:11, 1:13, 1:14, 1:17 community-based [1] - 14:9 **commuter** [1] - 26:3 **companies** [1] - 5:13 company [1] - 4:23 compelling [1] - 20:10 completed [1] - 4:20 complex [1] - 14:8 compliance [1] -25:16 complicated [1] - 23:9 complies [1] - 35:17 compromised [1] -9:3 concentrations [2] -21:1, 24:10 concern [1] - 14:16 concerning [1] - 5:6 concerns [2] - 23:4, 25:13 confront [1] - 25:2 Connection [1] -

connector [1] - 24:7 Connell [5] - 2:15, 32:13, 32:14, 32:17, 33:15 Connell's [1] - 33:18 consider [1] - 26:2 Consider [1] - 33:11 considered [1] - 24:6 constant [1] - 8:12 consumed [1] - 10:11 contact [1] - 16:12 contacts [1] - 12:11 contagious [1] - 27:17 continually [1] - 7:6 continue [8] - 15:14, 18:21, 23:23, 24:25, 28:25, 29:3, 29:15, 29:20 continued [2] - 8:2, 10:5 continues [2] - 16:6, 23:18 **continuing** [1] - 6:17 contract [4] - 6:5, 6:12, 14:3, 26:7 contribution [1] -11:17 convenient [1] - 15:15 converters [2] - 9:16, 9:18 coordinating [1] -13:22 coordination [1] -20.22 coordinator [1] - 18:6 COORDINATOR [1] -1.17 coronavirus [3] - 5:16, 6:22, 27:9 correct [1] - 27:4 cost [2] - 15:22, 19:10 costly [1] - 22:1 Council [1] - 31:2 council [2] - 25:9, 25:12 Council's [1] - 21:20 Councilwoman [1] -2:10 **COUNCILWOMAN** [2]

- 25:7, 34:10

counties [1] - 3:23

Counties [1] - 24:5

country [2] - 19:13,

county [15] - 4:15,

5:12, 5:24, 6:1, 8:9,

8:23, 15:16, 19:7,

20:16, 21:4, 24:10,

29:8, 31:8, 32:4,

20:4

32:16

County [35] - 3:4, 4:5, 7:1, 7:12, 12:14, 12:16, 12:18, 12:23, 13:12, 13:16, 14:4, 14:15, 15:2, 15:9, 15:18, 18:10, 19:16, 19:24. 20:5. 21:19. 22:8. 22:24. 22:25. 23:11, 23:19, 25:3, 27:1, 28:22, 28:24, 29:4, 29:8, 30:21, 31:1, 31:16, 33:8 county's [4] - 9:24, 11:17, 20:2, 22:21 County's [4] - 13:25, 16:23, 18:14, 18:23 course [1] - 5:3 Court [2] - 35:5, 35:6 court [1] - 35:10 courteous [1] - 33:4 coverage [1] - 6:8 covered [1] - 6:6 **COVID** [3] - 17:19, 26:8, 26:16 coworkers [1] - 34:2 CRCR [1] - 35:22 create [3] - 24:1, 24:19, 24:21 created [1] - 35:11 creatively [1] - 23:21 Crescent [1] - 24:12 crossing [1] - 17:13 **Crowe** [1] - 2:10 crucial [3] - 18:17, 19:23, 29:17 current [2] - 15:17, 30:7 customers [2] - 6:25, 10:13 cut [1] - 30:10

D

daily [2] - 8:20, 10:11 data [1] - 20:9 date [3] - 22:15, 27:7, 27:19 days [1] - 32:25 decision [1] - 27:10 decrease [1] - 3:25 defer[1] - 17:23 definitely [2] - 28:21, 29:7 delayed [2] - 5:17, 6:14 delivery [1] - 22:20 delta [2] - 27:9, 27:16 demand [1] - 20:19 demonstrated [1] -19:4

department [14] -3:11, 3:17, 5:12, 6:21, 6:24, 7:22, 10:2, 10:16, 12:4, 12:12, 12:17, 12:22, **Department** [3] - 8:23, 20:6, 27:14 depended [1] - 31:10 **DEPUTY** [1] - 1:9 deserve [1] - 12:10 deserved [1] - 7:4 design [1] - 20:17 destination [2] -31:12, 31:13 destinations [1] -14:22 develop [1] - 16:8 Development [1] -22:24 dialysis [2] - 4:10, 8:24 different [1] - 15:20 difficult [2] - 33:11, 33:12 difficulties [1] - 30:9 diligently [1] - 29:4 **Diplomate** [1] - 35:6 direction [2] - 6:23, 6:24 directly [2] - 28:4, 31:11 director [1] - 22:10 Director [4] - 3:3, 3:12, 4:18, 13:11 **DIRECTOR** [24] - 1:8, 1:9, 3:1, 3:9, 17:1, 17:21, 17:25, 21:8, 21:11, 25:5, 26:18, 27:4, 27:20, 27:23, 28:2, 28:7, 28:10, 28:13, 29:23, 30:1, 30:8, 30:14, 30:18, 33:20 disabilities [5] - 14:7, 21:23, 23:22, 24:11, 25:21 DISABILITIES [1] - 1:2 Disabilities [1] - 25:17 Disability [2] - 13:18, 22:25 disabled [5] - 19:19, 24:21, 25:2, 25:14, **Disabled** [1] - 3:19 discourages [1] -23:15 discussed [1] - 20:5 disease [1] - 32:18 **Diskin** [1] - 18:6

dispatch [1] - 20:21 dispatchers [1] - 8:12 dispatching [1] -22:18 distances [1] - 32:21 distancing [1] - 8:11 diverse [2] - 20:16, 20:17 Division [12] - 13:12, 13:14, 13:16, 13:21, 14:1, 14:11, 15:12, 16:5, 16:20, 19:16, 19:24, 22:25 **DIVISION** [7] - 1:8, 1:10, 1:11, 1:13, 1:14, 1:17, 1:19 division's [1] - 14:16 doctor [2] - 31:14, 32.2 doctor's [2] - 19:22, 33:1 doctors [2] - 10:8, 31:6 dollars [2] - 12:14, 32:8 donated [1] - 12:13 done [2] - 7:25, 28:23 **DONNA**[1] - 1:12 **Donna** [2] - 3:13, 12:21 down [3] - 5:5, 26:4, 27:16 drive [5] - 14:20, 31:5, 32:20, 32:21 driver [1] - 5:6 drivers [8] - 4:22, 7:15, 8:15, 9:6, 9:9, 10:22, 22:16, 33:3 driving [3] - 7:10, 18:19, 27:2 drove [1] - 4:9 due [2] - 5:15, 6:14 during [17] - 5:3, 6:9, 7:9, 7:20, 8:4, 8:5, 9:12, 9:13, 9:17, 10:4, 10:18, 11:9, 17:18, 22:12, 26:16, 32:3, 32:6

Ε

easier [1] - 7:18
East [1] - 4:16
eat [1] - 31:6
education [1] - 4:12
effect [1] - 10:18
efficiencies [1] 19:10
effort [1] - 15:8
efforts [1] - 22:16

element [1] - 23:3 eligibility [1] - 15:22 elsewhere [1] - 19:13 emailed [1] - 18:7 employ [1] - 24:7 employed [1] - 35:14 employees [6] - 6:25, 7:21, 8:4, 8:20, 10:1, 10:12 employment [1] -25:15 encourage [2] - 19:11, 24:16 encourages [2] - 16:8, 23:20 end [4] - 5:18, 30:22, 31:5, 34:6 End [2] - 32:11, 33:18 ends [1] - 17:9 engaging [1] - 19:2 Englewood [2] -18:10, 31:3 enhance [3] - 20:2, 25:20, 29:17 **enhances** [1] - 15:13 ensure [2] - 8:8, 20:25 entered [1] - 6:5 entering [1] - 6:11 entire [1] - 10:4 entities [1] - 24:16 **Epstein** [1] - 2:13 **EPSTEIN** [3] - 30:6, 30:13, 30:16 equipment [2] - 10:25, 22:15 equipped [1] - 4:21 especially [3] - 12:18, 15:23, 26:10 essential [1] - 12:18 established [1] -13:18 etc [1] - 33:2 **ETTEN** [6] - 26:20, 27:22, 27:25, 28:6, 28:9, 28:12 Etten [2] - 2:11, 26:19 event [1] - 23:5 eventually [1] - 24:3 everyday [1] - 25:23 exactly [1] - 28:1 example [2] - 19:25, 24.2 **examples** [1] - 20:4 except [1] - 32:1

Executive [3] - 7:1,

eight [1] - 26:25

Elaina [1] - 7:23

26:11

elderly [2] - 10:9,

12:16, 12:23 exercise [2] - 31:13, 31.22 expand [7] - 6:12, 19:10. 19:14. 19:21. 23:24, 24:17, 29:15 **expanded** [1] - 23:16 **expanding** [3] - 16:6, 20:22, 26:2 **expansion** [2] - 29:6, 29:11 Expires [1] - 35:24 explore [1] - 19:12 expressed [1] - 7:1 **extensive** [1] - 4:23 extent [1] - 25:22 extra [1] - 9:4 **EZRide** [3] - 6:5, 16:8, 16:16 **EZRide's** [1] - 19:18

F

face [2] - 8:16, 9:8

facilities [4] - 4:6,

facility [1] - 28:3

fact [1] - 31:25

22:1, 25:14, 33:2

Fair [2] - 18:11, 26:22

families [2] - 33:24, 34:2 family [2] - 31:7, 33:5 far [2] - 5:8, 23:13 February [1] - 19:17 federal [1] - 13:19 feet [1] - 32:19 few [2] - 12:25, 28:18 fewer [1] - 31:7 field [1] - 34:3 fill [1] - 15:6 filtered [1] - 8:9 financial [2] - 35:13, 35:15 findings [1] - 27:13 fine [1] - 23:12 first [1] - 30:20 fits [1] - 20:11 fitted [1] - 4:24 Fitzgibbons [3] - 2:8, 21:13, 21:19 FITZGIBBONS [2] -17:22, 21:12 Fitzgibbons' [1] -25:25 fixed [1] - 32:22 flexible [1] - 20:19 focused [1] - 29:1 follow [1] - 25:24 follow-up [1] - 25:24

10.13 following [4] - 4:20, 8:13, 8:15, 30:23 **food** [2] - 8:25, 10:8 FOR [1] - 1:2 force [1] - 27:8 forego [1] - 14:24 foregoing [1] - 35:8 Fort [1] - 5:25 forth [1] - 13:8 forward [3] - 16:22, 17:8. 29:9 FORZANI [1] - 1:11 Forzani [1] - 3:12 **foster** [1] - 19:8 framework [1] - 20:15 Franklin [1] - 26:5 free [1] - 25:14 frequently [1] - 14:13 Friendly [2] - 18:3, 18:5 friendly [2] - 18:9, 23:1 friends [1] - 31:7 frustrating [1] - 33:12 full [1] - 22:18 fullest [2] - 19:6, 25:22 functioned [1] - 22:22 fund [3] - 3:21, 3:22 funded [1] - 15:3 funding [7] - 3:17, 6:20, 12:4, 13:22, 14:3, 29:1, 32:10 **FUNDING** [1] - 1:1 funds [1] - 3:24 FURBACHER [3] -

followed [2] - 8:10,

G

1:23, 35:4, 35:22

future [1] - 5:5

gaps [1] - 15:6 Gardens [1] - 24:11 Garfield [1] - 18:11 gates [1] - 9:24 gearing [1] - 27:15 general [1] - 25:15 geographic [1] - 15:21 geography [1] - 20:17 glad [1] - 30:17 goal [1] - 21:23 godsend [2] - 32:5, 33:3 GOEZ [1] - 1:17 government's [1] -22:8 gowns [1] - 9:8

gradual [1] - 22:18 grant [2] - 6:6, 6:16 grants [2] - 6:19, 6:20 gratified [1] - 19:20 great [4] - 7:25, 11:2, 12:8, 23:22 greatest [1] - 22:4 grocery [1] - 19:22 group [2] - 21:10, 22:15 growing [3] - 16:4, 20:3, 20:19 guess [2] - 8:5, 27:25 guest [1] - 22:13 **guidance** [1] - 10:22 guidelines [2] - 8:13, 8:16

Н

Hackensack [3] -9:10, 11:19, 24:8 hailing [2] - 19:18, 20:22 half [2] - 18:16, 28:21 hand [3] - 8:14, 13:6, 28:14 handle [1] - 23:10 handled [1] - 4:11 hands [1] - 17:23 hang [1] - 31:25 happy [1] - 31:21 hard [2] - 10:3, 16:21 health [7] - 6:25, 9:3, 10:12, 10:14, 13:24, 14:9, 18:18 Health [2] - 8:23, 27:13 healthy [1] - 33:23 hear [2] - 19:20, 32:7 HEARING [1] - 1:1 hearing [2] - 3:16, 32:6 Hearing [1] - 34:12 hearings [1] - 14:17 heart [1] - 32:18 height [2] - 7:20, 8:5 Heightened [1] -21:14 **HELD** [1] - 1:2 help [8] - 11:3, 12:20, 14:6, 16:13, 17:7, 17:13, 19:10, 25:20 helped [1] - 11:2 helpful [2] - 5:8, 33:4 helping [1] - 17:10 helps [1] - 12:22 Herald [1] - 4:3 hereby [1] - 35:8 Hi [1] - 28:16

hi [1] - 26:20 high [1] - 21:1 highways [1] - 32:21 HIP [1] - 23:8 hired [1] - 4:23hit [1] - 6:22 hits [1] - 26:6 home [2] - 21:24, 22:5 homes [2] - 31:21, 32:3 Hope [1] - 28:10 hope [4] - 18:7, 19:8, 29:14, 33:23 hopefully [2] - 29:9, 33:24 hoping [1] - 30:11 hour [1] - 31:13 hours [1] - 15:21 **HSAC** [1] - 21:16 Hudson [1] - 24:4 **human** [1] - 14:9 Human [1] - 21:19 husband [1] - 32:15 husband's [1] - 32:14

ideas [2] - 21:5, 24:25

impetus [1] - 18:25 implementation [1] -5:16 implies [1] - 22:6 importance [1] - 7:2 important [2] - 10:7, 31:20 **importantly** [1] - 31:23 improved [1] - 22:17 incidents [1] - 5:2 include [4] - 8:13, 20:20, 23:25, 24:18 includes [1] - 18:9 including [1] - 14:4 inclusion [1] - 30:24 incomes [1] - 32:22 increase [1] - 19:10 increased [3] - 6:2, 7:6, 9:12 increasing [2] - 20:20, 23:17 independence [1] -13:24 Independence [1] -21:14 independent [1] -21:15 independently [2] -21:25, 22:5 individual [1] - 8:22 individuals [10] - 6:9,

7:10, 7:15, 14:7, 21:22, 21:24, 23:13, 25:21, 29:16, 29:18 infirm [1] - 10:10 information [3] - 16:2, 16:9. 16:13 INFORMATION [1] -1.17 **initiatives** [3] - 4:19, 18:10, 23:2 innovation [1] - 18:25 innovative [2] - 24:16, 29:10 input [1] - 21:7 insight [1] - 18:17 installed [5] - 9:5, 9:6, 9:20, 9:24, 10:25 interest [2] - 35:14, 35:15 interviews [1] - 5:11 invited [1] - 12:25 involve [1] - 4:20 involved [3] - 7:10, 17:10, 35:13 involves [2] - 3:18, 8:10 **involving** [1] - 5:6 **ISABEL** [1] - 1:15 Isabel [3] - 2:12, 28:16, 29:23 **Isabelle** [1] - 12:5 **issue** [2] - 5:5, 14:19 issues [2] - 10:12, 24:23

IT [1] - 5:12

item [1] - 11:25

J J-O-E-W-O-N-O [1] -13:11 Jackie [3] - 17:23, 17:25, 21:8 Jacqueline [2] - 2:9, 18:2 Jane [1] - 33:15 Janelle [1] - 12:6 Janet [2] - 2:15, 32:13 Jenny [1] - 7:22 Jersey [18] - 3:16, 3:19, 11:16, 12:3, 12:7, 18:4, 19:13, 20:6, 20:8, 23:21, 26:1, 26:9, 26:14, 28:17, 35:8, 35:11, 35:18, 35:23 JERSEY [2] - 1:16, 1:24 Jim [1] - 12:15 jitneys [1] - 24:13

Joan [7] - 2:11, 17:5, 17:15, 17:19, 26:19, 26:21, 27:21 job [4] - 7:25, 11:2, 12:8, 23:12 Joe [5] - 3:12, 12:21, 17:3, 17:17, 27:4 **JOEWONO** [2] - 13:9, 17:17 Joewono [2] - 2:6, 13:10 Joewono's [1] - 25:25 JOHN [1] - 1:17 Joseph [1] - 2:7 **JOSEPH** [1] - 1:9 juggled [1] - 7:23 **JULIO** [1] - 1:14 **July** [1] - 4:18

K

KATES [2] - 18:1, 21:9 Kates [2] - 2:9, 18:2 Kates' [1] - 25:25 keep [2] - 8:3, 27:7 key [2] - 20:20, 23:3 KIM [3] - 1:23, 35:4, 35:22 known [1] - 3:20

lack [2] - 14:18, 14:24

Lake [1] - 11:11

large [1] - 24:10 last [3] - 4:1, 19:1, 28.14 launch [1] - 19:17 **Lawn** [2] - 18:11, 26:23 leaders [2] - 21:3, 21:4 leadership [1] - 28:22 leads [1] - 6:19 learn [1] - 18:21 least [1] - 14:24 leave [2] - 31:12, 32:3 Ledger [1] - 4:3 Lee/Cliffside [1] - 5:25 legislation [1] - 13:19 Lehmann [1] - 24:11 lens [1] - 20:15 less [2] - 31:5, 31:6 level [1] - 22:11 liability [1] - 5:7 liaison [2] - 25:9, 29:3 License [2] - 35:4, 35.23 life [5] - 15:14, 25:20, 29:18, 29:20, 33:11

Life [2] - 16:16, 19:18 lifts [1] - 24:22 limited [2] - 10:6, 32:22 limits [2] - 9:10, 23:14 Line [1] - 26:6 line [2] - 5:5, 12:24 lines [1] - 28:5 Link [3] - 23:21, 23:24, 24:15 Links [1] - 26:2 literally [1] - 32:2 live [5] - 4:22, 21:24, 24:11, 30:12, 30:20 lived [1] - 33:8 living [1] - 21:15 loaned [1] - 11:4 local [4] - 19:3, 20:23, 23:23, 24:4 locally [1] - 32:20 locate [1] - 16:15 locations [1] - 15:4 locked [1] - 9:25 locking [1] - 9:23 Lodi [1] - 5:1 Logisticare [1] - 6:12 long-term [2] - 14:8, looking [2] - 6:11, 16:22 loop [1] - 24:8 Loraine [1] - 13:7 **Lorraine** [5] - 2:6, 13:6, 13:10, 17:5, 17:15 love [1] - 31:24

M

Lyft [2] - 6:8, 24:17

Mahwah [4] - 25:8,

25:11, 25:13, 26:7 **Mahwah's** [1] - 26:5 main [2] - 12:11, 26:5 MANAGEMENT [1] -1:18 Manager [1] - 3:13 manager [1] - 16:10 MANAGER [1] - 1:11 mandate [1] - 8:2 mandated [1] - 3:16 mandates [1] - 8:9 March [1] - 6:22 masks [2] - 8:10, 8:16 matter [2] - 5:4, 15:11 matters [1] - 4:20 Matthew [3] - 32:14, 32:17, 33:15 mayor [1] - 25:12

Meals [3] - 9:11, 11:23, 22:21 medical [2] - 23:5, 29:19 meet [3] - 20:2, 20:18, 22.7 Meeting [1] - 30:20 meeting [9] - 3:10, 3:15, 3:18, 4:2, 13:1, 22:14, 28:20, 33:22, 34:7 meetings [2] - 14:18, 21:10 Mel [1] - 11:1 members [1] - 33:5 menu [1] - 24:17 Michelle [3] - 2:10, 25:6, 25:7 miles [2] - 4:10, 15:9 mind [2] - 26:9, 27:7 minutes [1] - 13:15 miscellaneous [1] -11:25 Mobility [1] - 20:8 mobility [5] - 15:13, 16:10, 18:19, 20:12, 24:23 model [1] - 24:9 modified [1] - 22:21 moment [1] - 18:24 money [2] - 3:21, 11:18 monies [4] - 6:6, 6:18, 11:20, 11:21 **monitoring** [1] - 9:23 month [2] - 5:18, 30:22 morning [1] - 21:18 most [2] - 14:14, 18:23 move [2] - 17:8, 17:14 moving [1] - 29:9 **MR** [8] - 17:3, 17:20, 17:22, 21:12, 27:6, 30:6, 30:13, 30:16 MS [13] - 13:9, 17:17, 18:1, 21:9, 26:20, 27:22, 27:25, 28:6, 28:9, 28:12, 28:16, 29:25, 34:11 multitude [1] - 29:19 municipal [1] - 14:21 municipalities [3] -4:5, 14:23, 24:14

Ν

name [10] - 3:2, 13:4, 13:7, 13:10, 21:18, 25:7, 26:21, 30:25,

32:13, 32:14 navigate [1] - 16:14 navigating [1] - 15:19 need [15] - 6:13, 14:14, 15:4, 15:11, 16:4, 20:2, 22:10, 23:9, 23:16, 23:17, 29:9, 30:7, 31:8, 31:18, 33:7 needed [7] - 5:24, 6:7, 7:17, 7:24, 10:15, 11:3, 29:7 Needs [1] - 20:8 needs [14] - 6:24, 14:17, 16:23, 18:14, 19:23, 21:22, 22:7, 23:9, 23:12, 23:13, 25:10, 26:11, 26:22, networks [1] - 20:25 neuropathy [1] - 32:19 **NEW** [2] - 1:16, 1:24 New [22] - 3:16, 3:18, 7:13, 11:9, 11:16, 12:3, 12:7, 19:13, 20:6, 20:8, 23:21, 23:25, 24:3, 26:1, 26:3, 26:8, 26:14, 28:17, 35:7, 35:11, 35:18, 35:23 **new** [9] - 4:22, 5:10, 5:19, 5:21, 5:23, 6:19, 21:4, 22:15, 33:25 News [1] - 4:3 next [1] - 30:12 nice [2] - 28:11, 30:19 nightly [1] - 9:25 nightmare [1] - 17:9 NJ [1] - 33:17 **NJT** [1] - 24:2 non [1] - 18:19 non-driving [1] -18:19 nonprofits [1] - 3:24 North [1] - 18:4 northern [1] - 5:25 **Notary** [2] - 35:7, 35:23 noted [1] - 22:20 nothing [1] - 33:21 notices [3] - 4:4, 4:6, 4:7 notified [1] - 28:8 number [1] - 5:21

numbers [2] - 31:4,

nutrition [3] - 4:13,

4:14, 4:15

numbness [1] - 32:19

31:18

0

oath [1] - 35:9

obtain [2] - 6:19, 12:13 obtained [1] - 10:15 obvious [1] - 31:9 obviously [1] - 12:24 occasional [1] - 32:1 occurred [1] - 5:3 **OF** [7] - 1:8, 1:10, 1:11, 1:13, 1:14, 1:17, 1:19 offer [5] - 19:21, 20:15, 21:7, 21:17, 24:23 offering [2] - 16:11, 29:12 office [3] - 5:1, 8:3, 8:8 **OFFICE** [1] - 1:11 Office [1] - 3:13 official [1] - 30:24 often [1] - 23:14 older [17] - 5:21, 13:25, 14:6, 14:14, 14:19, 15:14, 16:24, 18:15, 18:20, 18:23, 19:14, 19:19, 20:3, 21:1, 21:22, 21:23, 22.2 Older [2] - 13:19, 14:2 **ON** [1] - 1:1 on-site [2] - 5:15, 9:25 once [2] - 17:14, 21:6 one [13] - 7:5, 8:17, 8:21. 8:22. 10:5. 11:10. 14:10. 16:8. 16:12. 19:25. 20:10. 21:10 One [1] - 30:21 one-stop [1] - 16:8 ones [1] - 5:21 open [3] - 7:8, 13:1, 26:9 opened [1] - 5:22 operate [2] - 10:16, 24:21 operated [1] - 24:13 operates [1] - 24:8 operating [2] - 11:14, 15:21 opportunities [2] -25:18, 31:6 Opportunity [1] -26:22 opportunity [6] -18:13, 21:7, 25:4, 29:13, 29:21, 33:14

option [2] - 17:11,

33:5
options [5] - 14:19,
15:5, 16:14, 24:1,
24:18
Orange [1] - 4:16
Orchard [1] - 24:12
order [2] - 6:12, 16:13
organizations [1] 14:3
ourselves [1] - 10:25
outcome [1] - 35:15
own [3] - 10:19, 14:23,
24:22

Р

P.O[1] - 1:24 **PAGE** [1] - 2:3 paid [1] - 33:8 pandemic [23] - 5:22, 6:10, 6:14, 7:8, 7:9, 7:20, 8:4, 8:6, 9:13, 9:17, 10:2, 10:3, 10:19, 11:9, 17:9, 18:16, 19:2, 22:12, 26:16, 31:9, 31:24, 34:5 paratransit [1] - 3:22 parent [2] - 25:10, 26:21 parents [1] - 26:25 **PARK** [1] - 1:24 Park [2] - 5:25, 24:12 parking [1] - 9:23 part [2] - 5:25, 22:2 participants [1] - 15:5 participate [2] - 23:1, 25:22 participation [1] -23:15 particular [2] - 3:18, particularly [2] -20:11, 24:10 parties [2] - 24:24, 35:12 partner [2] - 17:7, 23:20 partnered [1] - 10:17 partnership [3] - 16:7, 24:13, 24:20 **passenger** [1] - 5:6 passengers [8] - 4:23, 8:17, 8:19, 9:5, 9:7, 10:23, 11:7 past [1] - 6:18 pay [1] - 16:3 Payroll [1] - 3:14 **PAYROLL** [1] - 1:12 **PAZ** [2] - 25:7, 34:10

Paz [4] - 2:10, 25:6, 25:8, 26:18 Peer [1] - 11:21 people [10] - 9:2, 10:7, 12:17, 22:16, 23:16, 24:5, 24:11, 27:17, 31:24, 34:1 per [2] - 8:13, 8:22 percent [4] - 3:22, 8:24, 27:12, 31:7 perhaps [1] - 24:13 permanent [1] - 7:15 person [1] - 31:19 personally [1] - 34:4 **PERSONS** [1] - 1:2 persons [2] - 25:15, 25:22 pickup [1] - 24:15 pike [1] - 27:16 pilot [1] - 16:6 piloted [1] - 20:5 place [1] - 29:21 Plan [1] - 14:2 plan [1] - 23:13 planned [1] - 28:8 planning [4] - 13:22, 16:9, 22:2, 22:4 plans [1] - 19:21 plays [1] - 18:18 Pledge [2] - 3:6, 3:8 Plexiglass [1] - 8:11 point [7] - 3:7, 7:5, 7:7, 8:21, 10:6, 12:5, 16.12 points [2] - 24:15, 25:25 popped [1] - 30:3 populated [1] - 29:8 **Population** [1] - 20:8 population [5] - 16:24, 20:3, 20:13, 20:17, 29.1 Port [2] - 24:3, 26:4 poses [1] - 22:3 position [1] - 13:8 possible [6] - 8:3, 15:10, 21:25, 22:6, 25:23 possibly [1] - 24:19 posters [1] - 8:13 potential [2] - 19:6, **PPE** [2] - 10:15, 10:19 practices [1] - 25:15

precaution [1] - 9:4

PRESENT [1] - 1:6

primary [1] - 13:22

priority [1] - 14:11

president [1] - 21:13

private [1] - 15:18 problem [1] - 9:14 proceeding [1] - 3:7 process [2] - 5:9, 22:4 professional [1] - 6:15 program [12] - 9:11, 11:23, 15:5, 16:7, 19:18, 19:21, 19:25, 22:21, 23:3, 23:4, 32:8, 32:10 Program [2] - 3:20, 22:9 PROGRAM [1] - 1:15 programs [10] - 4:7, 13:23, 14:4, 14:6, 15:2, 16:17, 19:4, 19:5, 19:8, 20:22 progress [1] - 21:14 project [1] - 18:2 projects [1] - 29:10 promoted [1] - 6:3 promoting [1] - 13:23 promotion [1] - 20:21 proper [1] - 10:15 properly [1] - 28:8 proposed [1] - 11:14 protect [1] - 9:24 **protecting** [1] - 10:22 protocols [2] - 10:14, 22:17 provide [8] - 5:13, 6:8, 10:19, 11:6, 16:15, 20:24, 29:5, 29:11 provided [5] - 7:9, 9:9, 16:9, 18:17, 35:9 provider [1] - 14:18 providers [2] - 14:13, 16:17 providers' [1] - 15:21 provides [2] - 14:2, 22:9 Public [3] - 34:12, 35:7, 35:23 **PUBLIC** [1] - 1:1 **public** [7] - 3:15, 13:2, 14:17, 15:18, 33:21, 33:22 public/private [1] -20:1 purchase [1] - 5:20 purchased [1] - 5:19 purposes [1] - 14:22 pursue [1] - 21:4

Q

quality [4] - 15:13, 25:20, 29:18, 29:20 quickly [1] - 33:25

R

R.D.R [1] - 1:23 raised [4] - 13:6, 17:23, 23:7, 28:14 ran [1] - 11:8 rash [1] - 9:15 rather [1] - 22:1 RDR [1] - 35:22 reach [1] - 19:14 read [3] - 11:13, 13:13, 21:17 ready [1] - 21:4 really [5] - 10:18, 11:2, 12:10, 17:20, 28:25 **Realtime** [1] - 35:6 realtime [1] - 5:1 reason [1] - 32:9 receive [2] - 11:18, 27:1 received [2] - 4:1, 6:18 receiving [1] - 3:25 recitation [1] - 3:8 recognition [1] - 12:9 recognize [2] - 22:3, 33:7 recognizes [1] - 15:13 recollection [1] - 10:4 recommend [1] -23:24 recommendations [1] - 20:15 Record [1] - 4:3 record [2] - 30:24, 35:9 recording [1] - 34:7 recreational [1] -25:18 recurring [1] - 14:16 Reddin [2] - 2:14, 30:25 Reddin's [1] - 32:11 redesigning [1] -20:25 reduced [1] - 7:5 referee [1] - 35:10 **REGIONAL** [1] - 1:15 Registered [1] - 35:5 regular [1] - 8:19 regulation [1] - 35:18 reimbursement [1] -6:13 related [3] - 10:14, 35:12, 35:14 released [1] - 20:7 reliable [1] - 31:11 remaining [1] - 22:5 remarkable [1] - 17:19

remember [1] - 9:1

report [3] - 20:6, 20:9, 20:14 Reporter [3] - 35:5, 35:6, 35:7 represent [1] - 25:8 representative [1] representing [1] -21:16 request [2] - 16:18, 33:6 required [1] - 8:18 requirements [1] -25:16 research [2] - 4:24, 5:12 Residential [1] - 3:19 residents [5] - 7:12, 18:15, 18:23, 24:1, 28:23 Resource [1] - 13:18 resource [1] - 16:11 resources [2] - 11:4, 22:6 respect [3] - 4:8, 10:22, 12:3 respectfully [2] - 26:1, 33:6 respond [1] - 18:22 response [1] - 16:4 responsiveness [1] -22.11 rest [1] - 8:1 restricted [1] - 14:22 result [1] - 7:4 resume [1] - 27:2 resuming [1] - 5:17 return [1] - 22:18 review [1] - 5:5 ride [5] - 19:5, 19:18, 20:19, 20:21, 20:22 Ride [2] - 16:16, 19:18 ridership [1] - 19:10 rides [4] - 7:24, 16:3, 19:21, 24:23 Ridge [1] - 24:12 Ridgewood [2] -11:10, 18:11 Riggi [1] - 3:13 **RIGGI**[1] - 1:12 rise [1] - 3:8 Rivera [1] - 12:6 **ROCHELLE** [1] - 1:24 **ROJAS** [4] - 1:15, 28:16, 29:25, 34:11

remotely [1] - 8:5

replace [2] - 5:21,

9.19

REMOTELY [1] - 1:2

Rojas [3] - 2:12, 12:5, 28:17 role [1] - 18:17 Rosco [1] - 4:24 route [3] - 24:4, 24:6, 26:3 Route [1] - 26:6 routes [6] - 5:23, 7:23, 23:23, 23:24, 23:25, 26.2 run [4] - 12:17, 12:22, 23:8, 24:2 running [1] - 7:14 runs [1] - 11:18

S safe [2] - 29:14, 31:10

safety [7] - 4:22, 5:7, 6:25, 8:8, 10:12, 10:14, 18:18 sanitation [1] - 22:17 sanitization [1] - 8:12 **sanitized** [1] - 8:18 save [1] - 5:4 saved [1] - 12:14 savvy [1] - 16:1 **SCDRTAP** [2] - 3:21, 11.16 **schedule** [1] - 16:2 **schedulers** [1] - 7:22 **scheduling** [1] - 5:10 scooters [1] - 23:11 **Scott** [2] - 2:14, 30:25 screen [1] - 30:3 seamless [1] - 20:24 seconds [1] - 8:14 secure [1] - 9:21 see [6] - 12:24, 13:6, 30:3, 30:11, 30:19, 34:7 seeking [1] - 20:12 **selected** [1] - 5:14 send [1] - 13:15 Senior [13] - 3:19, 13:12, 13:14, 13:16, 13:21, 14:1, 14:12, 15:12, 16:5, 17:6, 19:17, 19:24, 31:1 senior [8] - 10:8, 13:23, 15:3, 19:3, 19:22, 23:5, 31:2, 31:19 **SENIOR** [3] - 1:2, 1:14, 1:19 **Seniors** [1] - 31:5 seniors [19] - 11:11, 14:12, 14:23, 15:1, 15:8, 15:9, 15:10, 15:24, 15:25, 16:13,

25:2, 29:2, 31:10, 31:12, 31:20, 31:21, 31:24, 32:1, 33:1 sent [3] - 4:4, 4:5, 4:7 separate [2] - 8:12, 9:7 separators [1] - 9:5 **September** [2] - 27:5, 27:7 serious [2] - 7:4, 14:19 seriously [1] - 7:2 serve [9] - 15:8, 20:12, 22:23, 23:16, 24:9, 24:14, 26:10, 26:15, served [2] - 7:13, 24:5

serves [1] - 25:19 service [24] - 4:6, 5:23, 6:9, 6:13, 11:5, 11:6, 12:18, 14:11, 14:13, 14:17, 15:11, 15:21, 16:9, 19:19, 20:24, 21:1, 22:9, 22:19, 23:22, 24:14, 27:1, 33:2, 33:7, 33.9

Services [18] - 13:12, 13:14, 13:17, 13:21, 14:2, 14:12, 15:12, 16:5, 17:7, 19:17, 19:25, 21:16, 21:20, 21:21, 22:13, 23:18, 31:1

services [26] - 5:14, 6:7, 6:14, 7:6, 7:8, 7:9, 10:5, 13:23, 14:9, 14:21, 15:3, 15:6, 15:19, 15:20, 15:23, 16:13, 16:16, 19:15, 20:23, 20:24, 23:16, 29:6, 29:15, 29:17, 29:19 **SERVICES** [1] - 1:19 serving [2] - 16:10, 16:23 set [1] - 13:8 several [3] - 5:23, 12:13, 23:1 **shadow** [1] - 26:2 **shadowing** [1] - 23:25 **shadows** [1] - 23:23 share [1] - 24:25 shields [1] - 9:8 **shop** [1] - 31:6 **shopping** [1] - 8:25 **Short** [1] - 26:6 **shot** [1] - 7:19

shots [1] - 6:10

show [1] - 31:18

shutdown [2] - 10:4, 22:22 shuttle [5] - 7:13, 9:10, 11:9, 11:19, 24:14 significantly [3] -6:23, 7:5, 9:12 single [1] - 16:11 site [6] - 5:15, 7:16, 8:22, 9:14, 9:22, 9:25 sites [1] - 7:10 six [1] - 18:10 size [1] - 20:10 smartphones [1] -16:1 smoothly [1] - 12:22 social [2] - 8:11, 23:5 socialize [1] - 31:25 **sometimes** [1] - 31:12 soon [1] - 34:8 sources [1] - 3:17 **spaced** [1] - 8:3 **SPEAKER** [1] - 2:3 speaking [1] - 18:3 **special** [3] - 25:10, 26:11, 26:22 specialized [1] - 15:22 specific [3] - 10:13, 14:22, 25:16 specifically [1] - 5:24 spell [1] - 13:7 spent [1] - 33:1 spontaneity [1] -23.14 spread [1] - 15:9 **staff** [5] - 5:10, 7:5, 8:1, 10:2, 11:1 stand [2] - 3:5, 21:4 **Star** [1] - 4:3 started [3] - 4:19, 5:14, 31:9 starting [1] - 10:18 starts [1] - 24:2 State [2] - 35:7, 35:11 state [5] - 3:23, 12:9, 13:4, 13:7, 20:4 statement [4] - 13:13, 17:2, 32:12, 33:19 Statement [2] - 2:14, 2:15 statements [1] - 30:23 statewide [2] - 20:14, statute [1] - 35:11 stay [1] - 33:23 stays [1] - 29:14 **step** [1] - 28:25 stepped [1] - 11:2

still [4] - 6:11, 8:6, 10:3, 10:6 stole [1] - 9:18 stop [3] - 16:8, 27:24, 34.7 stores [1] - 19:22 story [2] - 32:7 strategies [3] - 19:12, 20:11, 21:5 Street [1] - 33:16 stress [1] - 31:20 strict [1] - 9:9 **study** [1] - 19:7 Suarez [3] - 2:5, 3:2, 22:10 SUAREZ [23] - 1:8, 3:1, 3:9, 17:1, 17:21, 17:25, 21:8, 21:11, 25:5, 26:18, 27:4, 27:20, 27:23, 28:2, 28:7, 28:10, 28:13, 29:23, 30:1, 30:8, 30:14, 30:18, 33:20 submitted [3] - 2:14, 2:15, 30:24 successfully [1] - 25:1 Sue [2] - 3:12, 12:21 SUE [1] - 1:11 Suffern [1] - 26:3 suggest [1] - 19:7 suggestions [1] -20:20 SUPERVISOR [1] -1:18 supplied [1] - 8:16 support [6] - 12:20, 14:3, 16:21, 20:21, 23:19, 29:5 surgeries [1] - 32:18 surrounded [1] - 30:4 survey [3] - 19:3, 19:4, 20.9 system [8] - 5:10, 5:17, 15:17, 16:5, 16:10, 20:18, 22:18, 32:4

Т

systems [1] - 3:23

T&A/CARE [1] - 1:18 tackle [1] - 25:1 targets [1] - 21:21 task [1] - 27:8 tax [1] - 32:8 taxes [1] - 33:8 taxicabs [1] - 32:23 Teaneck [2] - 18:3, 18:11 tech [1] - 16:1 TECHNOLOGY [1] -1:17 Tedesco [1] - 12:15 temperatures [1] -8:19 tentative [2] - 27:7, 27:19 tentatively [1] - 27:14 term [2] - 14:8, 22:1 TESS [1] - 1:18 testified [1] - 19:1 testimony [2] - 21:17, 35:9 testing [1] - 33:2 thefts [1] - 9:16 themselves [2] - 8:17, 31:4 THERE [1] - 1:6 they've [1] - 28:23 thoroughfare [1] -26:5 thousands [1] - 12:14 throughout [3] -22:22, 24:4, 34:5 **THURSDAY** [1] - 1:3 timely [1] - 16:2 title [1] - 13:5 Title [1] - 11:23 today [2] - 18:3, 18:8 today's [1] - 28:20 TOMASI [1] - 1:18 took [1] - 10:24 top [2] - 14:11, 17:23 topic [2] - 14:15, 23:2 total [1] - 11:14 town [1] - 17:13 towns [8] - 10:17, 10:21, 11:3, 11:4, 17:10, 17:12, 18:10, 19:4 Township [2] - 25:13, 26:7 township [1] - 25:20 trained [1] - 5:10 training [2] - 5:15, 5:16 trains [1] - 24:1 Trans [1] - 16:17 transcript [1] - 35:17 **TRANSIT** [1] - 1:16 transit [5] - 15:20, 20:23, 23:20, 24:7 **Transit** [8] - 3:16, 11:16, 12:3, 12:7, 26:1, 26:9, 26:15, 28:17

technical [1] - 30:9

technologies [1] -

20:21

Transit's [1] - 23:21 transport [6] - 6:9, 7:15, 8:23, 17:11, 19:19, 27:11 transportation [35] -5:24, 9:2, 11:12, 14:10, 14:14, 14:15, 14:18, 14:21, 14:25, 15:5, 15:16, 15:17, 15:19, 15:22, 16:2, 16:11, 16:12, 16:14, 16:15, 18:14, 18:18, 18:25, 19:14, 20:11, 20:18, 22:3, 23:2, 24:18, 25:1, 26:12, 31:8, 31:10, 31:15, 31:17, 32:4 TRANSPORTATION

TRANSPORTATIO [7] - 1:1, 1:8, 1:10, 1:11, 1:13, 1:14, 1:17

Transportation [15] - 3:4, 3:20, 6:17, 14:5, 15:2, 15:7, 16:7, 16:20, 19:12, 20:6, 20:7, 22:9, 23:11, 23:19, 28:22

transported [4] - 4:10, 4:12, 4:13, 4:16 transporting [1] - 8:22 travel [2] - 16:9, 22:7 traveling [1] - 26:4 trenches [1] - 17:18 trip [1] - 14:22 Tripmaster [2] - 5:14,

4:12, 4:14, 14:24, 23:13, 31:5 truly [1] - 33:2 trust [1] - 12:16 try [3] - 17:14, 29:10, 32:23

trips [10] - 4:8, 4:11,

5:15

trying [2] - 17:9, 30:2 turn [1] - 19:9 Turnpike [1] - 26:5 type [1] - 19:25

typical [1] - 24:2

U

Uber [3] - 6:8, 24:17, 32:23 unable [2] - 6:7, 7:16 under [3] - 12:19, 13:19, 35:9 unforeseen [1] - 27:24 unfortunately [1] - 9:13 unless [2] - 27:15, 27:24 unmet [1] - 14:14 up [10] - 5:5, 7:8, 11:2, 13:1, 22:15, 25:24, 27:15, 28:25, 30:3, 31:5 up-to-date [1] - 22:15 urge [1] - 18:24 urgent [1] - 33:7

V

utilized [1] - 7:11

VA[1] - 4:16 vaccinated [1] - 22:17 vaccination [2] -22:15, 22:16 vaccine [8] - 6:10, 7:10, 7:12, 7:14, 7:18, 11:8, 11:10, 19:20 Van [2] - 2:11, 26:19 **VAN** [6] - 26:20, 27:22, 27:25, 28:6, 28:9, 28:12 **van** [5] - 19:3, 32:16, 33:2, 33:7, 33:9 vandalism [1] - 9:14 **vandalized** [1] - 9:18 variant [3] - 27:9, 27:17, 33:25 various [4] - 3:17, 5:11, 5:13 vehicles [9] - 4:24, 5:19, 5:21, 12:13, 19:5, 23:10, 24:19, 24:22, 29:16 VELASQUEZ [1] -1.14 vendors [1] - 5:13 verbatim [1] - 35:9 Veterans [2] - 11:22, 24:20 veterans [1] - 4:16 vets [1] - 24:21 VIA [1] - 1:2 view [5] - 4:25, 5:2, 5:7, 18:24, 30:7 virus [1] - 7:3 visit [1] - 32:2 visits [1] - 31:7 vital [1] - 15:11

vulnerable [1] - 18:23

wants [2] - 12:25, 13:3 washing [1] - 8:14 ways [4] - 8:6, 9:3, 19:8, 26:10 wearing [1] - 8:10 week [2] - 30:12, 32:4 welcome [2] - 3:1, 28:10 welcoming [1] - 3:10 well-being [2] - 13:24, 18:19 Westwood [3] - 18:12, 32:16, 33:17 wheelchair [3] - 4:11, 7:17, 24:22 wheelchairs [1] -23:10 Wheels [3] - 9:11, 11:23, 22:21 whole [2] - 17:8, 17:18 win/win [1] - 24:24 wisely [1] - 32:9 wish [1] - 34:1 **WITH** [1] - 1:2 wondering [1] - 27:1 Woodcliff [1] - 11:11 words [2] - 12:25, 17:12 workers [1] - 16:21 Workforce [1] - 22:24 workforce [1] - 5:20 works [2] - 32:8, 34:3 writer [1] - 6:16 written [2] - 32:11, 33:18

X

XIO1042 [1] - 35:5

Υ

year [7] - 3:24, 4:1, 18:16, 19:1, 22:14, 28:21, 30:21 years [1] - 33:9 York [2] - 23:25, 26:3 York's [1] - 24:3

Ζ

ZOOM [1] - 1:2