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Transportation in Monmouth County

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The popular Shore EZ Ride jitney will be returning to participating beach towns this year with one addition. This summer the City of Long Branch is along for the ride.

Meadowlink of Wood-Ridge operates the Shore EZ Ride jitney, which operated in four beachfront towns last year as the Shorelink Shuttle. The towns participating last summer were Bradley Beach, Belmar, Ocean Grove and Asbury Park.

The Shore EZ Ride jitney encourages people who live along NJ Transit's North Jersey Coastline to visit Monmouth County's beaches by train. Once they arrive they will have inexpensive transportation to the beaches and downtown shopping and dining areas. This adds to the local economy without adding traffic to already crowded summer towns.

The jitney service costs \$1 per ride. Transportation partners involved in the jitney include Meadowlink Transportation Management Association, which provides the buses, NJ Transit and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). Also involved in the project is the Monmouth County Planning Board, the

county Tourism Division, the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism.

The Shore EZ Ride jitney will begin operation on May 25, the start of Memorial Day Weekend, and run through the summer. The hours of operation are 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday through Sunday to accommodate the dinner crowds.

The service was so successful last year that two towns are interested in expanding it year round at other destinations, not just the beaches.

To do that, Meadowlink is seeking a grant from the NJTPA to provide year-round bus service in Long Branch and Neptune. The funding source, called a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Mobility Initiative grant (CMAQ), would pay for the expanded service as well as a Bikeshare program at the Newark campus of Rutgers University.

The grants are 75 percent federal highway dollars and 25 percent match from the participating towns. Monmouth County is not being asked to contribute.

If the grant application is successful, the areas being considered for shuttle service in Long Branch include:

* Monmouth University. Shuttle service is needed to get students and employees to the

campus from the trains station and other areas of the city.

* Monmouth Medical Center and the Long Branch train station. The hospital is a large employer and the shuttle would help get employees, patients and visitors to the trains and to Monmouth Medical Center.

* Pier Village and Ocean Plaza. This is a highly popular and congested area with long- and short-term rentals. A shuttle bus would help get employees to and from this area.

* West End. The city's West End section is a cluster of residential and commercial buildings that would greatly benefit from a shuttle service.

Neptune has expressed the need for shuttle service for some time. While Shore EZ Ride jitney services Ocean Grove in summer, it does not assist residents getting to work or to shopping areas inland from the township's beach.

Neptune residents work in many of the major commercial businesses, including Wal-Mart, Home Depot, ShopRite and Jersey Shore University Medical Center. Neptune also has a sizable population of residents who do not have access to a car and depend on public transportation.

Inexpensive bus service increases tourism in these communities and helps their businesses – for some possibly year round – which is something we all want to achieve. The buses are not limited to visitors. The more people use the shuttle the less traffic congestion there will be.

In other news, the Monmouth County Mosquito Extermination Commission will be participating in an Asian Tiger Mosquito Symposium at the American Mosquito Control Association's national conference next week in Austin, Texas.

The Asian tiger mosquito has become one of the top nuisance mosquitoes in Monmouth County since it was first discovered in 1995.

These last three years, the county's Mosquito Extermination Commission has been a partner in a program grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The program aims to provide better area-wide surveillance and control strategies to address this mosquito.

County employees Taryn Crepeau and Sean Healy, who are both entomologists, relied on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for their study. They created a tool to match environmental and demographic data with mosquito surveillance data to pinpoint areas of concentration that can be targeted for control measures.

The experience gained will form the basis for mosquito control abatement throughout the country.

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