

TESTIMONY

OF

GERALD BLANCHFIELD

SUPERVISOR

HARBORCREEK TOWNSHIP

Before the  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

HOUSE BILL 527, PRINTER'S NO. 554  
"PROPOSED HIGHWAY TRANSFER BOARD"

May 21, 1981

Harrisburg, PA

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Transportation Committee, I am Gerald Blanchfield, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Harborcreek Township, Harborcreek, Pennsylvania. I deeply appreciate the opportunity you are giving me to present comments on House Bill 527 which concerns the returning of secondary commonwealth roads to the local governments. We are strongly opposed to House Bill 527. The reasons and background follow.

Harborcreek Township is located just East of Erie Pennsylvania on the shores of Lake Erie. We are known as a bedroom type community in Northwestern Pennsylvania. We have people who, although they reside in the township, travel to Erie or work at the Hammermill or General Electric and in the small stores and industries in the area. We have a population of just under 15,000 residents according to the latest 1980 census. Our community has been experiencing growing pains due to the influx of people moving out of the city into the suburbs. These growing pains have manifested themselves in many ways which all translates down to the need of more money to serve the people with. Now it seems that the money we presently have is to be stretched even further because of House Bill 527.

With House Bill 527 there appears to be a diabolical plan on the part of the Commonwealth to dictate to the local communities by expecting them to shoulder a greater share of the total road work without adequate compensation.

The following should illustrate what we are trying to accomplish in our community and the impact that House Bill 527 can have on our township funds.

The list that accompanies shows the total yearly budget and highway expenditures for 1974 to 1981 and the percentages used for the road work for the total budget. Harborcreek Township will maintain a total of Eighty-Two and a Quarter miles of township roads in 1981. This is an increase of slightly over three miles from 1980 which includes PennDOT roads that we voluntarily took back in 1980.

In spite of the increase in mileage for 1981, we actually have had a decrease of Liquid Fuels Money coming back to us to maintain the roads with. In 1980 we had a budget of \$1,322,251.00 including \$111,759.00 in Liquid Fuels Money. And of that \$708,230.00 or Forty-two percent of the total went to highways. In 1981 our total budget is \$1,520,600.00 which includes the \$102,614.00 of Liquid Fuels Money. Fifty-one percent or \$649,500.00 is budgeted for roads. The difference lost from the Liquid Fuels will be made up by taking money from our other programs to keep the road program going in our Township.

In the past few years we have been approached by the Commonwealth through PennDOT with various programs asking us to get involved with the idea that by our helping them that we helped our people. What it turned out to be was that PennDOT took their troubles and dumped them on our shoulders and gave us less than adequate money to handle their troubles. This left our people to make up the difference.

Example #1. The Snow Removal Program. We are enticed to plow the snow on various PennDOT roads and we would be reimbursed by PennDOT for doing this. Trying to co-operate, Harborcreek Township immediately agreed to plow fifteen miles of state roads by contract. The contract called for the communities to be reimbursed on what PennDOT called the Lane Mile Basis. A lump sum of money for each lane mile. This lump sum of money was arrived at based on PennDOT's costs for plowing roads of that classification and their cost experience. The township then did proceed to plow the roads in the winter time that they had contracted for. Some of those roads were roads that PennDOT rarely touched in the winter time. We kept all of our roads, township and contracted state roads, open all thru the winter season. At the same time, PennDOT abandoned mile after mile of their roads to twenty foot snow drifts for weeks at a time. There was no allowance in the contracts for exceptionally bad winters where you spend more money and put in more time and effort. You get what the agreement calls for and if you

wanted anymore you had to appeal for it. But in the final analysis you didn't receive anything extra for doing the job. After two years of this we dropped four miles from the original fifteen miles in the contract, and refused to plow that four miles anymore because of the severe financial burden being put on the township. A parallel to this would be when PennDOT contracts with private contractors to plow various roads for snow removal. We understand they pay those people on a per hour basis depending on what types and class of equipment are used and based on the rates that they can negotiate and/or have bids for. Therefore, those people get paid for what they do. A double standard exists at the communities expense and we have been hurt by our co-operation with PennDOT.

Example #2. When the Road Turnback program was first announced a number of years ago, Harborcreek was one of the first communities to offer to take over two roads which would have totaled approximately three miles. For five years we tried to take those roads over and ran into nothing but bureaucratic red tape and incredible mix-ups and double talk. And until the personal intervention of Secretary Larson in 1980 we were getting nowhere. With Doctor Larson's personal help we finally managed to get these roads taken over by the fall of 1980. This is after both of the roads had minimal work done by PennDOT in cleaning out ditches that hadn't been cleaned for years, replacing collapsed cross pipes where the water has been backing up and flooding the roads. Cutting the brush that had been hanging out over the road, which had been neglected for years. Repairing broken down guard rails on bridges which have been laying in the streams for years and putting new bridge decks on the bridges. All of this was in addition to patching up holes in the road and the final tarring and chipping to seal all of the repairs. I said minimal work because what they did was needed, but we will have to go back now in 1981 and make various corrections to put the two roads in good condition comparable to our other township roads. Therefore, approximately \$25,000.00 of township money will be spent this year on top of what

PennDOT has already spent to finish the job, and we have been hurt by our co-operation with PennDOT.

Over the years laws have been changed by the Commonwealth to take various sources of income that formerly came to the municipalities away from them and give that income to the commonwealth. At the same time, the Commonwealth has asked the communities to assume more and more of the road responsibilities for taking care of the people. An example of this would be the overweight scale money. For many years Harborcreek Township has owned a piece of property adjacent to Interstate 90. On that property is located a set of platform scales and scale house which were owned and maintained by the township but which were used by the State Police to enforce the weight limits on Interstate 90. Back in 1976 the Commonwealth decided that they needed more money and they wanted the fine money from the overweight trucks. So they changed the law to where now, if the State Police did the weighing, the money went to the Commonwealth rather than the community. This reduced our income by over \$100,000.00 a year which had formerly been put into road maintenance and/or reconstruction in our township. The catch here, of course, was that when the township lost the money we shut the scales down. The Commonwealth did not have scales to weigh trucks and enforce the weight limits to protect the roads, so the truckers had a free run through Pennsylvania on Interstate 90. And now, after years of the free run, the people are spending millions of dollars through PennDOT and the Federal Government to rebuild Interstate 90 after the truckers destroyed it. The township lost the money and the Commonwealth did not recover the money for the lack of scale facilities, so everybody lost.

Other traffic fines over the years have been slowly changed by the Commonwealth to where the fines now go to the Commonwealth where formerly they had gone to the local communities. Again, an erosion of the money the community used to have to get the job done.

In House Bill 527 they proposed to give us \$2,500.00 a mile to maintain these roads. This is ridiculous. Example: Our costs this year based on this years awarded bid prices for one coat of tar and chips on a twenty-two foot wide road one mile long, just the material alone for one coat is \$5,159.44 per mile. This does not include the labor and/or machinery and/or fuel to get the job done. So again, we would not be getting enough on that yearly allocation of \$2,500.00 for even basic minimal road maintenance or preventative maintenance. Local taxpayers cannot be asked to repair broken down PennDOT roads which have been deliberately neglected by PennDOT for years. Roads which have collapsed cross tubes, deteriorating bridges, plugged ditches, washed away berms, pot holes, cracks, guard rails down and/or missing entirely.

If the Supervisors in any community in Pennsylvania had neglected their roads as badly as PennDOT has neglected theirs, there is no doubt in my mind that the residents in any one of those communities would have had their Supervisors in court for malfeasance of office or dereliction of duties. Our roads are not falling apart from years of neglect. We do not prioritize work on our roads.

Now we are being told that we are going to have a law that says the Commonwealth and the communities will decide which roads to turn back. Who's kidding who? We know who's going to decide and it will not be the communities that determine, and after the roads are turned back, if we don't agree, we can pay to take it to arbitrators. Arbitrators who do not live in our community and who do not care about our community or help to pay its bills through their taxes. They are going to decide what we will or will not have for roads. And this decision is not subject to appeal! Gentlemen, this sounds like big brother is going to dictate what is going to happen and the people are going to take it, like it or not.

To summarize, Harborcreek Township through the years has gone overboard in trying to work in these various programs with PennDOT for what we felt was good for our people and good for our Commonwealth to solve a problem. However, everytime we would try, we'd end up getting hurt. Hurt in the form that it cost us more than they predicted that it would and there was not correction to the cost problem after we were involved in it. To say that we would be reluctant to enter into anymore agreements or deals with PennDOT would be an understatement.

I submit to you Gentlemen that elected local officials are not going to cooperate with PennDOT anymore at the expense of their people. Come up with a fair and equitable bill which does not cheat the communities upon road turnbacks, and you undoubtedly will get support for that Bill at the local level.

We have demonstrated our willingness to work with PennDOT and the Commonwealth. Now it's PennDOT's turn to be willing to work with the communities and treat them fairly.

Thank you.

<u>HARBORCREEK TOWNSHIP</u>	<u>ERIE COUNTY</u>	<u>PENNSYLVANIA</u>
1970 Population	12,038	
1980 Population	14,644	
<u>TOWNSHIP FACTS</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
Road Mileage	79.18	82.24
Real Estate Tax, School Millage	73	79
Real Estate Tax, County Millage	17½	20½
Real Estate Tax, Township Millage	9	9
Assessed Evaluation, 100%	\$97,233,052	\$98,475,152
Number of Taxable Land Parcels	5,644	5,713

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>EXPENDITURES</u>	<u>HIGHWAY EXPENDITURES</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE USED FOR HIGHWAYS</u>
1981	\$1,520,600 *	\$ 649,500 *	42%
1980	\$1,322,251	\$ 708,230	54%
1979	\$1,269,909	\$ 643,602	51%
1978	\$1,005,122	\$ 516,699	51%
1977	\$1,247,010	\$ 683,704	55%
1976	\$1,201,146	\$ 778,470	65%
1975	\$1,229,527	\$ 675,164	55%
1974	\$ 828,739	\$ 445,209	54%

Revenue Received from Police Fines

<u>Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1980	\$ 8,316 **
1979	\$ 9,864
1978	\$ 10,391
1977	\$ 9,917

Revenue Received from Scales

<u>Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percentage of total fine moni</u>
1976	\$ 68,381 ***	91%
1975	\$129,210	82%
1974	\$ 94,700	76%

\* Budgeted amounts shown for year 1981; all other expenditures shown are actual

\*\* Includes \$4,707 1980 monies received in January 1981

\*\*\* Receipts for a six month period only



MAY 13, 1981  
RESOLUTION 81-37

HARBORCREEK TOWNSHIP TO OPPOSE SENATE BILL 153

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, THAT WE, the Supervisors of the Township of Harborcreek, at a meeting held on Wednesday, May 13, 1981, at the Harborcreek Township Municipal Building, 5601 Buffalo Road, with Board members Gerald Blanchfield, James Sonney, and Tracy Passerotti present, having the authority and being empowered to do so, do hereby pass a Resolution opposing Senate Bill 153 in its present form and urge the legislature to protect the local municipalities from the arbitrary turn back of state roads.

HARBORCREEK TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS

*James Sonney*  
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James Sonney

*Gerald Blanchfield*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Gerald Blanchfield

ATTEST:

*Eleanor H. Musgrave*  
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Eleanor H. Musgrave, Secretary  
THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Passerotti  
Second by Mr. Blanchfield

VOTING: Mr. Passerotti - aye  
Mr. Blanchfield - aye  
Mr. Sonney - aye