

REMARKS OF RICHARD D. DARIO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
THE LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND FINANCE COMMITTEE,
AT THE AUGUST 26, 1987, PUBLIC HEARING
OF THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE PERTAINING
TO THE SUNSET REVIEW OF THE PENNSYLVANIA PARKWAY COMMISSION

Thank you for inviting us to be here today. Accompanying me is John Rowe, Chief Analyst on our staff.

As you may know, the members of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee do not play a direct role in the sunset performance audit process. Therefore, the audit finding that I will be discussing today represents the work and conclusions of our audit staff and does not necessarily represent the point of view of any of the members of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee.

Our sunset performance audit work in relation to the Parkway Commission was carried out in the fall of 1986. Our work related to this Commission was completed in late November, and our report was released on December 16, 1986. A copy of the report was subsequently provided to each member of your Committee.

This project was unique in the sense that our assignment was to conduct a performance audit of an organization that no longer exists. We found that written records and documentation pertaining to the Commission were scarce and that few individuals were even aware of the legal requirement for a Parkway Commission. We did, however, receive excellent assistance from officials and staff of the PA Department of Transportation as well as from the consulting engineering firm which prepared feasibility studies in the

1950's and 1960's pertaining to the roadway which the Parkway Commission was to operate.

As established by the General Assembly in 1941, the Parkway Commission was to construct, operate and maintain a scenic mountain ridge parkway in the Pocono Mountains. This roadway, which was variously referred to as the "Rim Parkway," the "Pocono Mountain Memorial Parkway" and the "Pennsylvania Parkway," appears to have been intended as a limited access scenic highway designed primarily for tourists and recreational travel. Proponents of the parkway concept cited the potential economic benefits of such a roadway and comparisons were made with scenic highways in other states such as the Skyline Drive and Blue Ridge Parkway. The three member Parkway Commission was to finance the construction of the parkway through the issuance of revenue bonds which were to be repaid from tolls collected from patrons of the parkway. Upon repayment of the bonds, the parkway was to be turned over to the Department of Transportation for maintenance as a non-toll roadway within the state highway system, and the Parkway Commission was to be dissolved.

Studies of the engineering and economic feasibility of constructing the proposed parkway were undertaken in 1954 and 1966. The initial study, which was described as exploratory in nature, concluded that a parkway could be economically feasible and called for appointment of the Parkway Commission and completion of additional detailed feasibility studies. A Commission was appointed in 1966, and further study of the parkway concept was authorized. The consulting engineers retained by the Commission con-

cluded that the proposed parkway would involve construction costs at that time of between \$28 and \$32 million and could not be self-supporting as a toll facility. Upon concluding that the parkway would be a deficit operation if constructed, the consulting engineers recommended that other means be sought to make the parkway a reality. We did not find any record, however, of Commission action taken in response to the 1966 feasibility study or of any actions which may have been otherwise taken relative to the Commission or the parkway since that time.

Several highways which provide scenic travel opportunities have since been constructed in the region in which the parkway was to be located, including one route that is maintained by the National Park Service as a scenic and recreational highway for passenger vehicles. We discussed the concept of an additional scenic roadway in the Poconos with state transportation planning officials. These individuals expressed the opinion that an additional scenic roadway in the Poconos is not needed and would not be financially feasible. Our discussions with Department of Commerce personnel and the executive director of a group which represents local tourism interests in the Poconos also resulted in the lack of strong support for rekindling the idea of a Pocono Mountain Parkway.

Not surprisingly, we concluded that elimination of the requirement in law for a Pennsylvania Parkway Commission would not significantly harm or endanger the public health, safety or welfare.

Thank you very much for your attention. We will be pleased to try to answer any questions that you may have.