

**TESTIMONY OF**

**DENNIS D. LOUWERSE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BARTA**

**TO THE**

**PENNSYLVANIA**

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 1996**

## INTRODUCTION

Good Morning. My name is Dennis D. Louwerson and I am the Executive Director of the Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority (BARTA) which is located at 1700 North Eleventh Street, Reading, Pennsylvania. Let me express my appreciation to the members of the Transportation Committee for the opportunity to present this testimony.

On January 6, snow began to fall and began **THE BLIZZARD OF 1996**. This weather disaster had a devastating impact upon Berks County for a period of approximately two weeks. The cost of this event to the citizens and the economy of Berks County can only be measured in millions of dollars.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Berks County is located in Southeastern Pennsylvania and is approximately fifty miles northwest of Philadelphia, and fifty miles east of Harrisburg. Berks County includes the city of Reading as well as several surrounding boroughs and townships. BARTA provides public transportation service by way of a fixed route bus system and through a demand responsive paratransit system. The BARTA fleet consists of 53 fixed route buses and 31 paratransit vehicles. The annual ridership is in excess of 3.6 million. Annually, 2 million service miles and approximately 157,000 service hours are provided. In the almost thirteen years that I have been at BARTA, we have provided service every day except for when the Blizzard of 1996 hit. On January 7, we were forced to close down our transportation system and despite all efforts, were not able to restore emergency service until January 12, 1996.

## **IMPACT OF THE BLIZZARD**

During the Blizzard crisis, Reading and Berks County and the economy of Reading and Berks County came to a standstill. Individuals were not able to access employment, medical services, or other basic activities. In cooperation with local officials, BARTA attempted to provide a basic level of service which came to be known as "Snow Routes". This was an attempt to provide service on major corridors to each quadrant of the greater urban and suburban areas. BARTA, in providing this service, did all in its power to meet the basic mobility needs of our community. The impact of this weather event was so great that it took BARTA over two weeks to restore normal service. Cost, in terms of facility damage, equipment damage and snow removal, exceeded \$45,000. Our revenue loss exceeded \$83,000. The Blizzard of '96 had a significant negative impact upon our community and upon our transportation system.

## **DISASTER - ASSISTANCE AGENCY RESPONSE**

Throughout this weather related disaster and following, we have had a very positive relationship with our local Berks County Emergency Management Agency. Further, we have received invaluable assistance from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. To date, we have had no personal contact with any representative from PEMA or FEMA.

Our concern is that as the snow has gone and Spring is upon us, the Blizzard of '96 is being forgotten along with our hopes for any relief. Why do I say this? Let me point out a number of reasons:

1. This weather disaster impacted our community from January 6th through at least January 19th. We have been advised that the FEMA disaster-assistance program is only considering expenses incurred January 7 - 9 and January 12 - 13, 1996 as eligible for reimbursement.

2. BARTA was originally advised that facility damages, equipment damages, and such costs as relates to snow removal would be eligible for reimbursement. BARTA's damages for these types of related activities was \$ 45,278. Now, we are being advised that only items as relates to life and safety, i.e. snow removal, are eligible. This would make BARTA eligible for only \$3,197.

The weather related events of 1996 had devastating impacts on our community. It appears, however, that unless you were involved in the devastating flood areas, that your loss is viewed as insignificant.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and including Berks County, the Blizzard of 1996 and the Flood had disastrous impact upon our communities. During the disaster, individuals and government agencies responded and deserve nothing but high praise. However, even though the emergency has passed, the disastrous economic impact remains. I encourage you not to forget those who were impacted by the snow of the Blizzard of 1996. Perhaps best describing our fears and frustrations at this time is an article which appeared in the "Opinions From Readers" in the Reading Eagle/Reading Times on Tuesday, February 13, 1996, which was entitled, "Lord of the Not Much, Truly Insignificant". This article is the last exhibit of this Testimony document. In conclusion, the Blizzard of 1996 was not insignificant to Reading and Berks County. We respectfully request your continued assistance in obtaining appropriate relief.

## DISASTER RELIEF TOPICS

Approximate costs associated with the weather event - January 6th - 19th, 1996

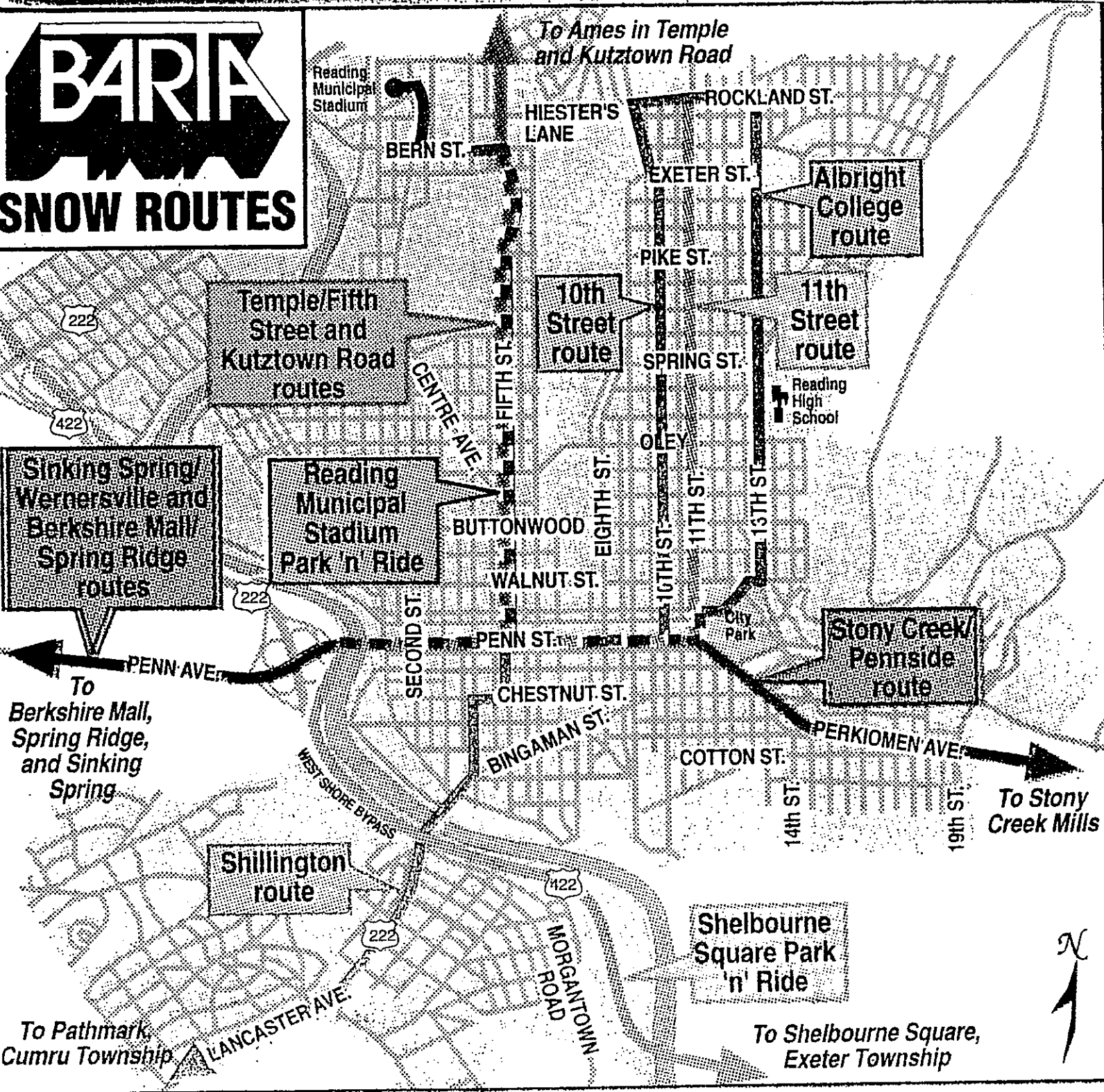
- Facility damages - stations/stops/buildings \$ 6,500
- Equipment damage - vehicles, support equipment, etc. \$35,581
- Emergency Transportation services
  - essential workers service
  - evacuations
  - dialysis patients or other health care critical people
- Additional costs associated with the disaster
  - additional contract services
  - maintenance \$ 3,197
  - additional equipment to meet service demands
- Public Safety
  - track and switch clearing
  - debris removal
- TOTAL \$45,278

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## SNOW ROUTES



# BARTA SNOW SERVICE

The following routes will be operating on a limited schedule on the BARTA system beginning Friday.

**10th Street:** Drop off at Shelters No. 1 and No. 6 near Fifth and Penn streets. Service will run from 10th and Exeter streets, south on 10th Street to Penn Street, and west on Penn to the shelters. Service leaving 10th and Exeter streets at 5:15 a.m. and every 15 minutes; last bus at 5:45 a.m.

**11th Street:** Pick up at Shelter No. 6 near Fifth and Penn streets. Service will run east on Penn Street to 11th Street, north on 11th Street to Rockland Street. Buses leave Fifth and Penn at 5:45 a.m., then every half hour; last bus at 6:15 p.m.

**Albright College:** Pick up at Shelter No. 6 near Fifth and Penn streets. Service operates east on Penn Street to 11th Street, north on 11th Street to Washington Street, east on Rose Garden Road through City Park, to 13th Street, north on 13th Street to Rockland Street, west on Rockland Street to Hiester's Lane and Kutztown Road, then south on Kutztown Road, and return to 11th and Exeter streets at BARTA. Buses leave Fifth and Penn streets at 6 a.m., then every half hour; last bus at 6 p.m.

**Stillington:** Pick up at Shelter No. 8 along Fifth and Penn streets. (Buses will not leave from Fifth and Court streets or Fifth and Cherry streets.) The route will end at Pathmark in Cumru Township. There will be no service to Mohnton. Buses will travel south on Fifth Street to Chestnut Street, west on Chestnut Street to Fourth Street, south on Fourth Street to Bingaman Street and across the Bingaman Street bridge and south on Lancaster Avenue. Buses leave Fifth and Penn streets at 5:20 a.m., 5:40 a.m., then every half hour; last bus leaves at 5:40 p.m.

**Temple/Fifth Street:** Leaves from McDonald's at Fifth and Penn streets proceeding north on Fifth Street terminating at Fifth Street and Tuckerton Road for early morning trips and Ames Department Store for remaining day trips. Buses leave at 6:40 a.m., then every hour; last bus leaves at 5:40 p.m.

**Kutztown Road:** Leaves from McDonald's at Fifth and Penn streets on regular route, however, buses will detour to Madison Avenue for both inbound and outbound service. There will be no service to Laureldale or Northmont. Buses leave Fifth and Penn streets at 6:10 a.m. and run every hour; last bus leaves at 5:10 p.m.

**Stony Creek Mills/Pennside:** Leaves from Shelter No. 6 near Fifth and Penn streets. Buses will run east on Penn Street to Perkiomen Avenue, east on Perkiomen Avenue to Carsonia Avenue, north on Carsonia Avenue to Stony Creek Mills. Pennside buses will not serve Butter Lane or Hollywood Court. Both routes will stay on Carsonia Avenue. First bus leaves at 6:40 a.m. from Stony Creek Mills to Fifth and Penn streets. Bus leaves Fifth and Penn for Stony Creek Mills at 6:20 a.m. and every half hour. Last Pennside bus leaves Fifth and Penn at 5:05 p.m.; last Stony Creek Mills bus leaves Fifth and Penn streets at 5:50 p.m. Buses will operate every 15 minutes along Carsonia Avenue during the morning rush hour.

**Sinking Spring/Wernersville:** Leaves from Shelter No. 5 along Fifth and Penn streets. Regular route will be in effect with buses proceeding west on Penn Street to Penn Avenue. First Sinking Spring bus leaves Fifth and Penn streets at 5:37 a.m. Service from Sinking Spring at 5:53 a.m., and every half hour. First Wernersville bus leaves Fifth and Penn streets at 6:30 a.m. Last bus leaving Fifth and Penn streets for Wernersville at 5:10 p.m.

**Reading Municipal Stadium Park 'N' Ride:** Parking at Front Street lot adjacent to the stadium. Express service to operate north on Front Street to Bern Street, east on Bern to Fifth Street, south on Fifth to Fifth and Penn streets and dropoff at Shelter No. 8. First bus leaves the stadium at 6:20 a.m., and every half hour through 8:20 a.m. No mid-day express service. For mid-day return use Temple/Fifth Street. Buses to the stadium leave Shelter No. 8 beginning at 3:07 p.m., and every half hour, last bus at 5:37 p.m.

**Shelbourne Square Park 'N' Ride:** Leaving Shelbourne Square on regular route to Shelter No. 8 near Fifth and Penn streets. Buses leave Shelbourne Square at 6:15 a.m., 6:55 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. No mid-day service. Buses leave Shelter No. 8 at 3:08 p.m. and every half hour until 5:08 p.m.

**Berkshire Mall/Spring Ridge:** Regular route. Leave Fifth and Penn streets from Shelter No. 5, proceeding west on Penn Street to Penn Avenue with stops at Berkshire Mall and Spring Ridge for morning rush-hour. Buses leave Fifth and Penn at 6:40 a.m., 7:20 a.m., then every half hour until 8:50 a.m. Mid-day buses from 9:20 a.m. leaving Fifth and Penn and every half hour, afterward go directly to Berkshire Mall. Leave Spring Ridge at 3:35 p.m., to the Berkshire Mall, every half hour; last bus from Spring Ridge at 5:38 p.m.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 1996

# BARTA could resume limited service Friday

City and transit officials are putting the wheels in motion to get some buses back on the streets, especially in the heart of the city.

By Mark Abrams and Kevin Cramsey  
*Eagle/Times*

BARTA intends to resume limited bus service Friday on only 11 routes designed to reach out to commuters stranded by snow-choked roads.

The plan would end a five-day hiatus caused by poor road conditions.

Dennis D. Louwerse, BARTA executive director, and Mayor Paul J. Angstadt, worked Wednesday afternoon on the plans to restore bus service.

Angstadt and Louwerse said conditions are so bad in some neighborhoods that public transportation stated to be accessible off a handful of streets is really the only way people can begin to

get around.

Traffic is being discouraged, Angstadt said, and people are urged to use the bus.

"Businesses are saying to us, 'Is there some way we can get people into town?'" Angstadt said. "I think this is the way to go."

Angstadt placed a top priority on widening and clearing snow from the bus routes and directed crews to work on that task Wednesday night and today.

The hub of the bus operations will be in the area of Fifth and Penn streets, Louwerse said.

"This is a good plan because it provides a means for us to get some transportation to all the areas of the community," Louwerse said.

He said about 35 percent of BARTA service will be on the street and some routes will be limited. The BARTA executive conceded that several areas will be bypassed altogether because of street conditions.

"At this point, we're not sure when we'll get service back to normal," Louwerse said.

See BARTA, Page B3

## ► BARTA

*Continued from Page B1*

He said BARTA personnel will be out on Penn Street Friday morning and afternoon to direct riders to the marked shelters for the various routes.

Police also will be asked to ticket and tow any cars illegally parked in the bus stops, Louwerse said.

Riders who have questions about routes and times can con-

tact BARTA at 921-0601, he said.

Regarding BARTA's para-transit door-to-door ride service used by senior citizens and by kidney-dialysis patients, Louwerse said he did not expect it to resume until sometime early next week.

The BARTA Snow Service, as city officials are dubbing it, attempts to serve the northern, southern, eastern and western sectors of the county, and offer people access to jobs as well as area food stores and malls.



**OPINIONS FROM READERS**

## Lord Of Not Much truly insignificant

**Editor:**

Once upon a time in the nearby land of Berks, a cruel winter storm arose from the east, burying villages and farms under an immense blanket of snow. A peasant farmer, Lord Of Not Very Much, witnessed his humble barn give way to the great layer of white, trapping the lord's animals underneath. Surely, the winter wrath befelled many lords, great and small, with similar fates.

Within a fortnight, winter's fury unleashed a second dose of scorn, this time drenching the landscape with torrents of rain and melting snow, filling rivers with chunks of ice and flooding many from their homes in Berks and beyond in The Land Of Penn.

Pleas for help went up throughout the land. Response was swift as the Lords Of Berks and Beyond, Lord O'Pake, Lord Holden, and Lord Ridge of the surrounding Lands Of Penn, agreed to request King William and Queen Hillary from All The Lands United, that disaster be proclaimed, so all sufferers of such calamities may be aided and abetted by the Great City Of Spending, whose budget has no bounds.

Alas, fate was not kind for Lord Of Not Very Much. King William's proclamation dispensed the responsibility of such affairs to Lord Witt, leader of the Find Everyone Meager Aid society.

Lord Witt and his followers felt compelled to grant aid to only those who suffered from nature's second scorn of rain, and thereby saving the Great City of Spending many shillings to be used for other more worthy causes as fighting wars in distant Lands Without Reason, or to research

how our lives could be changed by varying thickness in tomato catsup.

So Lord Of Not Very Much is left to care for his own losses, having learned that though his daily labor supports all the Lords in the Great City, he is truly insignificant in The Land Of Confusion.

**David Brown**  
Shoemakersville