

**Testimony for House Transportation and
House Commerce and Economic Development Committees
Joint Hearing on the Impact of Transportation and Economic Development
September 15, 1999
10:40 a.m.**

Good morning Representative Geist, Representative Hasay, and members of the House Transportation and House Commerce and Economic Development Committees I'm Frances Egan, Assistant General Manager for Public and Government Affairs at the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority. I am pleased to provide testimony to support the joint committee's study on the impact of transportation on economic development in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We wholeheartedly concur with Representative Geist's observation that the success of economic development initiatives within our great Commonwealth can only be assured by addressing the issues of transportation access.

A healthy transportation infrastructure can serve as a vital tool to support economic prosperity. Access to employment is essential to improve the quality of life for all citizens and enable businesses to attract qualified workers. Moreover, the time and expense of bringing goods and services to the marketplace would be prohibitive without a multi-modal transportation system utilizing public conveyance and private vehicles. Investment in transportation infrastructure can also provide attractive incentives to stimulate private capital development interest in communities and business centers accessible by these transit links.

As the fifth largest transit agency in the nation and primary provider of public transportation services for Southeastern Pennsylvania, SEPTA recognizes its role and responsibility to support regional economic development by serving the needs of existing business centers and ensuring access to new and growing marketplaces.

Through the framework of our strategic business plan SEPTA has taken a proactive approach to supporting regional economic development activities by establishing working partnerships with public and private entities to provide public transit service. The Authority has been working with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDot) in the development and implementation of the Route 202 Congestion Mitigation Plan designed to support the 3 year, \$ 250 million construction project to rebuild a critical section of Route 202 in the Great Valley/King of Prussia area. SEPTA has formulated a comprehensive plan of new and enhanced public transportation service alternatives for the anticipated short-term construction inconvenience and vehicular traffic congestion, and to maximize the long-term economic benefits that will accrue from improved access to this growing economic hub.

Creating new transportation infrastructure, as Representative Hasay noted, can indeed turn an entire community around. To that end, SEPTA is working to build on the strengths of our core service infrastructure to establish new access opportunities in areas previously unserved or underserved by public transportation. The recent success of our small bus links -- the Horsham and Commonwealth Breeze services, created in partnership with SEPTA, county

officials, area businesses, and the county's transportation management association underscores this point. Since the inception of the Horsham Breeze route in 1996, service has quadrupled with more than 1,100 employees from area business and retail centers using this service to get to and from work. Horsham's success paved the way to create the Commonwealth Breeze to meet the transportation needs of other area businesses not served by the original Breeze route service. Owing to the success of these routes, the Authority is investigating the possibility of expanding the Horsham Breeze into Philadelphia to better service current customers and to provide area businesses with access to a broader employee base. The recent inauguration of another small bus route -- the 305 -- serving Darby and airport complex businesses is another example of establishing a new transportation infrastructure in support of community economic development initiatives. Working in partnership with the Darby Revitalization Task Force and Delaware County, SEPTA has created a new bus service to connect individuals seeking employment opportunities with growing employment centers in and around Philadelphia International Airport. SEPTA's ability to provide service to meet capacity and to expand service as market demand increases is essential to keep our region's economic development engine moving. As the network of transportation access grows, the needs of both employers and those seeking employment can be met. This win-win situation also represents a win for statewide and regional economies in the form of tax revenues and dollars being spent on goods and services in local economies.

In addition to addressing current transportation needs, SEPTA believes in the importance of long-range planning to evaluate the region's future access demands. At present we are engaged in two critical planning studies for the Schuylkill Valley and Cross County Metro rail line projects. The proposed Schuylkill Valley Metro, linking key locations in Bucks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties, offers the potential to provide access to major regional retail, employment, and business centers to an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 daily riders. SEPTA last operated rail service in this corridor in 1981, several years before the opening of the U.S. 422 Expressway and the recent explosion of growth in suburban communities surrounding Philadelphia. Development sprawl, congestion, and few transportation alternatives to private vehicle travel have caused SEPTA and its partner on this project, the Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority (BARTA), to look at the possibility of bringing back rail service. Based on comparable experiences in Portland, Oregon, the potential economic benefits accruing from a project like Schuylkill Valley Metro may be in excess of \$14 billion dollars. This project was recently mentioned in newspaper articles about the proposed construction of a new baseball stadium in Philadelphia. In this instance the economic benefits of public transportation can extend beyond business interests to the Commonwealth's leisure, and visitor and tourism industries.

The second study, the Cross County Metro covers a 60-mile corridor beginning at Glenloch in Chester County, traveling through King of Prussia and Norristown in Montgomery County, and terminating in Morrisville, Bucks County. Included in

this assessment study will be an evaluation of a service line between King of Prussia and Glenloch to identify potential rail stops along the Great Valley and Route 202 corridors. Creating enhanced public transit access to key employment centers such as King of Prussia will provide many benefits to Montgomery County, county businesses, and individuals seeking job opportunities.

Within our service region, the viability of the public transportation infrastructure and service is critical to continue the recent course of economic and demographic growth. On behalf of the Board and General Manager of SEPTA, I would like to pledge SEPTA's support and collective professional expertise to assist your joint efforts to formulate a transportation agenda to enhance the economic well being of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning, if there are any questions, I would be happy to respond.