

**Testimony before the House Transportation Committee Regarding House Bill 1182 –
Establishing the Southeastern Pennsylvania Regional Airport Authority**

Ridley High School, 901 Morton Avenue, Folsom

**Monday, July 23rd, 2007
1:00pm**

**Presented by Bill Tyson
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Good morning, Chairman Markosek, Chairman Geist, Representative Lentz, and members of the House Transportation Committee. My name is Bill Tyson and I am testifying on behalf of the Delaware County Chamber of Commerce today. Thank you for the opportunity to present our views on HB1182, which was introduced by Representative Lentz this spring.

The Delaware County Chamber is the largest suburban chamber in Pennsylvania with over 3,200 members. This makes us the premier business organization in the region, especially for Delaware County, and as some of you know, two thirds of the Philadelphia Airport is actually within Delaware County. The Chamber works hard to represent the business community and to promote the economic well-being of the county and state. Due to that, as recently as Representative Raymond's bill last legislative session and as far back as TRI-PAC commission in 1971, the Chamber has long supported proposals to make the Philadelphia Airport part of a regional airport Authority.

Pennsylvania is the only state in the northeastern United States without a regional Authority controlling its airports and airfields. This puts us at a major disadvantage, especially since air travel is guaranteed to increase considerably in the future. Cooperation through an Authority is in the best interest of the residents and business community of the Greater Philadelphia and Lehigh Valley Areas. We would even argue that all of Pennsylvania has a stake in creating a twenty-first century airport system to keep our state safe and involved in the world economy.

The absence of a regional Authority hampers coordination and it is obvious that Philadelphia International Airport is overused and airports in the Lehigh Valley, Wilmington, Delaware, and Atlantic City, New Jersey, are dramatically underused.

Airport authorities are not new and in fact, Boston, New York, Atlantic City, Wilmington San Diego, St Louis and Louisiana, to name a few, are under regional authorities. The Louisiana Airport Authority is of particular interest to the Chamber because it is the key driver behind a \$4 billion dollar economic development project focusing on international cargo, a deep water port, rail, and an industrial complex designed specifically for manufacturing. In Massachusetts, the Port Authority monitors air service levels at more than half a dozen airports. It continually analyzes airport development, how to improve and distribute service, and how the region as a whole can market itself to air carriers. The New York Port Authority follows a similar approach, and recently purchased Stewart Airport in Newburgh in order to expand the Authority's regional capacity. In Manchester, New Hampshire, the regional airport received extensive infrastructure improvements after entering into a cooperative arrangement with Logan International Airport in Boston.

As you can see, regional planning works in other states and it can work here in Eastern Pennsylvania. An Authority can play an integral role in the economic development and growth of our region through commerce, industry, research development and the utilization of our resources of the area. A regional approach would not end the local role in airport management but it would provide an opportunity for local airports to prosper in a very difficult industry.

This bill presents an opportunity for our region do what other authorities have done before us. It allows us to cooperate for the greater good of the citizens and business community of the Greater Philadelphia and Lehigh Valley Regions. In fact, if we do not work together, we will be ill-equipped for the continued increase in air travel in the years ahead and left out of the economic benefits that air travel will generate. This bill will make our region a leader in airport management and a key part of the world economy.

The Delaware County Chamber for one looks forward to working with this Committee, Representative Lentz and our legislative delegation, as well as the Lehigh Valley legislative delegation, the Chamber of Commerce and the business community of the Lehigh Valley to ensure that everyone's concerns are taken into consideration. Our initial analysis is that this bill is fair to all of the counties involved and allows Lehigh and Northampton Counties the same amount of representatives on the Authority as the counties in this area. In addition, officials from Lehigh Valley Airport have previously stated that they would like to grow where other airports can not. They were specifically quoted in an article that ran in the Star Ledger in April of last year that their airport is underutilized, and due to that passenger traffic is decreasing at Lehigh Valley airport. Officials from LVIA also stated they can increase their share of the market by adding more flights, and feel if they add additional services, people will come and use those services.

With that in mind, air traffic at Philadelphia International is expected to increase, and the airport is already at or above full capacity. An Authority would be able to distribute flights within its airports and send more domestic non stop flights to Lehigh Valley, as well as be in a better position to coordinate with airports in New Jersey and Delaware. This better distribution of domestic flights would allow Philadelphia to concentrate on international traffic. As recently as last Thursday our local paper, the Delaware County Daily Times, ran an article about US Airways offering non-stop flights from Philadelphia to Beijing, China. Demand for available flights to China is high because of their growing economy. The route is being considered by the U.S. Department of Transportation as part of an expansion of airline service that the U.S. and Chinese governments agreed to earlier this year.

More international flights such as the one to China would be an immense economic opportunity and would help the economy of all of eastern Pennsylvania and the Delaware Valley. Direct flights to China do more for region than 10 daily flights to Pittsburgh.

Finally, I want to mention that this bill allows the Authority to coordinate planning and investment with SEPTA and Amtrak. We find this part of the bill intriguing and think it is

another driver for the region's economy as it is a better way to distribute passengers throughout the region.

In closing, I want reiterate that the Delaware County Chamber fully supports this bill and is very excited about the economic opportunities that would come with a regional Authority. We commend you and your committee members for seeking input on this very important issue.

Thank you.