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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
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**Statement of State Representative Rick Geist (R-Altoona)
Republican Chairman of the PA House Transportation Committee**

**House Transportation Committee public hearing on House Bill 2593
(PA Turnpike lease proposal)**

**Thursday, June 26, 2008
Room 140, Main Capitol Building**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, and guests,

I want to welcome all of you to today's public hearing, which I hope will mark the start of a thorough and substantive debate on how best to meet the needs of Pennsylvania's transportation infrastructure, now and well into the future.

The critical issue before us this morning is one that warrants the full attention of the General Assembly in the days and weeks ahead. It is incumbent upon this committee, and upon the Legislature as a whole, to objectively examine and evaluate this proposal to lease the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

Only then will we be able to make an informed decision on a matter of public policy that could affect our citizens and our surface transportation system for generations to come.

Our focus this morning is on the question of whether or not to lease the Turnpike. But we must analyze that question within the larger context of how we are going to fund the maintenance, improvement and expansion of Pennsylvania's roads, bridges and transit systems. That, ladies and gentlemen, is the overriding issue, and it transcends the Turnpike.

Four years ago, I was appointed to serve on the Governor's Transportation Funding and Reform Commission, which spent two years studying and quantifying Pennsylvania's transportation infrastructure needs. The commission concluded in its 2006 report that an additional \$1.7 billion is needed annually just to meet the existing and immediate needs.

Considerably more funding will be needed if we hope to improve and expand the infrastructure to meet future needs.

The cold, hard truth is that Pennsylvania's infrastructure needs far surpass the public sector's ability to fund them. We have no choice but to explore other alternatives to bridging this funding gap, and I believe private-public partnerships represent a viable alternative.

That is why I, along with Chairman Markosek and seven other members of this committee, are sponsoring enabling legislation (House Bill 555) that would allow Pennsylvania to enter into public-private partnerships to help the Commonwealth fund its transportation needs. In my view, enacting that broad-based legislation is essential to solving the problem that confronts us.

A public-private partnership is a contractual arrangement between a public agency and a private-sector entity to deliver a public service. These partnerships, which have been successful in other states and around the world, provide an infusion of private-sector capital that accelerates the maintenance, improvement and expansion of roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

A lease of the Pennsylvania Turnpike would be the largest public-private partnership in the history of the United States. But by no means is this the only scenario in which public-private partnerships could benefit the Commonwealth.

By investing private-sector capital and using the principal and interest exclusively to fund Pennsylvania's infrastructure needs, several ambitious projects around the state that would otherwise never materialize could be completed more expediently and more efficiently.

Thousands of Pennsylvanians could be put to work rebuilding our roads and bridges.

And future generations would not be strapped by massive debt payments.

Pennsylvania cannot afford to wait. Our road and bridge needs are too immediate and too extensive.

The transportation funding plan that was enacted last July (Act 44 of 2007) falls far short of solving this crisis even as it mortgages our future with billions of dollars in borrowing.

I have devoted the last 30 years of my life, as a legislator and as a chairman of this committee, to achieving the goal of providing Pennsylvania with a surface transportation system that ensures mobility and prosperity for its citizens.

Now, we are at the crossroads, facing a paradigm shift. We can either pursue that vision, or stand by and watch a broken infrastructure continue to deteriorate.

With that, I look forward to today's testimony.