

Testimony before the  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives Transportation Committee  
On Freight and Passenger Rail in Pennsylvania

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Good morning, Chairman Markosek, Chairman Geist, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Matthew Mehalik. I am the program manager at Sustainable Pittsburgh, a 501 c (3) organization, whose mission is to promote policies and practices of sustainability in the ten county region of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

My comments today address passenger rail as it relates to livability and sustainability in our region and state.

At the heart of livability and sustainability are capacities within communities that enhance economic opportunities, that promote healthier living standards, that reduce environmental impacts, and that include all members of that community as participants. Without well-functioning rail transit systems, economic opportunities become more limited, people become more disconnected, and the potential dynamism of a community suffers.

It is my understanding that the current vision for the Pennsylvania Passenger and Freight Rail Plan will improve the performance of our state's passenger and freight rail systems so that people and goods will be able to travel seamlessly between cities and to other points in a national rail network by the year 2035. Over the next 25 years, the state will work to make rail travel competitive with other modes of transportation by making it reliable, convenient, frequent, time competitive, cost effective, and conveniently connected. Key to making this happen is the creation of stable and predictable relationships through public-private partnerships so that funding, rail schedule coordination, safety, and security issues can be managed effectively.

The vision expressed in this plan must be put into practice in the Keystone West Corridor—the part of the passenger rail network that connects Pittsburgh to

Harrisburg. The \$750,000 federal grant to complete a detailed study of the feasibility of high speed rail between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg is a hopeful start on extending what has been a large success in the Keystone East Corridor between Philadelphia and Harrisburg. Electrified trains traveling at 110 miles per hour on passenger rails rebuilt on previously dismantled but existing rights of way would certainly improve the sustainability of Southwestern Pennsylvania. We in the Pittsburgh area recognize the business and quality of life opportunities that would come with completion of this segment in the national rail network. Harrisburg in under 3 hours. Philadelphia in under 5 hours. New York in under 7 hours. All at costs less than driving an automobile. Having the ability to be productive by being able to meet with others during the trip makes this type of transport better than air travel for trips under 400 miles. This happens to be standard operating procedure in European cities.

Several key points provide the foundation of a sustainable community's rail transit system. First, the rail system needs to be corridor-focused. Corridors provide the level of service demand (density and complexity) to keep trains running at capacity. They are the places that people want to visit. This is the case for Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, New York, and Cleveland.

Second, the system needs to be integrated with other modes of public transit at the points of departure and arrival. This is advantageous from the passenger's point of view because the passenger can plan a trip without having to figure out where to park an automobile (if he has one) or how to get to the train station at all (if he does not have a car). From the community's point of view, it is advantageous because land use at the point of access to transit can be directed to more productive economic uses than parking lots, which tend to cut off business districts and community activity by creating wide-open spaces of considerable distance. Pittsburgh's Amtrak station resides at such an intermodal transit stop at Penn Station, where the Martin Luther King Busway has a major connection, and with a future connection to light rail. This stop resides one block from the David Lawrence Convention Center (a notable first among green buildings), as well as the cultural district and a myriad of businesses, restaurants, and hotels.

Third, rail transit improves air quality through reduced emissions than other forms of transportation per passenger mile. Electrified trains reduce reliance on imported resources from increasingly unfriendly parts of the world. They eliminate traffic congestion on increasingly crowded roads and highways.

Fourth, having a high-speed rail network enhances the reputation of a community. The presence of such a system sends a signal that that community understands the importance of well-connected corridors as part of being on the leading edge. Regions that have received the lion's share of federal rail money are regions that have been working at these concepts for some time and have recognized the importance of rail and integrated public transit as key to "getting their act together."

Sustainability is really an emergent property. It is something that occurs in complex systems, such as cities and corridors, when that region has multiple modes of adapting as the price of natural resources increases, as business demands require flexibility, as communication and access become increasingly important, and as residents demand a higher quality of life through convenience, proximity to key services, and environmental quality. Lack of a high-speed rail places a limit on the adaptive potential of a region.

Pittsburgh's remarkable transition continues as was reflected by the spotlight of the G-20 on our region in September 2009 and by the United Nation's selection of Pittsburgh for being the North American host city for World Environment Day for June 5, 2010. We are increasingly recognized as a leading region in terms of green and sustainability dimensions. This success needs to be integrated with our region's rail transit system. Pittsburgh is ready to be re-connected through effective rail transit so that others can see what has been accomplished here and so that we can continue to improve upon our record of having sustainable practices emerge here. Thank you.

# Sustainability: A Process for Continuous Improvement

