



10thousandFriends
OF PENNSYLVANIA
LEADING THE WAY ON SMART GROWTH

**Testimony before the
Joint House Transportation Policy Committee Hearing
Hershey, PA
May 27, 2010**

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania is an organization dedicating to improving all of Pennsylvania's communities, including cities, towns and rural areas. We pursue state policies to help keep these communities vibrant and economically healthy. We believe a strong transportation infrastructure, including a transit system that meets the needs of a 21st Century economy, is vital to our communities, both urban and rural.

That's why we support a comprehensive solution to our current transportation crisis that includes funding to fix our crumbling roads and bridges, as well as full funding for public transportation – enough to bring our aging transit infrastructure up to a state of good repair, as well as to make some carefully selected strategic investments in system expansion that will help our communities compete more successfully in a global economy that increasingly demands a wide range of mobility options. Fortunately we have an authoritative new report produced by PennDOT's Transportation Advisory Committee that quantifies how much it will take meet the needs of Pennsylvania's transportation systems. Their number is \$484 million annually, increasing through time to keep pace with inflation. Without this funding, our transit capital stock will continue to deteriorate, resulting in loss of service throughout the state. In fact, this is already starting to happen.

The \$484 million for transit must be added to the \$3 billion needed for roads and bridges. A mixture of revenue sources will be required to raise the total of \$3.5 billion needed for transportation. The Rendell Administration has developed a menu of potential revenue options, as has Rep. Geist and several other legislators; and all of

those alternatives deserve careful consideration. We at 10,000 Friends would add two caveats, however. First, since gas taxes and other potential sources are constitutionally limited to highway investments, the new revenue solution must include sources that can be dedicated to transit. And second, any legislation appropriating new highway funding must include a strong "fix-it-first" provision to ensure that the vast majority of funds go to repair and upgrade the infrastructure we already have.

We all know how important transit services are to residents of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and their suburbs. But I'd like to focus on how important it is to us here in south central Pennsylvania. It's true that most of us in this region don't use public transportation on a regular basis, but we'll all suffer if the services provided by agencies like Capital Area Transit, Rabbit Transit and Red Rose Transit are curtailed. Many of our most important employers depend on public transportation to get their employees to and from work. Our retailers depend on transit to get shoppers, as well as workers, out to suburban malls from more urban locations. And consider our the hospitals and medical centers that need dependable transit services to meet the mobility needs of the many volunteer and lower-wage workers who play important roles in the health care sector.

Pennsylvania has a larger proportion of senior citizens than any other state except Florida. Seniors, along with younger people with disabilities that prevent them from driving, need transit and shared ride services to help them stay productive, keep working if they want to, and avoid becoming prisoners in their own homes. Pennsylvanians understand how important transit is to seniors and people with disabilities. In a recent survey of Pennsylvania voters, 84% concurred with the statement that "we need to keep our train and bus service available and affordable

especially for seniors, the disabled and workers who rely on it to get to and from their jobs."¹

On a more personal note, I regularly take the Keystone line train from Lancaster County to Harrisburg, so I know firsthand what public transportation means to our region. I'm amazed by the growing popularity of train travel in the area, despite less than ideal service. Even on cold winter mornings, scores of commuters shiver in the dark at what passes for a station in Mount Joy, waiting in all kinds of weather for a train that may or may not come on time. We're willing to do this because the train, when it runs, is vastly more pleasant than the drive to Harrisburg, with its inevitable traffic snarls and expensive parking.

Just imagine how much more popular rail travel will become when the trains are faster and more reliable, and when the planned station improvements at Mount Joy and Elizabethtown make waiting for the train a less grueling experience. And imagine what a boost improved train service will be to Lancaster, Mount Joy, Elizabethtown, Middletown and Harrisburg. Better train service will raise property values and spur redevelopment by making these towns places of choice for people who want easy access to jobs in Harrisburg, Philadelphia or the Main Line. Even those of us who don't live along the line and don't take the train will benefit, since better train service will mean fewer cars on the road and less traffic.

In tough economic times, we all understand the need to cut spending, but that doesn't mean we should stop investing. There are some investments we simply can't afford *not* to make, and adequate funding for transportation infrastructure is one of them.

¹ Poll conducted by Laurie Wiegel (Public Opinion Strategies) and Dave Metz (Fairbank, Maslin, Maulin, Metz & Associates) for Smart Growth America, April 2010.