



PENNSYLVANIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS

**TESTIMONY BY
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF
TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION, HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY,
AND HOUSE REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEES**

**CONCERNING
TRANSPORTATION FUNDING**

**PRESENTED BY
LESTER O. HOUCK
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT**

JUNE 3, 2010

CENTER VALLEY, PA

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Chairman Markosek and members of the House Transportation Committee and the House Democratic and Republican Policy Committees:

Good morning. My name is Lester Houck, township supervisor for Salisbury Township, Lancaster County and the First Vice President for the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. With me is David M. Sanko, executive director for the Association.

My township, **Salisbury Township, Lancaster County**, located in District 8, maintains 27 bridges from 8 to 20 feet and 12 that are over 20 feet. Our township is located at the headwaters of the Pequea watershed. As you well know, bridges are very expensive to maintain and we started a serious replacement program in 1984 that has allowed us to keep ahead of the game using local dollars. However, we currently have a 52-foot bridge that has failing box beams and is a replacement priority. Our township received about \$348,000 in liquid fuels funds in 2008.

The Association believes that local government is an essential partner with the state in maintaining our transportation system and that local roads and bridges, state highways, and mass transit comprise a single transportation network for the Commonwealth's traveling public. As you will see in the following examples from District 5, townships take this partnership to heart and work to ensure the safety and efficiency of all roadways and intersections within their jurisdictions that are essential to the community. We provided a statewide perspective at the May 27 hearing.

PennDOT District 5

In 2008, municipalities in District 5 spent \$166.3 million on local roads and bridges, yet only received \$35 million in liquid fuels funds.

Amity Township, Berks County has been working on the relocation of Tollgate Road and Nicholson Avenue since 2005. The township has spent \$169,000 in engineering costs so far, and has obtained all needed permits except the PennDOT HOP and all except for one remaining right of way. The total project is expected to cost \$1.4 million.

SR 0662 separates SR 2057 from Nicholson Avenue (T637) and the two intersections are offset by approximately 110 feet from the centerline of Nicholson to the centerline of Tollgate (SR662). Also, a vertical curve exists on SR 662 that causes sight distance issues for vehicles turning at both intersections, which has resulted in numerous accidents as the traffic volume has increased. By moving Tollgate Road to the north, it can be realigned at a right angle directly opposite of Nicholson, eliminating the offset.

To do this, the township is seeking to relocate a state road without state or federal assistance. The project will benefit the township because the intersection will be of a safer design. Realignment will benefit the surrounding light industrial/office zoned properties by creating corner lots that are more attractive to investment.

Brecknock Township, Berks County has put one paving project on hold until

next year because of increased costs and the reduction in liquid fuels funds, as well as uncertainty over township revenues for the remainder of the year. The low bid for this paving project was nearly \$118,000 for 1.25 miles of road. There are many roads in the township that need attention and whether the funds are available to provide it is questionable at this time.

Brecknock and Robeson Township have jointly purchased a road paver and asphalt zipper machine to mill and patch roads in both townships. The road crews work together using the equipment, allowing the small crews in both townships to do work that otherwise would require a contractor and a higher cost. This effort has benefited both townships.

In **Maidencreek Township, Berks County**, the biggest issue is US 222 North and its intersection with Route 73. A 2003 PennDOT-sponsored study indicated the need for a \$500 million project to complete US 222 as an expressway through northern Berks County. However, only \$17 million worth of improvements at three intersections – PA 73, Genesis Driver, and PA 662 – have made it into the current draft TIP, with promises to look at the remaining critical intersection (*Long Lane*) in the hope that someday the safety and capacity needs between the intersections can be addressed with sufficient funding. The draft Reading MPO Long Range Transportation Plan Update does not contain funding to address these needs between now and 2035.

In **Heidelberg Township, Lehigh County**, the drop in liquid fuels funds has greatly decreased the township's ability to maintain its current roads, well as to take on any additional maintenance projects that might benefit the community.

Heidelberg and five other municipalities in the northern Lehigh County area have for years relied on cooperative purchasing and road maintenance to save money. Road crews from the participating municipalities share equipment resources and work crews to maintain roads, as well as park and recreation areas.

Heidelberg is involved in an effort to fund the Northern Lehigh Rails to Trails project, which would link this 14.2 mile trail to the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Trails and to the Maiden Creek Greenway from Reading, which would benefit the entire Lehigh Valley. This trail segment would complete a 150-mile loop from the Lehigh Valley to Reading to the Schuylkill River to Philadelphia and back to the Lehigh Valley. An attempt to obtain a grant from DCNR this year failed due to lack of a local match from the four participating municipalities and the state of the economy. The match for the feasibility study would cost \$30,000 and trail construction is expected to cost \$1.5 million. Both public and private funds were sought during this grant attempt.

Lower Milford Township, Lehigh County has two roads, Chestnut Hill Church Road and Plover Lane, that have had heavy truck traffic for the past 15 years due to a weight reduction on Spinnerstown Road Bridge. This state bridge was closed in March 2010 for reconstruction and since that time the township has had increased truck and car traffic on these roads, which are in dire need of repair and resurfacing. The estimated cost

for this project is \$220,000 to \$260,000. However, the township is not in a position to fund these badly needed improvements. The state bridge should be open in November, which will alleviate the traffic flow, but do nothing to help repair the township's roads.

North Whitehall Township, Lehigh County experienced the loss of a project that was on the local TIP after many years of effort to obtain funding for the project. On SR 0873 in the village of Neffs there is an awkward intersection with SR 0329 and Neffs Laurys Road (T731). There have been a number of accidents at this location, many of which could be blamed on driver confusion.

The township began planning for this project in earnest in 1997 and 1998 and the township's traffic engineer developed an alternate intersection design in 1999. The township held public meetings and had the support of local citizens and legislators. The project appeared on the draft TIP in March 2002 and a technical proposal was presented in July 2003. The project was included in the 2005-08 Lehigh Valley TIP, but does not appear on the current TIP.

The township feels that more attention needs to be placed on existing areas of congestion, particularly on arterial routes. Funding at the municipal level cannot provide for the improvements required to deal with what is largely pass-through traffic.

In 2004, **Upper Milford Township, Lehigh County** participated in developing plans for an existing multi-jurisdictional east-west corridor to improve connectivity between Route 100 in Lower Macungie Township and Route 29 in Upper Milford Township. Much of this project has been completed, and the remaining section of the route, Allen Street to Chestnut Street (*Route 29*) remains to be improved and signalized. Allen Street is bordered by an existing traditional grid neighborhood and design details, such as street trees, will be included to encourage use of the proposed sidewalk and keep traffic speeds in line with a residential neighborhood.

This last segment will serve as an important link and enhance mobility for the mostly residential areas along it. Due to the existing land uses and barriers, such as Interstate 476, Allen Street needs to both accommodate the growing east-west traffic volume and remain part of a residential community. Traffic studies have determined that the turning movement at the Chestnut Street and Allen Street intersection will be improved as a result of the additional turn lanes and signalization proposed. Also, the signal with pedestrian push buttons and curb ramps will facilitate pedestrian mobility. The estimated cost is \$1.1 million and the township has allocated \$100,000 so far towards the project. Upper Milford received \$211,000 in liquid fuels for 2008.

Upper Saucon Township, Lehigh County, like many other municipalities, has a very tight budget for 2010 and, most likely, for the next several years. As a result, several road projects have not proceeded to construction as a result of the township's inability to fund the construction.

Route 309 is a heavily traveled state highway that generally runs north to south through the township and approximately splits Upper Saucon in half. A very significant portion of the Route 309 traffic is pass-through traffic on its way to the Lehigh Valley or the Quakertown, North Penn, or Philadelphia areas. Congestion on Route 309 and multiple intersecting roads (*particularly other state highways such as Route 378, Passer Road, and Lanark Road*) is increasing. Despite the fact that these are PennDOT highways, the township has taken on the cost of designing improvements to the 309/378 intersection to reconstruct the existing shoulders and median of Route 378 in order to permit creation of an additional eastbound lane to alleviate the current traffic congestion. The estimated budget for this project is \$300,000.

The township has also funded the design of the Route 309/Lanark Road intersection to alleviate current traffic congestion and facilitate increased auto and bus trips to nearby schools. The estimated budget for this project is \$2.9 million.

Additionally, the township has paid to design drainage and widening improvements to Taylor Drive, a township-owned collector road that carries significant traffic between Route 412 in Lower Saucon Township and Route 309 in Upper Saucon Township and is expected to cost \$2.5 million. These three projects are already designed and are waiting on construction funding. Upper Saucon received about \$322,000 in liquid fuels funds in 2008.

Stroud Township, Monroe County conducted a comprehensive traffic study in April 1998, which identified 38 intersections within the township that needed various improvements, ranging from vegetation and embankment removal for sight distance, to adding lanes and turning lanes, and installing traffic signals. Of the 38 intersections studied, 34 were intersections of two state roads. Only four identified intersections involved locally owned and maintained roads.

Since that time, the four locally owned intersections have been addressed using township staff and general fund money. The township borrowed funds via a general obligation note to fund major improvements at three PennDOT intersections. The township has also leveraged funds from land developers to facilitate improvements at four other PennDOT intersections included in the study.

Despite the township's progress and success, 20 plus projects still need to be funded, all involving PennDOT roadways. The state and District 5 has not assisted in the township's efforts and have imposed permit and inspection fees on the projects paid for with local funds.

Stroud Township also owns and maintains eight bridges, one of which was replaced in 2002. Five of the remaining six are structurally deficient and obsolete and need to be replaced. Because of financial constraints, the township has no immediate plans to replace any of these bridges. In addition, there are six PennDOT bridges that are structurally deficient and need to be replaced, one of which has been closed for 10 years, one of which was recently posted with weight restrictions, and one which is scheduled for

replacement in 2011. Clearly a great deal of funding is needed to replace both the township and PennDOT bridges.

For priority projects, the township estimates that \$750,000 is needed to fund improvements to signalize three intersections on SR 447, \$800,000 is needed to replace a PennDOT bridge structure on SR 2005, and \$1.5 million is needed to replace two PennDOT bridges on township-owned Hallet Road. Stroud Township received \$380,000 in liquid fuels funds in 2008.

Lehigh Township, Northampton County did a study of 4 intersections that are in need of improvement. The township adopted a Traffic Impact Plan to work on obtaining some of the funding for these projects. The biggest problems for the township are the Cherryville intersection (*Route 248 and Blue Mt Drive, both state roadways*) where turn lanes should be added to alleviate congestion; however, condemnation of two corner properties would be required. This is a \$1.8 million project. In addition, the intersection of Route 248 and Walnut Drive, also both state roads, needs a traffic signal due to the many serious accidents that have occurred at this location and is expected to cost about \$230,000. Because of the economic downturn, the township has not been receiving impact fees, nor have they pursued the needed improvements to these intersections because of the cost.

In **Palmer Township, Northampton County**, the Palmer Heights area was laid out circa 1916 and is bordered by Northampton Street, Route 248, Greenwood Avenue, and Caroline Street. The housing stock in this area was built in the 1920s through the 1950s and the roads and storm sewers in the south end are in dire need of replacement. The road reconstruction work was deferred in the hope that funds could be found to first replace and upgrade the existing storm sewer system to current standards, as it is currently insufficient.

In the township's Highland Park subdivision area, two projects have made vast improvements to the roads and storm systems, but reconstruction to another large section of this subdivision has yet to begin due to lack of funding.

Local share of transportation funding

The Association believes that local roads, state highways, and mass transit comprise a single transportation network for the Commonwealth's traveling public. As such, the commonwealth must maintain a predictable and reliable funding method for our surface transportation network. PSATS supports a blend of revenue enhancements, including realigning the cap on the oil franchise tax, tying Pennsylvania's registration fee structure to the consumer price index, adjusting the gas tax, and increased use of public private partnerships, to fund the state and local highway and bridge systems. We urge that any and all solutions include the following components: at least a 20 percent local share, depositing all proceeds into a restricted use account, and linking any tax or fees to the consumer price index.

Decrease mandates

There are several actions that the General Assembly can take that would significantly decrease the cost of maintaining their transportation infrastructure. These actions include:

- ♦ Provide relief from the Prevailing Wage Act by revising the act's criteria to return to the historical exemption for paving and similar maintenance activities while retaining coverage for new construction if state dollars are used.
- ♦ Require PennDOT to increase the maximum amounts for road bonding.
- ♦ Increase the required advertising and bidding amounts from \$10,000 to at least \$25,000, and index it to inflation.
- ♦ Require PennDOT to maintain its storm drainage facilities on state highways.

In closing, transportation funding for state and local highways and mass transit needs to be carefully examined and acted on now. Unless action is taken soon, our transportation system will crumble, driving economic opportunities away.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the committee today. We will now attempt to answer any questions that you may have.