

Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Transportation Testimony: June 2010

Chairman Markosek, Chairman Geist and other distinguished members of the House Transportation Committee. My name is Gail A Landis, C.P.M. Vice President, Government and Community Relations for the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Commonwealth's transportation funding needs.

The Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry is the Greater Reading /Berks County regional business advocacy association, representing 1590 businesses and organizations of all sizes and across all industry sectors. We have an active Transportation Committee that in addition to reviewing positions and policies on transportation meet regularly with transportation officials to inform them of safety and maintenance issues on all our roads in the region.

One of the key factors for regional competitiveness is a strong modern, safe and efficient transportation network necessary for the free flow of commerce and the mobility of residents and visitors to Berks County and the Commonwealth. The Chamber acknowledges that roads are not the only answer to our transportation challenges. A comprehensive solution will employ multiple modes of transportation in the most effective configuration- including roads, freight and passenger rail, air, transit and water. It is time for a new vision for transportation policy.

Providing adequate funding for transportation is an essential function of state government. Congress also needs to prioritize a multi-year reauthorization of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act, A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

While no one likes increased taxes or fees, in a recent survey, our members were realistic saying they would support increased use of tolling and gas taxes to provide a dedicated funding source for infrastructure projects. Due to increased federal fuel efficiency requirements, revenues from the tax have declined from needed levels. They also told us that they supported public private partnerships but were skeptical of a vehicle miles traveled tax.

The Chamber Board of Directors approved in March 2010 the attached 'Transportation and Infrastructure Position' that supports increased funding for transportation through a variety of sources including increased use of tolling and motor fuels taxes, and increased private sector involvement through public-private partnerships. We oppose the use of long-term borrowing.

Additionally, the Chamber believes a greater focus on the implementation of reasonable and consistent regulations is required to expedite projects and promote operational efficiencies. The Chamber strongly encourages efficiency in contracting and monitoring of costs to ensure maximum return on investment.

The improvement of 222 North remains our number one priority expansion project. A second priority is the restoration of rail service to Philadelphia. This is a quality of life issue, but also has very strong potential to relieve congestion on 422. The rehabilitation of the West Shore Bypass that has structurally deficient bridge decks and outdated interchanges is also a priority along with other capacity, safety and maintenance issues on primary roads within our region.

The Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry recognizes that lawmakers face no small task in finding viable funding sources for Pennsylvania's transportation system at a time when the Commonwealth faces so many other significant fiscal challenges. The Chamber is prepared to work with elected officials to find common ground among the many ideas that have been put forth in order to ensure a reliable and efficient transportation system.

Thank you for allowing the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of its members.



TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE POSITION

Approved by the Board of Directors on March 18, 2010

The Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry recognizes that the current economy, alternative fuel vehicles, increasing maintenance cost with decreased revenues streams will require us to look at numerous solutions to resolve our transportation funding-gap to maintain system integrity and build new infrastructure capacity. The Chamber recognizes that it is time for a new vision for transportation policy. A comprehensive solution is needed for our aging transportation infrastructure. Policy makers need to consider a variety of possibilities for funding our infrastructure requirements, including but not limited to the following:

Tolling

The Chamber supports efficient electronic tolling of limited access highways to provide additional funding mechanism to maintain the roadways. The accountability to manage and distribute revenue for transportation expenditures from tolling limited access local roads should reside within the local region. Toll revenue from limited access interstate roads should be managed and used for transportation expenditures and equitably distributed statewide.

Motor License Fund and Motor Fuels Taxes

The Chamber believes that motor fuels taxes are the clearest examples of user fees and therefore supports reasonable increases to the motor fuels taxes as part of the funding solution. It is clear that this funding source alone will not be sustainable due to the use of alternate transportation and the use of more fuel-efficient and alternative-fuels vehicles.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

Private investment will likely play a major role in building new capacity in the future. A more comprehensive examination of the risks and the benefits of such investments should take place in the context of developing a comprehensive PPP plan for Pennsylvania rather than limiting the discussion to the sale or lease of assets.

Oppose Long-term Borrowing – Support Pay As You Go Philosophy

We oppose long-term borrowing. Short-term debt can provide transitional funding to bridge gaps until new revenue sources are established. The Chamber also supports reauthorization of the federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU.

The Chamber supports Route 222 North between Reading and I-78 as the region's number one priority road project. Route 222 North is a critical connector for our community, quality of life and economic stability/growth for our region and key connector to I-78. We are committed to making 222 North a limited access highway. The proposed '422 Improvement Project' (R6) is another project that would relieve congestion on Route 422 by making the road improvements and restoring rail service from Wyomissing and Reading to Philadelphia. There are a number of capacity, safety and maintenance issues on primary roads (i.e. West Shore Bypass, 422 W, 183, 61 and 176) within our region. We encourage all responsible government and private sector entities to focus on these priorities to provide increased economic development and provide quality of life opportunities for the region.

Additionally, the Chamber believes a greater focus on the implementation of reasonable and consistent regulations is required to expedite projects, promote operational efficiencies along with the utilization of land use planning ("smart growth") for transportation and economic development needs. Investment in advanced technology, intelligent transportation systems (ITS), for highways and bridges will provide for safe travel and congestion mitigation. The Chamber strongly encourages efficiency in contracting and monitoring of costs (i.e. prevailing wage) to ensure return on investment is maximized.