



Pennsylvania House Transportation Committee

NEPA RPO Testimony (Pike & Wayne Counties)

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**NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA ALLIANCE (NEPA)
TESTIMONY REGARDING TRANSPORTATION FUNDING
SHORTFALLS IN THE NEPA RPO REGION
FOR PENNDOT DISTRICT 4-0 (PIKE & WAYNE COUNTIES)**

Good afternoon. My name is Jeffrey Box and I am the President & CEO of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance. Let me begin by thanking members of the Committee for holding these hearings and for taking time to consider the transportation needs of our region. As background, the NEPA Alliance is one of seven regional agencies, created as a Local Development District under the Appalachian Development Act of 1965, that assist with the coordination of economic development, community development, transportation and a variety of other programs and services utilizing federal, state and/or local resources in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. NEPA serves the seven county region of Northeastern Pennsylvania, comprised of Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill, and Wayne counties; covering 4,400 square miles with a total population of nearly 1 million. The Northeast area is a dynamic region containing three of the fastest growing counties in the Commonwealth, namely Pike, Monroe and Wayne counties, who have a combined average population growth rate of 19% according to U.S. Census statistics.

The NEPA Alliance is designated by the Commonwealth as the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) for Carbon, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill and Wayne counties and the region is served by two PennDOT Districts: 4-0 and 5-0. NEPA manages the Northeastern Pennsylvania Rural Transportation Planning Organization (NPRTPO) Committee, formed to assist and advise with assessing the transportation needs of these rural counties. The RPO region includes 151 municipalities with a population of 441,849 and a total land area of 3,043 square miles, which includes approximately 6,000 miles of roadways and over 1,900 bridges. The NPRTPO committee reviews the area's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which is the primary funding source for the counties' highway and bridge projects and transit system improvements. Through the TIP, the counties' priority transportation projects are identified and advanced consistent with the restoration and development of an intermodal transportation infrastructure to support economic

development by creating a safer and more efficient travel environment for the movement of people and goods.

As you all know, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recently rejected the Commonwealth's bid to toll Interstate 80, leaving an approximate \$472 million funding shortfall for next year's transportation infrastructure projects throughout Pennsylvania. Tolling I-80 was an integral part of the state's transportation funding plan as outlined in Act 44; however, since tolling I-80 was rejected, critical road and bridge improvement projects will be deferred until additional funding is generated. In the NEPA RPO region, PennDOT has delayed \$140 million in bridge and roadway projects over the four year period of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) due to transportation funding shortages. In the two counties covered by PennDOT District 4-0 (Pike and Wayne), \$95 million in bridge and roadway projects are being delayed.

The overall transportation system improvement needs of the NEPA RPO counties covered by PennDOT District 4-0 continue to out pace available funding. According to information provided by PennDOT, 144 out of the 583 bridges covered by PennDOT District 4-0 within the NEPA RPO region are currently classified as structurally deficient (SD), which equates to 25% of the bridges in these counties. Over the next 10 years, it is estimated that bridge, highway and safety improvement needs in Pike and Wayne counties will total over \$423 million dollars. These project costs equate to a burden unable to be addressed by available transportation funding sources. Over the current four year local TIP, the NEPA RPO region has programmed \$452 million for bridge and highway projects within our five county region. Based on information provided by PennDOT, just to address the 144 structurally deficient (SD) bridges in Pike and Wayne counties, it would cost approximately \$260 million or 58% of the total funding allocation for the entire RPO region. This example serves to underscore the scope of the issue in just one region for just one aspect of the overall transportation problems being faced.

In addition to addressing SD bridges and roadway deficiencies, capacity adding projects need to be included in the discussion regarding needed transportation funding. Interstate 81 is a significant transportation corridor for the region, the Commonwealth and the United States. Truck traffic has increased considerably

from the additional logistics facilities that have located within the northeastern region and I-81 continues to serve as a major North - South thoroughfare for the entire northeast United States. The NEPA Alliance formed the Focus 81 Committee in the Spring of 2003 to address transportation concerns on Interstate 81 within a targeted corridor stretching from Nanticoke (Exit 164) in Luzerne County to Waverly (Exit 197) in Lackawanna County, with the goal of improving safety and reducing congestion. This targeted corridor was designed to accommodate approximately 40,000 vehicles per day, however; traffic surveys conducted by PennDOT show that certain sections have vehicle volumes upwards of 80,000 vehicles per day (vpd) with large trucks contributing to 20+% of the volume. Future projections indicate that traffic volumes could exceed 120,000 vpd by 2015; 169,000 vpd by 2025; and 240,000 vpd by 2035 in certain sections and the level of service (LOS) for most segments according to PennDOT have a "D" rating. On a larger level, NEPA also participates on the newly formed I-81 Corridor Coalition, consisting of representatives from the six states through which I-81 traverses. This group is working to integrate and synergize transportation infrastructure, land use, and economic development decision making to more effectively utilize scarce public resources and promote the health, safety and welfare of citizens within the entire length of Interstate 81. These grassroots groups are working to address similar issues pertaining to safety, congestion, adverse environmental impacts and economic development concerns within the Interstate 81 corridor. A cooperative approach, coupled with adequate funding aimed at addressing these overriding problems (including funding for added capacity) is important to ensuring the sustainability of this important roadway.

This problem is not just a transportation problem; it is an economic development problem. Northeastern Pennsylvania has diversified its economic base over the past thirty years and recently has been extremely successful as a location for warehousing and distribution centers. The major factors leading to increases in this market can be attributed to competitive strengths of the region including its proximity to major markets; an available, productive labor pool; cost of living, etc. however; a major regional deficiency continues to be our aging transportation infrastructure. In order to continue to grow the regional and statewide economy, adequate funding needs to be allocated to preserve and manage the current transportation infrastructure to assure that the core systems are adequately

maintained to meet existing demands and safety requirements and to facilitate economic development and commerce.

According to the report released in May 2010 by the Pennsylvania Transportation Advisory Committee, in addition to the Act 44 funding gap, the Commonwealth needs to invest an additional \$3.5 billion annually from federal, state and local sources just to meet current infrastructure maintenance needs and to reduce the number of structurally deficient bridges. This report advocates for a long term solution to address transportation funding for the Commonwealth and highlights the consequences of inaction. The NEPA Alliance considers the overall integrity of our highway and bridge infrastructure as essential to the vitality of the region and supports the Commonwealth's commitment towards addressing its transportation funding deficiencies. We applaud this Committee for holding hearings to highlight the extent of the problem and to encourage dialog to find solutions. Clearly, the transportation funding needs of Pennsylvania are vast and we understand that a solution will not be found overnight; however we must start the process in order to ensure that funding streams are adequate to sustain the future integrity of our transportation infrastructure.

The NEPA Alliance's mission to improve the economy throughout our region, positions us to be keenly aware of the crucial role that transportation services and infrastructure play in fulfilling this goal. It also enables us to appreciate how the various transportation opportunities in our region combine to form a system capable of supporting continued economic growth and improved quality of life. We acknowledge the challenges in supporting an effective transportation system for the entire Commonwealth and encourage our elected officials to enact measures that will adequately fund the Commonwealth's critical transportation needs including bridge and highway repairs and capacity adding projects, all crucial to a successful transportation system.

Thank you and I'll be happy to take any questions from Committee members.

Our Mission

“The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance is committed to achieving recognition as the premier regional community and economic development organization in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by consistently providing innovative high-quality services that improve the economy of the region and the quality of life for our constituents.”

Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance

NEPA



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