

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TESTIMONY

Districts 1 & 10

June 17, 2010

Clarion, PA

**Counties of: Erie, Crawford, Warren, Mercer, Venango, Forest, Butler,
Clarion, Jefferson, Armstrong and Indiana**

Good afternoon and welcome to Northwest Pennsylvania. My name is Tim Geibel and I am the Executive Director of the Crawford Area Transportation Authority based in Meadville and I am also a board member of the Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association. Today with me are my friends and colleagues representing public transportation providers from across PennDOT Districts 1 and 10. Here present along side me are Dennis Solensky of the Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority, John Kanyan of the Indiana County Transit Authority and Mike Imbrogno of the Area Transportation Authority who's service area includes Jefferson County and portions of Clarion County. We also have colleagues not present from the Transit Authority of Warren County, Butler Transit Authority, Butler Area Rural Transit, Venango County Transportation Authority, Town and Country Transit from Armstrong County and the Shenango Valley Shuttle Service in Mercer County. Remarks from Public Transportation providers at today's hearing will be made by myself and Mr. Dennis Solensky of EMTA in Erie.

First and foremost thank you for the opportunity to speak today. We all recognize the immense challenges faced by the state of Pennsylvania with the current economy and the budget hardships on all of us. Pennsylvania Legislature is facing many difficult decisions. We are here today to help you gain a better understanding of what Public Transportation funding means for the people of our region. Public Transportation services are provided in every county within our two districts as well as within all 67 counties across the Commonwealth. In our counties represented here we combine to provide over 5,000,000 passenger trips annually. You will find fixed route bus service transporting persons to work, transporting seniors to medical appointments, transporting students to higher education and providing regular bus service to support lower income persons trying to manage their daily lives without being able to afford a car. You will also find what we call our Shared Ride and lifeline services. These Shared Ride and lifeline services are more prevalent in our region than that in the more urbanized areas. The Shared Ride and lifeline service is a crucial access point for our most vulnerable citizens, those being seniors and persons with disabilities. Rural public transportation is truly a lifeline that restores independence and dignity to our seniors and persons with disabilities.

There are countless stories of our bus riders we can share with you. However, we would like to take a minute to discuss just a few. Donna Winger is a 72 year old cancer survivor living in Titusville. Donna lives in an independent apartment and must use her power scooter and oxygen tank at all times. Donna has regular doctor visits as part of her cancer treatment. When asked what Donna would do if CATA had to cut bus service in Titusville down to 2-3 days per week and how she would make her appointments, Donna answered that she would be forced to ride her power scooter over 6 blocks in town just to reach the hospital. Donna would be stranded without reliable bus service.

There is the story of Sgt. Michael Avery, a disabled veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom living in Indiana County. Sgt. Avery has proudly served his country and continues to do so with active service in the National Guard. Sgt. Avery relies on the bus to go to and from work. Without the services of IndiGO, Sgt. Avery would be unemployed. Finally Reynold Florentine, age 47 is legally blind and relies on the services of ATA in Bradford to get to and from work and do all his shopping. Without ATA, Reynold could not maintain employment. These are just three examples of how public transportation impacts the lives of residents. There are seniors and persons with disabilities in each of the counties that we serve who rely on public transportation. Every small town from Albion to Clarion to Kittanning to Smicksburg has people like Donna Winger, Sgt. Michael Avery and Reynold Florentine that rely on public transportation to remain independent. Of the over 5,000,000 trips provided each year in our region, we provide over 800,000 shared ride and lifeline trips each year.

There is constant discussion that we need to be able to do more with less. Public Transportation providers need to find a way to provide service cheaper and more efficiently. Rest assured that the Public Transportation providers here today and across the Commonwealth all have strong leadership and have been working to “tighten our belts” for many years. The situation we are all faced with now is that without an adequate, inflation sensitive source of funding as what was called for in the TAC report and as part of PA Act 44 of 2007, public transportation in Pennsylvania will become a fraction of what it is today. We are all at the point where there is little, if any, efficiencies left to realize and any further actions that we take will result in major changes to our operations.

The situation that we as public transportation providers face is that we will be forced to cut our lifeline services that are already operating at minimal levels. A senior citizen living in Sugar Grove is entitled to the same quality of service as a senior citizen living in Erie. However, seniors living in our most rural areas may receive bus service 1-3 days per week. This service is truly “life line” as without this service, a senior will not receive a hot meal at the local senior center OR this senior will not be able to make a doctor’s appointment. As our state is working hard to maintain independence in living with our seniors and persons with disabilities, there is a real need for quality transportation, not just life line services.

The costs savings for Pennsylvania by investing in public transportation that help maintain a senior living at home verse placing that senior in a skilled living facility are tremendous. The lifeline services under our Shared Ride program are historically operated under the Lottery subsidy and Medical Transportation programs. However, within our region alone, subsidy and trip reimbursement from these sources do not fully cover the cost of operations. Within the public transportation providers here today, over \$1,000,000 of state operating assistance provided for our fixed route operations is needed annually to help stabilize the operations of our shared ride and lifeline programs.

Public transportation has not seen an increase in operating funding for the last three years while fuel prices, health care costs and other expenses totally out of the control of the public transportation provider continue to increase annually higher than the rate of inflation. In fact, all public transportation providers were notified within the last two weeks that our current year State operating grants are being reduced by 3.7%. So our current levels of funding now stand below our 2007 levels when Act 44 was signed into law.

We are now facing annual service reductions and fare increases which leads to lower revenues and lower ridership. However, this only represents half of the issue. The capital needs of public transportation continue to go unfunded with an estimated shortfall of at least \$484 million in FY 2011 as included in the TAC report. The larger issue with the loss of State-provided capital funding is that the lack of State capital funds will result in the loss of federal capital funds. With the exception of the recent stimulus funding, federal capital funding requires a 20% match. The state has traditionally matched federal funds at the 16-2/3% rate with the local public transportation provider matching the remaining 3-1/3%. At the present rate of capital funding from the state under Act 44, there is a real potential that systems will not be able to provide the match for federal funds. If the match is not provided, the funds can't be used and would go back to the Federal Transit Administration to be reallocated to other states, resulting in a millions of lost federal dollars annually to Pennsylvania. What this translates into is that our public transportation providers are using more operating assistance to maintain vehicles that have long passed their useful life threshold. This causes an undue burden on our operating funds and potential safety concerns in operating buses for 15 years that only have a 12 year lifespan.

Aside from actual transportation, the benefits of Public Transportation reach far beyond our buildings and buses. Our Public Transportation providers represented here work with over 1,000 Pennsylvania businesses. This will range from purchasing tires to maintenance services to janitorial services. The Area Transportation Authority, serving six rural counties in Pennsylvania alone invests over \$4,000,000 annually in purchasing goods and services to sustain its operation. Decreased funding for public transportation will result in less money being provided to our area small businesses. Public Transportation is truly the engine that moves the local economies in our region.

As you hear testimony from all various modes of transportation here today (highway, bridge, aviation) please note that all modes are faced with the same challenges and that dedicated funding is needed for all modes. The funding requirements and programs of Act 44 were and are still sound. There needs to be accountability of the public transportation provider as well as a dedicated, reliable source of funding for both the operational and capital programs. On behalf of my colleagues here today, thank you for taking the time to listen to our story and thank you for your dedicated service to the people of our Commonwealth.