



Crawford County Planning Commission

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Jack P. Lynch
Planning Director

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

TO: The Honorable Joseph F. Markosek, Majority Chairman
Pennsylvania House Transportation Committee

The Honorable Rick Geist, Minority Chairman
Pennsylvania House Transportation Committee

FROM: Jack P. Lynch, Planning Director
Crawford County Planning Commission

DATE: June 21, 2010

RE: *House Committee Hearing Testimony*

As previously discussed, attached please find the (written) testimonies of Crawford County Commissioner Morris Waid and County Planning Director Jack Lynch who offered verbal testimony at the June 17th Hearing in Clarion, Pennsylvania. Speaking on behalf of Commissioner Waid, we were pleased to offer these testimonials and appreciate the opportunity to address transportation issues in northwestern Pennsylvania.

We trust everything is in order. If you have any questions on the attached, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number on the letterhead, or by my direct e-mail address at jlynch@co.crawford.pa.us.

ENC:

cc: Board of County Commissioners
Scott Sjolander, Chair, Crawford County Planning Commission
Roy E. Brant, Chair, CCPC Transportation Committee

CRAWFORD COUNTY TESTIMONY
2010 HOUSE TRANSPORTATION HEARINGS

MORRIS W. WAID, CHAIRMAN, CRAWFORD COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Clarion, Pennsylvania

Thursday, June 17, 2010

GOOD AFTERNOON LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, my name is Morris Waid and I serve as the Chairman of the Crawford County Commissioners. During my eighteen plus years tenure as a County Commissioner I have witnessed first-hand the importance of transportation planning and what it means for the overall economic vitality of our rural communities. Instinctively, we all understand the importance of a good road network coupled with a healthy bridge system while those of us closer to the actual planning of these related systems recognize the key role of planning that ensures there is a strategic balance between the capital planning required for roadway improvements and the capital planning for bridge rehabilitation and replacement.

AT THE SAME TIME, we are increasingly aware that this same transportation network is becoming ever more critical for a growing segment of our local economy – travel and tourism. As rural communities strive to redefine themselves in a struggling economic climate that has been in steady decline for years, tourism and the various spin-offs that compel people to get into their cars and head out and see our varied landscapes across the Commonwealth has witnessed a steady growth despite the recent decline in manufacturing and the current economic struggles. We would be remiss in our efforts not to address this feature as we plan for our communities and the spiraling network of roads and bridges that ties it all together.

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, I have been directly involved in the “Pennsylvania Route 6 Association and the 2007 “DO 6” effort that bears this name. Crawford County is uniquely positioned as the western host of the Commonwealth’s Route 6 network at the western gateway to the Commonwealth from Ohio to Linesville, Conneaut Lake, and the city of Meadville as it winds its way east. In Crawford County alone there are a bevy of attractions such as the Lineville Spillway, Pymatuning State Park, Conneaut Lake and Conneaut Lake Park, Woodcock Lake and Colonel Crawford Park, the historic Riverside Inn in Cambridge Springs, the Meadville Market House, the Baldwin –Reynolds Mansion and the Erie Wildlife Refuge - to name but a few.

Each of these attractions has wide regional appeal and can and should be thought of as an institution unto itself and each holds a significant place in the emerging industry of travel and tourism that is fast becoming a staple in the local economy. For each attraction there are a multitude of smaller venues offering unique shopping, dining and overnight accommodations. And this trend continues to grow. In just this past year in Crawford County alone Colonel Crawford Park hosted the first ever Woodcock Triathlon and Titusville hosted the Drake Well Marathon. Both events were huge successes in 2009 and the organizers consider this to be just a start as even larger events are planned for this summer and fall.

AS MORE VENUES COME ALIVE along Route 6 both in Crawford County and across the Commonwealth, those of us who have been involved from the ground up recognize the emerging importance and interplay between a strong transportation network and a vibrant and emerging tourism industry. This fact is borne out in hard numbers. For example, according to a study released by the PA Route 6 Heritage Corporation, Route 6 attracts 3.5 million travelers a year, who in turn spend approximately \$91.1 million dollars which in turn supports over 2,000 Pennsylvania jobs. This same study also revealed that over sixty-seven percent of travelers were staying overnight in hotels, motels, bed & breakfasts or local campgrounds. Perhaps most importantly, US Route 6 in Pennsylvania has been recognized as a premier touring and driving route by Car & Traveler, National Geographic Traveler and Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Back in 2005 the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor was designated as Pennsylvania's twelfth Heritage Area by Governor Ed Rendell. The eleven counties that comprise the Corridor have diligently been working together since that time.

IT IS FOR THE ABOVE REASONS that I implore State Officials to do everything in their power to ensure that this important and emerging road network receive both a priority status in terms of ongoing funding and exercise their presence to ensure that the Route 6 Association maintain its status as a coordinating agency of nine convention and visitor bureaus serving the eleven counties in the Corridor. I would strongly advocate the establishment of a line item across each RPO or MPO that Route 6 traverses that would accommodate important highway and bridge projects across Route 6. This could and should be considered as it is the obligation of each RPO and MPO to work with local counties and municipalities to highlight those projects that not only serve local constituents, but serve a broader goal of tying together transportation links that serve commerce and industry.

BEFORE I CLOSE BEFORE YOU TODAY, AND TAKING A PAGE FROM THE ABOVE, I would like to call attention to another rapidly growing element of the transportation network – the establishment of hike and bike trails. While there are considerable trail efforts underway across the Commonwealth, and across the country being built, there are but a few that are – or could be, as outstanding as the Appalachian Trail. One of these traverses Crawford County in a north-south orientation. It is the East Branch Trail that begins in Clymer, New York [state] and weaves its way south from New York to Maryland and ultimately on to Washington, D.C. Considerable efforts have been underway locally to organize, plan and fund this old rail bed and it has only recently received its first significant funding. In addition, and with a local flair, the Spartansurg section of the trail will accommodate the local Amish population with a safer alternative to the two-lane Route 89 segment for traveling to and from Spartansurg Borough located in northeast Crawford County.

AS CURRENTLY CONCEIVED, THE EAST BRANCH TRAIL would become the first recreational trail in Pennsylvania to cater to a “different cultural environment accommodating the Amish”, and the dual-trail concept is the first phase of development of a 17-mile stretch of railroad right-of-way that the Clear Lake Authority bought from Penn Central Corporation for \$18,000 back in 1992. These planning steps were made possible by a \$210,000 Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources grant coupled with a \$1.1 Million line item from PADOT to develop an additional 3.1 miles of trail. In addition, the group has hired a full-time ‘Greenways and Open Space Coordinator’ who is managing all aspects of future development not only of this trail - but is partnering with sister agencies across municipal boundaries to ensure that the effort as a whole is coordinated in a cost effective and timely manner.

IT IS FOR THE ABOVE REASONS THAT I bring to your attention this day the importance of these initiatives and the positive impact that they are having on our municipalities and the local economies of these places. To that end, I implore House members and state officials to do everything in their considerable standing to ensure that these local efforts do not wither as a result of reduced funding – but rather to ensure that they have their rightful place in a funding strategy that is both smart and sound and will bring

innumerable benefits to both the communities they serve and the Commonwealth as a whole.

I would close by thanking the House Transportation Committee for its time and close attention to these matters.

end testimony

CRAWFORD COUNTY TESTIMONY

2010 HOUSE TRANSPORTATION HEARINGS

JACK P. LYNCH, PLANNING DIRECTOR, CRAWFORD COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
Clarion, Pennsylvania *Thursday, June 17, 2010*

GOOD AFTERNOON HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS, my name is Jack Lynch and I have served as the Director of Planning for Crawford County for the past seventeen years. During that time frame, I have personally witnessed – and been a part of, some very compelling transportation and transportation enhancement projects that have a direct impact on the lives of Pennsylvania residents. Commissioner Morris Waid just spoke to the importance of Route 6 as well as the development of critical trail networks in Pennsylvania. One of the stereotypes of these types of projects is that they are ‘secondary’ or ‘ancillary’ inasmuch as the heavy lifting for transportation are highway and bridge projects. While this is certainly true, it is without dispute that those projects that enhance leisure travel or ‘off road’ travel in the forms of trail networks have established themselves as legitimate projects that serve the second largest industry in Pennsylvania – tourism.

I WOULD LIKE TO FOCUS MY TIME here today and draw the Committee’s attention to the process utilized in the Commonwealth for planning and implementing transportation projects. I believe we all understand that the process we follow for implementing projects with a federal funding component is spelled out by the FHWA. For example, we are familiar with Historical Impact Studies, Endangered Species Studies, Environmental Phase I and Phase II Assessments, Wetlands Determinations, Cultural Resource Assessments, Alternative [route] Analysis and any number of other studies and reviews that are conducted with the substantial rehabilitation or replacement of a bridge structure in Pennsylvania. Moreover, there are times when, due to the particular nature of a structure that may have historic relevance, a whole other review component is necessitated that in and of itself takes time to develop and implement. Some of these studies can overlap or occur simultaneously, some do not.

AN EXTREME EXAMPLE OF HOW LONG A PROJECT can take to matriculate through the system is the case of the Mead Avenue Bridge. The Mead Avenue Bridge passes over French Creek, which is referred to as having "The Most Ecologically Significant Watershed in Pennsylvania".

According to state and federal resource officials, French Creek has approximately 158 species or communities of special concern (97 plant, 19 fish, 17 freshwater mussels, nine natural communities, nine birds, three unique habitats, three insects, and one reptile). Moreover, French Creek contains two federally endangered freshwater mussels, the Clubshell and the Northern Riffleshell. It does not end there. The original wooden Mead Avenue Bridge was built at the current site in 1828. In 1871 the wooden structure was replaced with a steel truss Whipple Bridge by the Penn Bridge Works of New Brighton, PA. Then, in 1912, the original Whipple trusses were reinforced by grafting Baltimore trusses to the outside of the bridge to improve load-carrying capacity. Due to a combination of age and unique engineering significance the bridge was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places

GIVEN THE COMBINATION OF A TRULY HISTORIC STRUCTURE straddling a Significant Watershed replete with federally endangered mussels, it was understood by all that this particular structure would take some time – perhaps some significant time, to get to a point where this structure, with a Sufficiency Rating of zero, would be replaced. The Mead Avenue Bridge was first placed in the Twelve Year Program (TYP) back in 1993. It received an MPMS Number in 2003 and subsequently received its first project funding in the NW RPO TIP. In the spring of 2004 the project began its first of many studies (environmental, hydraulic, wetland, historic, cultural resource, etc.) and environmental clearance is anticipated sometime in July of 2010. Final Design will begin later in 2010 and conclude in 2011. A letting is anticipated during the fall or winter of 2012 and the project will tentatively break ground in 2012. The elapsed time for this overall effort – nineteen years.

THE FOCUS OF MY TESTIMONY HERE TODAY, is not the issues surrounding the Mead Avenue Bridge Project. As was pointed out, this is an extreme example of what can occur when a structure with no operating life or functionality left needs replaced. It serves as a backdrop for the following brief testimony. In the Commonwealth like elsewhere, we follow a broad process for the planning and delivery of Highway and Bridge Projects. There is a Planning Component, a Programming Component and a Delivery Component. Generally speaking, the Planning Component is between a given county and a local municipality. The Programming Component is between the County, the RPO and PADOT. The Delivery Component is

largely within the parameters of the PADOT process, a process that is in large measure defined by FHWA, EPA, DEP and other agency processes.

THIS IS WHERE A REVIEW OF OUR PROCESS MAY BE IN ORDER. First, and this needs to be stated on the front end, our partners on every level do an outstanding job and together we have forged a team approach under the banner of an RPO that is equitable, workable and flexible for the five counties within the local RPO. What I am advocating today is for the Committee to recognize this process for what it is and for us all to recognize that in terms of process we should be looking for greater efficiencies in terms of how projects are developed and delivered. For example, by every observable metric, the current framework works against efficiency. We heard earlier that, statewide, highway maintenance has experienced a \$1.6 Billion loss in buying power due to the ever-rising cost of raw materials. In our region alone, there have been 441 projects identified as 'needed but unfunded' as there are not enough funds to accommodate these projects in the TIP. Coupled with a modest decrease in highway travel contributing to less revenue for projects generally, we have a problem.

IN BRIEF, WHAT I AM ADVOCATING HERE TODAY is as the Committee reviews its options for addressing revenue sources, it does not lose sight of the process these revenue sources feed into. Collectively, if we can develop a more efficient delivery system or a revised methodology that would shave off even a year in the life of a typical bridge project from planning to letting, this alone would save millions in manpower and material costs. Most all of us in the planning and development ranks would applaud a white paper delivered to the State Transportation Committee (TAC) urging the Committee to take the issue up and give this a detailed review. For example, can we take the multitude of small like-kind rural bridges and engineer several at a time, in longitudinal fashion and 'right-sized' for their application and stagger the bidding such that several pre-cast structures could be placed over the course of a single construction season? What can be done environmentally – or during the environmental review process where possibly several structures can be evaluated at a single time? Within the context of the RPO, can we, over time, stagger the cycles of a typical project (PE, FD, ROW, CON) such that certain bridges are in PE in Crawford County, others are in FD in Warren County, ROW is being done in Clarion County and others are in the CON phase in Venango County? How can we work efficiencies into a system that treats each project as an

island having to go through the same or similar process of two bridges in a given county just a month prior?

I WOULD CLOSE BY NOTING WHAT WE COLLECTIVELY UNDERSTAND concerning the delivery of transportation projects. Each party to the process has a legitimate role and performs in this capacity with diligence. The existing partnerships are intact and they work. However, the steady erosion of the metrics of our system continues to stress the “systemic balance” of the process and this truncates the ability to feed additional worthy projects into the system while all but negating the ability to address Capacity Building projects. It is for this reason that I highlight this important issue before you today and would be willing to work with our partners to begin the process of building efficiencies into our overall process – a process we all have a stake in making better for the common good.

end testimony