



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
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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 Andrew J. Boni and I am a township supervisor for **Perry Township, Fayette County** and an executive board member 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 was forced to close a bridge that requires fire and emergency responders to take a 4.5 mile detour, delaying response by 8 to 12 minutes. The closure created problems with snow removal because the bridge is located at the bottom of a steep slope and several homes are located along this portion of the road. We evaluated our options and repair would cost \$1.3 million and rebuilding the bridge would cost over \$3 million. Since the bridge is not located over water, we determined that the bridge could be collapsed and the road rebuilt for \$550,000.

Our township has also seen significant impacts from gas drilling and when we are forced to pull a bond, there is very little that can be done for \$12,500 per mile. In addition, situations have occurred where the drillers pay to pave a portion of a road because of the damage that they caused, but not for connecting portions that now also need paving. The residents must pick up the balance for these improvements.

The Association believes that local roads, state highways, and mass transit comprise a single transportation network for the Commonwealth's traveling public. Pennsylvania has more than 117,000 total road miles and two-thirds of these are owned and maintained by local government, including those in Districts 11 and 12. Local government also maintains more than 6,400 local bridges over 20 feet and thousands more bridges that are less than 20 feet. These local roads and bridges are a vital link in our transportation network and provide children with safe transport to school, workers with reliable access to jobs, patients with transportation to doctors, and farmers with a means to move food to consumers across the state and country. As such, the Association believes that local government is an essential partner with the state in maintaining our transportation system.

PennDOT District 11

In 2008, municipalities in District 11 spent \$165.8 million on local roads and bridges, yet only received \$34.5 million in liquid fuels funds. District 11 has 509 local bridges, of which 27 percent are currently posted with a weight limit. Of all local bridges in District 11, 8 percent (42) are posted at 10 tons or less and another 2 percent (12) are currently closed.

Local officials have been squeezing as much as possible out of their transportation dollars for years. However, the combination of increasing prices, expensive mandates, and decreasing income from liquid fuels and local tax sources are driving our transportation system to a financial crisis. Local government has tightened its belt once

again and is forced to defer badly needed maintenance projects, which will only serve to sharply increase the dollars needed to complete these projects in the future.

Following are a few examples of transportation needs in District 11 and cases where townships have used partnerships to stretch their transportation dollars.

Findlay Township, Allegheny County has a bridge replacement project that will cost \$3.5 million. The township has been working on securing funding for sometime, but can't seem to line up any state or federal funds, despite the state of bridge deterioration.

The township has a partnership project with PennDOT that is in the planning stages for an intersection improvement. The township is using impact fees and donated rights of way to see the project through to completion. PennDOT will be managing the project as a design/build.

Pine Township, Allegheny County's recently attempted to secure funding for an intersection upgrade at State Route 910 and Pearce Mill Road, two state-owned and maintained roadways located within the township.

In 1991, the Township of Pine appointed an Impact Fee Advisory Committee, which allows municipalities to assess transportation impact fees on new developments to partly defray the costs of addressing issues created by additional traffic. Pine was the first municipality in Allegheny County to adopt transportation impact fees. In the 1991 study, the Route 910/Pearce Mill Road intersection was designated as one of the highest priority projects and funds were reserved for this project. Under Act 209, only up to 50 percent of the total project cost may be paid using impact fee dollars, with the remaining amounts assumed to come from state transportation funding or other sources. Unfortunately, it has been very difficult to secure the state share of funding for this or any other project on a state roadway.

Now in 2010, the township may have found a way to proceed with the project. Coincidentally, adjacent to the Route 910/Pearce Mill Road project there are two culvert bridges on the Route 910 alignment in dire need of replacement. When the township learned that PennDOT had begun to engineer replacements, the township contacted PennDOT to inquire if the Route 910/Pearce Mill Road intersection project could be added to the bridge projects, however, PennDOT advised that there was no funding for the intersection improvements.

In an effort to create an opportunity to move forward with the intersection project, PennDOT agreed to include the intersection project as an "Also Plan" to the bridge project, creating a combined bridge/intersection project. By combining the project, the township's transportation impact fee funds can now be used for the intersection project, while not expending more than 50 percent of the total project cost on the combined project.

The Township of Pine emphasizes that transportation impact fees can help state transportation dollars go further by having PennDOT partner with municipalities that have adopted transportation impact fee ordinances.

Another example of a project that needs funding is the State Route 19/Wexford Flats project, which began sometime in the 1980s and for several reasons has not been constructed. The project was placed on the TIP, funded, removed from the TIP, lost its funding, and just about everything else that can happen to a project. Finally, after 25 years, this project may become reality as it has made its way to the top of the list and the township is now being told that the project will begin later this year.

The Township of Pine currently has eight projects for which local funds are being reserved and state funding is sought, however, PennDOT is stating that no money is available for these projects.

Daugherty Township, Beaver County recently replaced a bridge that received “runner up” in the Pennsylvania Highway Information Association’s Road and Bridge Safety Improvement Program. The bridge on Frishkorn Road Bridge was replaced using local funds and a Beaver County Community Development Block Grant after major back-to-back hurricanes in 2005 significantly damaged the bridge. This road has no outlet and failure of the bridge would have resulted in loss of access to 13 homes and as a structurally deficient bridge, emergency service to the homes was limited. Using the grant and township labor, a metal bridge was installed that greatly improved safety.

New Sewickley Township, Beaver County has been working with the state for many years on the Crows Run Expressway (*Freedom Road Corridor*.) This would be a direct route from Beaver County Route 65 to Route 19 in Cranberry Township, Butler County. The roads that need improved are mostly state-owned in New Sewickley Township and the traffic has increased with the growth in Cranberry Township. Cranberry Township is also looking for improvements to Freedom Road. This project has been proposed since the 1960s and it cannot seem to get started.

PennDOT District 12

In 2008, municipalities in District 12 spent \$92.2 million on local roads and bridges, yet only received \$24.2 million in liquid fuels funds. District 12 has 507 local bridges, of which 58 percent are currently posted with a weight limit. Of all local bridges in District 12, 28 percent (142) are posted at 10 tons or less and another 6 percent (32) are currently closed.

Following are a few examples of transportation needs in District 12 and cases where townships have used partnerships to stretch their transportation dollars.

Wharton Township, Fayette County has two bridges in need of repair that have been a part of PennDOT’s bridge program since 1998. The township has set aside the required 20 percent township contribution for the estimated \$650,000 projects and has been waiting for PennDOT to proceed. Wharton is unsure how long they can keep this

money as the bridge project costs continue to increase and these funds are needed for other township projects. Currently, the township is unable to sealcoat and blacktop roads while maintaining the funds for these bridge projects.

Morgan Township, Greene County, has only \$80,000 to buy road materials for the rest of the year for its 50 miles of road. This includes everything from salt and cinders to patch, stone, and Superpave. The bad winter was particularly difficult on the township. In a recent bid, the cost of emulsion alone came to \$60,000 and this does not include stone. Clearly, the township will not be able to undertake the tar and chip projects that it was planning to do this year.

Morgan Township works closely with Jefferson Township, its neighboring township, on all road projects, including tar and chip and ditching. The two townships share equipment, including a paver, roller, and chipper, and have been able to reduce the size of their respective road crews through this partnership.

The township emphasized that local governments need the state to make some changes to reduce the burden for maintaining our infrastructure. Liquid fuels funds need to be increased. Advertising requirements need to be relaxed so townships can purchase equipment at online auctions, where a piece of equipment that would normally cost \$150,000 could be purchased for as little as \$40,000.

Cecil Township, Washington County has several outstanding roadway improvement projects that need funding:

- Creedmore Road Bridge, Deck Replacement Project: A 30' span that has a deteriorating deck and serves as the only access to a dozen homes. Estimated replacement cost is \$50,000.
- Oak Street Bridge: A 25' span that has insufficient beam section to carry loads. The design calls for a culvert to replace the existing structure. Estimated cost is \$40,000.
- Resurfacing of various roads in Southpointe: Various roads in the successful business park of Southpointe require resurfacing. This is a highly visible location, with numerous Washington County Departments involved in its success. Estimated cost is \$350,000.

Funding for most public works projects is far and few between. This year, Cecil Township will be replacing a retaining wall and section of township roadway at an estimated cost of \$325,000. In order to finance this project, the Board utilized a number of financing streams. Money from the Community Development Block Grants Program will be used with the board authorizing future funds from the program.

Liquid fuels funds will be used to make other repairs on roadways, but the near record snowfall reduced the amount of funds available for roadway projects. The board is creatively using all of its resources to fund transportation projects, but these funds fall short of the capital needed to make necessary improvements.

Cecil Township has always had an excellent relationship with our neighboring municipalities, as well as PennDOT. The township frequently shares equipment and exchanges materials or manpower to get the job done.

Peters Township, Washington County has numerous projects identified in its recent transportation plan. This plan identifies numerous projects over the next 20 years, although there are many projects planned for the next four years that are all pending state funding. To help mitigate these costs, the township implemented a traffic impact fee.

Peters Township is a growing community with numerous transportation impacts caused by development in its own community and regional impacts from residential, as well as major regional nonresidential development in adjacent communities such as the Southpointe Office Park, The Meadows Casino, outlets in South Strabane Township, and more.

Peters Township has a history of participating financially with the state on projects. The most recent is an upcoming major intersection relocation, of which the township is funding \$800,000.

Allegheny Township, Westmoreland County is facing several major projects that it has no means of funding. Within Allegheny Township, State Route 356 is the primary gateway from the northern tip of Westmoreland County as well as the northern tip of Allegheny Township. The Freeport Bridge borders it at the north and it moves south several miles to the heart of the township and to where it meets State Route 66. This stretch of highway has long been a source of problems for motorists in the region. As the area has become more developed, this 2-lane roadway carries thousands of vehicles on a daily basis. It had, many years back, been under consideration to be converted to a 4-lane highway but those plans died long ago and the traffic continues to increase.

Along this roadway there are numerous township-owned roads that abut and release traffic onto SR 356. The site distance at several of these intersections is extremely poor. There are two intersections in particular that are extremely bad and are used by school buses to access SR 356. The township sought help from PennDOT over the last 10 years more times than can be counted to improve these intersections, which have seen numerous traffic accidents.

In 2004, PennDOT visited the township with a team of experts from their Design Unit, Construction Unit, and County Maintenance to assess the problems on Indian Hill Road and Williams Road. As a result, cost estimates were produced showing low and high estimates depending on what level of mitigation was provided to improve the hazardous conditions at these intersections.

For Williams Road, low cost options involved trimming overhanging trees to increase site distance and eliminating left turns from Williams Road due to poor site distance. However, this would not solve the long-term problems. The high cost option

involved removing the embankment on the right and lowering the vertical curve by three feet. This option was estimated to cost more than \$1 million.

For Indian Hill Road, the low cost option was a \$350,000 ITS Warning System-Intersection crash avoidance system that works by placing detection loops on the side roads and hardwiring these loops to changeable message boards to alert drivers on the mainline of vehicles pulling out of the side road. The high cost proposal was a realignment of Indian Hill to the west and cutting the massive slope back to increase sight distance to the left. This was estimated to cost nearly \$2 million.

These are 2004 cost estimates and several other intersections on this road were examined at the same time. The additional assessed intersections could easily add an additional \$6 million onto the proposed need.

The state concludes that since these intersections abut state roads, the township is responsible for the financial improvements desperately needed to increase critical traffic safety. There is absolutely no way Allegheny Township has the resources to even begin such an endeavor. As such, the township continues to meet with PennDOT and urge action on these badly needed projects.

The township has also requested that PennDOT consider adding a climbing lane coming from the Freeport Bridge so that traffic does not become congested in the rush hour parts of the day.

Fairfield Township, Westmoreland County has two projects that are greatly needed. The Gravy Yard Hill project is estimated at \$546,000, and splitting this project over a two-year period with help from a CDBG grant will only fund the under draining and cross pipes at \$223,000, which leaves the township to come up with paving at a cost of \$322,800 the following year.

The Hirsch Bridge Project will not be conducted anytime soon due to the township budget of \$570,700 and a bank loan for this project was too expensive. A USDA loan would have been for a term of 40 years and the township residents were not in favor of this type of debt. The state cannot help with this project for approximately six years and no federal money is available.

Local share of transportation funding

The Association believes that the commonwealth must maintain a predictable and reliable funding method for local roads, state highways, and mass transit. 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 also support any reasonable means to streamline the approval process for transportation projects. We urge that any and all solutions include the following components: a 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, with an annual cost of living increase.
- Require PennDOT to maintain all storm drainage facilities on state highways.

In closing, transportation funding for 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.