

June 18, 2010

I am testifying today in favor of increased funding for public transit in Allegheny County. The Port Authority is facing an operating deficit of \$52 million in Fiscal Year 2010-11, and if we don't find increased funding, our fares will be raised, and our service will be cut. Again. Of course, I recognize that public transit is just one of the transportation needs facing the Commonwealth.

I live in PennDOT District 11, in Pittsburgh, in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood, an area well served by buses. I am 63 years old, recently retired, and my wife works at Carnegie Mellon University. We have one car, and I have an annual subscription to a Port Authority pass. I use my pass almost every day. If Pittsburgh ceases to have fairly frequent bus service, my ability to get around will be much less---for example, to attend this hearing, to which I have travelled on Port Authority buses.

I think that the Port Authority has been making a solid effort to use its resources more effectively through reorganization of bus routes. A modernized fare collection system with some kind of smart card is being planned, and will be a major improvement in terms of faster and more convenient operation that will benefit passengers. Furthermore, passengers do ride our buses; PAT buses are almost always well patronized, often overcrowded, in fact. This passenger base is one of the assets that Pittsburgh, unlike a lot of cities of similar size, can be proud of. All sorts of passengers, of all ages and economic groups, choose to take the bus---not just people who have no other option. But if service is cut, and potential passengers find there is no bus to take them to and from their destination, they will lose their transit orientation, and it will be very hard to get them back as riders. And of course, if service is cut, there will be people who will simply not be able to access needed services and most importantly will not be able to get to work.

So where can we find the revenue to fill the \$52 million deficit, plus invest in needed capital improvement, like an improved fare collection system? My answer is increase fees, possibly the low \$36 annual auto registration fee, and/or raise my taxes. Yes, raise my taxes. I say this not because I am so flush, or so generous. In the long run, paying a little more in taxes for public transit makes economic sense for me, because

without transit, my property value is going to go down, and my wife and I will need to think about the expense of a second car.

I commend Committee Chair Markosek and Republican Chair Geist for their bipartisan effort to confront our transportation crisis by travelling around the Commonwealth and giving us voters a chance to have our say. I hope that their colleagues in Harrisburg will resist the temptation to kick the can down the road till after the next election. I know a minority of citizens will reflexively raise a howl of protest against raising taxes or fees or both, but I really believe that most voters will accept the necessity of increased revenue, as long as they see that the revenue is bringing them safe and efficient transportation. In this situation good government really is good politics.

Keep Pennsylvania moving, and, in particular, keep the Port Authority going with adequate funds for operations and needed capital investment.

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