



# **RICH FITZGERALD PRESIDENT**

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**CHAIR,  
GOVERNMENT REFORM  
COMMITTEE**

June 16, 2010

Representative Joseph F. Markosek  
Room 314, Irvis Office Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Representative Markosek:

First and foremost, I would like to thank you for providing the opportunity to the public to offer testimony in advance of the General Assembly's 2010 Special Session on Transportation. Transportation is obviously a matter of, literally, front page importance here in Allegheny County. We have all recently read the newspaper articles describing the Allegheny County Port Authority's dire budgetary position; its estimated \$50 million shortfall this year may necessitate devastating cuts in personnel and service, which have been estimated to have the potential to reach a 30% reduction in service and up to 500 layoffs. All of which, of course, results from the Federal government's refusal to allow the tolling of Interstate 80, and all of which looms literally days before the Authority's board must attempt to craft and approve a workable budget for the coming year.

However, there are also other transportation issues that must be considered. Road and bridge maintenance needs within Allegheny County are significant. The County itself is in the process of rehabilitating the Rankin Bridge, and is on the verge of beginning another significant rehabilitation program with the Mansfield Bridge. New bridge construction includes flyover bridges at the Waterfront development, Duquesne, and McKeesport. The Fort Duquesne Bridge is undergoing restoration and approach work, the Liberty Tunnels are in the process of being rehabilitated, the Route 28 project in Millvale is proceeding, Carson Street is in the process of being widened to accommodate increasing commuter traffic demands and to facilitate access to the South Side Works development, the Broughton and Brownsville Road intersection improvement project is in process; the list of road and bridge projects for which funding must be maintained or secured goes on for pages.

Western Pennsylvania is a region that is in transition; but, for the first time in decades, it is for the better. We experienced the highest job growth in the United States in the month of May. Our unemployment rate is now consistently among the lowest in the Commonwealth. Census figures show that Allegheny County's population is growing. Forbes Magazine named Pittsburgh one of the top ten cities in the country for job growth in 2009, while Moody's named it the best commercial real estate market in the U.S. in March of this year. Just this week, nine Allegheny County high schools were named among the best in the country by Newsweek; only 20 other schools in the rest of the Commonwealth made the list.

To be sure, Allegheny County is profoundly fortunate to be situated near river and interstate transportation, to have an extremely resilient, hardworking, and family-oriented population, and to have ready access to some of the finest institutions of higher education in the country. But, at the same time, none of the recent accolades and achievements are accidental; tireless efforts have been made to make the region attractive for economic development and for families.

These efforts must continue if the region is to continue to thrive. The more individuals that we have commuting – due to a stable employment market, a growing population and, if necessary, any reductions in public transportation service – the greater the demands on our roads and bridges will become. Our challenges in decreasing the region’s carbon footprint and reducing vehicle-generated pollution will become greater as more vehicles are on the road every day. Traffic congestion will increase and, with it, the potential increases for higher numbers of vehicle accidents and more emergency services calls. Our university students that commute and currently avail themselves of public transportation will spend more time driving and less time studying. Our younger students will not be immune to the effects. Those in school districts that rely heavily on public transportation to get students to and from school - as Mount Lebanon’s (one of the nine Allegheny County school districts on the Newsweek list) does - the budgetary and other implications will be significant. Individuals that rely on public transportation for trips to the grocery store or the doctor or their workplace will have to find other means of making these trips, or will have to find a way to do without making them at all. And perhaps the most insidious effect of public transportation cuts is that, in many cases, the individuals who are most affected by the cuts are the very individuals who will have the most difficult time finding alternative means of transportation. Even our most promising natural resource development opportunity – the Marcellus Shale – will have an impact on our roads and bridges as drilling, extraction and the accompanying truck and other vehicle traffic increase. Limiting the transportation infrastructure available will of course limit the development of this resource.

I would urge the General Assembly and all of its Members and Committees to remain cognizant of all of these factors while participating in the Special Session on Transportation, and to remember that it would be truly tragic for a thriving region and its residents to be denied the ability to continue their progressive development and reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rich Fitzgerald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rich Fitzgerald, President  
Allegheny County Council