

Chairman Hennessey and Chairman Carroll:

Thank you for giving Pennsylvania Farm Bureau the opportunity to share our thoughts on the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation bridge funding proposal and Senate Bill 382, which seeks to bring greater transparency and oversight to the tolling process. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau opposes the current bridge tolling proposal and supports the efforts of SB 382 to bring greater transparency to the problem.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has long supported the need to upgrade our state's infrastructure system. We were among numerous business organizations that advocated for Act 89 and the new funding created to address our significant road and bridge needs. Pennsylvania farmers rely on a strong infrastructure network to get their products to market. At the time Act 89 was passed, we recognized that weight restricted bridges and deteriorating highway networks were a detriment to the effective movement of agriculture goods throughout the commonwealth. We also remain engaged at the federal level as Congress debates its major infrastructure initiative.

We also appreciate that creative approaches to addressing our infrastructure backlog is needed, including the Public-Private Transportation Partnership, (P3) and its efforts to replace state-owned bridges. However, we have concerns over the scope of work being undertaken by the P3 board to enact tolls on interstate bridges. Specifically, we would like to see greater transparency and oversight into future efforts to toll bridges or other roadways through a P3 partnership. At minimum, there should be a requirement for PennDOT to solicit public comment on these proposals, and involve the General Assembly in those decisions. For those reasons, we are supportive of SB 382 and encourage its passage in the General Assembly.

Secondarily, our organization has historically opposed tolling as a method for funding highway infrastructure. We opposed efforts to enact tolling on Interstate 80 and oppose this current proposal for bridge funding. Along with the costs that will directly, and indirectly, impact farmers in the movement of goods, we worry about what impacts tolling will have on adjacent secondary roadways. The Pennsylvania Turnpike, despite the cost of travel, remains one of the most effective ways to traverse the southern tier of the state. The same can't be said for some of the bridges proposed to be tolled as part of this P3 initiative. What will be the resulting wear and tear caused on secondary roadways in rural communities if a bridge on Interstate 81 in Susquehanna County, or a bridge on Interstate 80 in Jefferson County are tolled through this initiative? What would be the financial impacts on farmers, and their families, who frequently use those roadways to get their goods to market?

We look forward to the General Assembly having a more robust conversation on the way to adequately fund infrastructure in Pennsylvania. We encourage support for Senate Bill 382 and the need to bring greater transparency to PennDOT's P3 program. Thank you for giving Farm Bureau the opportunity to share its thoughts on this matter.

Sincerely,



Darrin Youker
Director, State Government Affairs