

Good Afternoon Esteemed Members of the House Transportation Committee and thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share with you on this important issue.

My name is Kim Lucas, and I serve as the Director for the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Mobility and Infrastructure. As the department's name suggests, DOMI is responsible for the transportation of people and goods throughout the City of Pittsburgh and for managing the operation of and access to the public right of way. Our infrastructure includes over 1,000 miles of roadway, approximately 150 bridges, over 800 sets of public steps, and more than 500 retaining walls.

On January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022, I, like many others, were woken-up by the news that a bridge spanning Frick Park's Fern Hollow, had collapsed. This shocking and tragic event brought national attention to a challenge with our nation's infrastructure that is not unique to Pittsburgh. The rebuilding of the bridge with a reopening within the same calendar year was a demonstration of not only the talents of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, City, contractor and consulting teams, but also provided lessons that might be applied to enable cities like Pittsburgh to increase the efficiency and timely delivery of our major infrastructure projects.

The rapid construction of a new bridge over Fern Hollow was done under formal declarations of emergency, which allowed us to work in ways that won't necessarily be possible, practical, or even desirable for normal bridge construction and maintenance. From conception to completion, a non-emergency bridge capital project can take anywhere from six to more than 20 years. The timeline varies widely depending on the availability of staff and financial resources, complexity of design, historic context, and need. It perhaps goes without saying that the immediate availability of sufficient funding to pay for the design and construction of the Fern Hollow Bridge, the "all-hands-on-deck" approach by PennDOT, the City, and the contractors and suppliers, enabling sufficient staffing levels; and the emergency and high-visibility nature of the project that enabled those two benefits, were game-changing in terms of project delivery. This shared prioritization yielded maximum benefits on the Fern Hollow project but also required us to delay other projects to allow Fern Hollow to "jump the queue." Put differently, it's not possible to make every bridge an emergency bridge, so the ideas I'd like to focus on today are ways to be more efficient in the day-to-day work of excellent asset management.

For instance, federally funded bridge reconstruction or rehabilitation of any size requires the city to enter into a reimbursement agreement with PennDot. Currently we budget 8-12 weeks for completion of this agreement – but it was completed in a matter of days for Fern Hollow. The difference has to do with the difficulty the City has had using PennDot's template agreement – our code just doesn't align, resulting in our respective Law Departments needing bespoke agreements for every bridge. On this front, there is some very good news: PennDOT and the City have been working diligently towards a Pittsburgh-specific reimbursement agreement, which will hopefully shrink the previous timeframes into ones closer to that seen in Fern Hollow. Similarly, the Reimbursement Agreement was for \$0 and enabled PennDOT to

formally own the reconstruction project before returning the completed bridge back to the City's ownership. While our residents expect municipal engineers and planners to engage them and to build bridges responsive to the city's history and needs, the ability to bypass a number of complex procurement processes that add little value to the quality or beauty of the bridge itself undoubtedly sped up project delivery. PennDot already performs oversight and compliance for many of the City's large-scale infrastructure projects. If there are ways to shift additional pieces of project management without relinquishing our obligations to our residents, we'd be interested in exploring those.

I'd also call your attention to a number of state and federal processes that apply to all of our large-scale capital infrastructure projects that stretch timelines and perhaps can be streamlined or adjusted. For example, in the Fern Hollow Bridge project, the bridge was able to be constructed and reopened prior to the Right-of-Way process being completed. Typically, we are required to complete all ROW-related items, from acquisition to temporary construction easements, prior to advancing to construction. By concurrently being able to advance design and construction simultaneously along with these administrative functions, Fern Hollow was able to achieve a dramatically shortened timeline. To my knowledge, there have not been negative consequences to this, which begs the question of what that process requires, and whether it can be adjusted to be more in line with true project needs. We budget years to complete these processes, which substantially contributes to project delivery timelines. In the case of the Charles Anderson Bridge, we began the preliminary engineering process for this project in 2019. In early 2023, we made the decision to close the bridge after a new inspection report and, with the help of SPC, were able to move the bridge up on the TIP. But even expediting the rehabilitation only shaved a year off the original timeline. Exploring opportunities to streamline environmental and historic review processes, especially for the replacement or restoration of existing infrastructure, has the potential to significantly reduce the time and costs associated with project delivery.

Another element of the Fern Hollow Bridge project that contributed to its rapid execution was the utilization of the Design-Build procurement method, a method which the City is not currently permitted to utilize. The market for large-scale design and construction services has evolved to enable time-saving forms of collaboration not available to us in Pittsburgh. We recognize design-build strategies are not appropriate for every project, but we believe that in some instances they it would yield significant project delivery benefits.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about resources, both financial and staffing. We are in a moment of a once in a generation infrastructure investment from the Federal government, and of unprecedented need in terms of the condition of our infrastructure. But because local finance has not really changed, we are challenged to take full advantage of the opportunity. We cannot, for instance, schedule or begin work on a project without identifying the required local match. More flexible funding mechanisms could help here. Similarly, is this a time to consider allowing municipalities to use infrastructure funds to perform maintenance that would extend

the life of our assets, making infrastructure safer and stretching out the timeline for needed reconstruction, even as we speed up our delivery systems? Municipalities often have difficulty recruiting and retaining the essential skilled professionals who do the work of bridge design and construction. Are there ways to incentivize municipal service in the world of infrastructure by providing benefits and supports like those offered to public servants in emergency service fields? We'd be eager to partner with elected officials to explore creative solutions so that we have a pipeline of needed municipal engineers and project managers who are so critical to ensuring that our cities are standing for generations to come, and the economic and social benefits that come from a reliable and safe place to live.

We look forward to working together on these important issues and thank you for your time.