

September 11, 2023

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
PA House of Representatives, Transportation Committee  
P.O. Box 202174  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2174

Ref: Public hearing on Challenges with Transit Funding

Members of the House Transportation Committee;

I write you today regarding the huge opportunity – or looming crisis – we face as a Commonwealth with the current state of our transit funding.

Mobilify brings holistic thinking to the transportation/community connection. We seek to democratize transportation by lifting up more accessible, cleaner, less auto-dependent modes that allow diverse communities to thrive. Flat out: this cannot happen without robust, reliable, attractive public transit system throughout the Commonwealth. This includes continued stability and growth of state-level funding as well as providing local jurisdictions the tools that they need to take control of their mobility destinies.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is a once-in-a-generation investment, offering a remarkable — and time-sensitive — opportunity for Western Pennsylvania’s public transit systems. With billions of new dollars ready to be invested by the federal government, there is an urgent need to act swiftly to secure these funds before the window closes in a few short years. Like lots of federal funding, this bill will be allocated on a project-by-project basis. Agencies write applications for specific grants for specific projects. Our projects compete head-to-head with other regions and states. And that is bad news for us, because other regions have a major advantage: substantial, dedicated local funding.

One of the first things federal agencies ask when they rate a project is: how much are you putting in? A minimum of 50% of the cost of any transit project must come from non-federal sources. That’s where our handicap comes into play: Unlike many other states, current Pennsylvania law limits what we can do to support our transit systems.

In southwestern PA, we have a lot at stake. Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT) and nine other partner agencies are indispensable. They currently serve more than three quarters of a million rides every week and drive our region’s economic vitality. A robust transit network ensures easy access to regional opportunities, attracting businesses and fostering economic growth. It is also a powerful tool for social equity, providing affordable and accessible transportation options for everyone, especially frontline workers, enabling access to essential services and to seize personal and professional growth opportunities. Finally, it’s a major factor for employers looking to locate and remain here — yes, even in a post-covid world.

There are a lot of great ideas to make our transit system work better, and two complementary initiatives have mapped out some really promising ways to get there. PRT’s *NEXTransit* and Southwestern

Pennsylvania Commission's *SmartMoves Connections* set forth ambitious yet achievable plans to create a thriving system, combining rail, bus and more. Some of the ways that Allegheny and Westmoreland counties in particular could benefit from federal funds include:

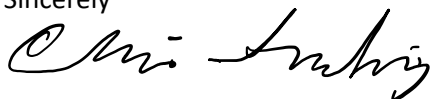
- Coordinated integration so that in-county service could expand while commuter service to our major job centers improves.
- Transfer hubs. Part of integration means making it easier and more convenient to transfer between different modes of transit. For example, [Greensburg](#) advocates want to build a hub near the Amtrak station.
- Faster, seamless movement from east-to-west, so someone can travel from Monroeville to the airport without ever having to leave their seat or getting stuck in tunnel traffic. This involves dedicated bus lanes along the Parkway and extended busways.
- More service, including in the Allegheny and the Monongahela valleys. Frequency and reliability are the backbone of a good transit system. Increased funding means more people can get where they need to go, when they need to get there.
- Cleaner, quieter buses. Zero-emission buses not only help the environment, they make it easier to breathe, helping our children and older neighbors stay healthy.

These investments would significantly improve riders' lives and our communities. To make them a reality, we have to win more federal dollars. To do that, we need new tools to create substantial, dedicated local funding. To get that, elected officials in Harrisburg must allow communities like ours to generate revenue on our own, specifically designated for transit in a way that supplements existing state sources. Then, we can leverage these financial mechanisms to support capital projects, ensure ongoing solvency and improve the quality and frequency of service that define a successful region.

What is also clear is that continuing the status quo is not acceptable for Pennsylvania's economy or the Pennsylvanians who rely on public transit, yet are so essential to the quality of life we all enjoy. Two companion reports – the Southwest and Southeast Regional Partnerships for Mobility – detail the crises and opportunities we faced before the pandemic. After the pandemic, when transit is even more crucial yet underfunded, we face fiscal cliffs that could undo the economic engines of our Commonwealth, to say nothing about stranding essential workers, people seeking medical assistance, or older Pennsylvanians who cannot move through life by any other means.

Unlocking federal funding's full potential for transit requires a unified and concerted effort; maintaining the status quo threatens the very systems that underpin our economies and our way of life. We must keep our eyes on the prize: the vision of an integrated, regional transit network that benefits all residents. This collaborative approach will unleash the full potential of our transit plans. Let's rally together, advocate for the necessary funding and create a transportation network that truly serves the needs of all. Other states are already doing this. If Pennsylvania doesn't seize this opportunity, they will.

Sincerely



Chris Sandvig, Executive Director