



**Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

**Transportation Committee Hearing**

Tuesday, September 12, 2023

SEPTA Board Room, Mezzanine Level  
1234 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Presented By:  
**Richard Farr, Committee Chairperson**  
**PPTA Government Affairs**

Good afternoon, Chairman Neilson, Chairman Benninghoff, and members of the PA House Transportation Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share a few comments on the state of public transportation.

I am Rich Farr, the Executive Director of rabbittransit, legally the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Authority (SRTA), which serves an eleven-county region of Central Pennsylvania providing more than 4 million trips a year through fixed route, express and shared ride services.

I have worked in a leadership position in Public Transportation for over 25 years. I began my transit journey at the Endless Mountains Transportation Authority, in the counties of Tioga, Sullivan and my native county of Bradford. Having been born and raised in Bradford County, working in Public Transportation in that part of the state, and having spent the past twenty years in York and Harrisburg region, I have working knowledge of the challenges that face our Commonwealth's rural and small urban transit systems.

Today, I am here representing the Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association (PPTA) as the Chair of its Government Affairs Committee. PPTA represents 53 urban and rural transit agencies and community transit providers across Pennsylvania. Each of Pennsylvania's 67 counties is served by some form of public transportation, connecting workers to jobs, students to education, and seniors to vital services in the community. Every trip on public transportation adds to the economy, makes transportation safer and more affordable, relieves congestion, and gets Pennsylvania closer to achieving its sustainability and carbon reduction goals.

PennDOT recently completed a Study titled "Pennsylvania's Investment in Public Transit and Passenger Rail". While the report is very robust, I would like to highlight two points from the study for you today:

- For more urban areas in the State to remain centers of innovation and grow and compete with other states and regions for high-value activity and investment, it needs to support workforce transportation needs.

- For transit-dependent populations, service needs to be maintained to ensure independence and quality of life. Ensuring seniors can age in place, medical appointments are not missed and providing employment connection for people with disabilities results in a reduction in public and private costs.

From Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to Potter County to Franklin County and everywhere in between, public transportation is Pennsylvania's engine of opportunity.

The past few years have presented numerous challenges to transit. While the impact of the pandemic on Pennsylvania's public transportation agencies has been as varied as the regions they serve, every transit provider faces fiscal challenges as federal COVID relief funds are expected to run out before ridership fully recovers. Each agency's timeline is different. For instance, SEPTA, which has historically relied on farebox revenue for a large portion of its operating budget, faces a \$240 million fiscal cliff beginning next July. Smaller agencies have experienced budget impacts from inflationary pressures on labor, supplies and insurances creating deficits of different degrees of severity, but without legislative action, the remedies will all be similar – unsustainable service reductions and fare increases that will limit individual mobility and negatively impact Pennsylvania's economic growth. In short, Pennsylvania's public transportation network is at risk.

To preserve transit operations across the Commonwealth, PPTA is supportive of legislation designed to address its diverse funding challenges in a comprehensive way. Our members from rural, small urban, and large urban areas alike have worked together over the last several years to create a legislative initiative that will modernize the management of our public transportation systems with a focus on capital funding predictability and ensuring funding is spent as dictated by local decision-making. The result of our extensive collaborative work is reflected in SB 597 which has been introduced by Senator Dan Laughlin (R-Erie) in the PA Senate. Additionally, Representative Ryan Bizzarro (D-Erie) has circulated a cosponsor memo and plans to introduce companion legislation in the PA House of Representatives. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all of you to support this initiative by adding your name as a cosponsor to Rep. Bizzarro's bill.

SB 597 is a vital piece of legislation which would provide predictability in capital funding and increase local control in transit decisions without raising new revenue through the following comprehensive measures.

- Maintain the existing formula for operating funds.
- Maintain the existing split for capital funds for Class 1 (SEPTA), 2 (PRT), 3 (small-urban), 4 (rural).
- Revert to prior Title 74 language from Acts 44, 3, & 26 for Class 3 & 4 systems to directly receive an annual apportionment of state capital funds based on formula.
- Ensure rural transit authorities are given priority in receiving federal 5311 funds (Funds designated for rural transit and administered by PennDOT).
- Provide for a detailed independent planning study or Transit Development Plan conducted by award recipients rather than PennDOT led performance reviews.
- Modify language for performance measures to be determined locally.
- Add definitions to emphasize the federal requirements for the Transit Asset Management Plan performance goals and the Public Transit Safety Plans.
- Enhance definition for asset maintenance costs and eligible uses.
- Modify language concerning fare increases to reflect local performance goals.
- Add definition for Simplified Acquisition Threshold-Small Purchases to match federal language.
- Very similar to what the fixed route services are encountering, so are the shared ride services. This bill would allow PennDOT to develop and implement a “Pilot Program” for shared ride service delivery.
- Require additional accountability of PennDOT on the amount, use, and distribution of funds on an annual basis.
- Revise language for meaningful performance reviews based upon public participation and agency specific criteria.
- Importantly, ensure that capital funds are bondable.

We believe these changes will greatly improve public transit throughout the Commonwealth and help Pennsylvania remain among the industry leaders nationally.

While SB 597 is the primary legislative initiative supported by our association, PPTA is committed to a comprehensive approach to address the challenges facing our public transportation systems. Legislative efforts to adjust how the state sales tax receipts are allocated to public transportation by increasing the percentage of the sales tax transfer from the current 4.4 percent to 6.4 percent is an imperative component of any comprehensive solution. This change would improve every single Pennsylvania transit system's ability to meet their immediate and future operating requirements.

Additionally, PPTA supports the efforts of its two largest transit systems, SEPTA and PRT, in their advocacy for a local revenue option to address specific projects in those regions.

PPTA's support of a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges facing public transit mirrors the diversity of our membership. Whether it be a rural, small urban, or large urban system, we remain committed to the millions of Pennsylvanians who rely on public transportation every day. We know that every ride matters.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to share some of my thoughts with the committee and I look forward to your questions.