

Senate Transportation Commission Hearings

Testimony

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Thank you for the opportunity to present some brief comments. My name is Pat Miller and I am the Executive Vice President of the Altoona-Blair County Development Corp.

The Altoona-Blair County Development Corp. has been in existence for over 60 years providing a wide range of economic development services to the businesses in this region. The transportation improvements that this area has seen over the past 30 years, primarily in the completion of I-99, have served as a major contributor to the economic vitality of the Blair County economy where unemployment rates are consistently below the region's, the State's, and the nation's average. As we continue to move forward as a community, additional transportation improvements will always be of priority consideration.

We were asked to provide some specific examples of the type of transportation improvements that will be necessary to support our economic development initiatives and I offer the following prime examples.

During the past 20 years the Altoona-Blair County Development Corp. successfully developed a series of seven business parks primarily along the I-99 Corridor, and with each, access improvements were key to the successful development of the park. We are currently embarking on the development of our eighth business park in the southern end of Blair County. In planning for the development of this Park, the traffic analysis has already indicated the need to replace one functionally deficient bridge on an existing state route, and possibly improve intersections leading in and out of the business park location. This type of improvement is typical of the type of improvements required when developing land to support business development and business growth. Given the geography of this area, the development of sites

is complicated by environmental issues such as steep slopes, floodplain, and wetlands.

Recognizing these fatal flaws, the Altoona-Blair County Development Corp. has placed an emphasis on the redevelopment of Brownfield sites, many of which were associated with the railroad heritage of this area. Similar to developing a new business park, the redevelopment of these Brownfield's also requires improvements to the transportation network serving the sites.

Specifically, we continue to make investments at the DeGol Industrial Center, formerly the Hollidaysburg Car Shops property, and have identified a number of access improvements along the state highway system serving that location which are well documented through previous studies. Impacted areas include U.S. Routes 22 and 36. Funding at the present time to support these improvements currently does not exist. Without these

access improvements, the successful redevelopment of this critical piece of property may be limited.

Likewise, we are currently working with a company to locate a manufacturing facility on a former Act 2 Brownfield site referred to as the Powell Property, just north of the City of Altoona. Again, preliminary engineering indicates the need to improve access in order for this project to occur.

The adaptive reuse of the former Bon Secours Hospital Campus in the City of Altoona has now surfaced as a priority within our organization. We are currently evaluating the access and infrastructure improvements that will be required to put this former hospital campus into productive reuse. It is anticipated that there may be a need for access improvements on SR 764, which is the primary access to the site into the City.

We noted in Friday's paper the discussions which currently are taking place between AMTRAK and

PennDOT to maintain rail passenger service along the Pittsburgh to Harrisburg corridor. It was inferred that the failed transportation funding bill leaves the train without the much needed State subsidy for the long term. I was pleased to see it reported on Sunday that a compromise was reached and funding provided for at least the upcoming year. We only hope that the required new funding would eventually result from comprehensive transportation funding legislation.

The State's Rail Freight Assistance Program is also critical to our economic development efforts and we are currently beginning the process of attempting to secure Rail Freight Assistance funding to improve rail infrastructure at the DeGol Industrial Center and will continue to monitor the extension of short line service to our new business park as it develops.

Finally, the need to continue mass transit funding remains a priority. The ability to get employees to the workplace as well as consumers to our regional shopping

areas supports economic development in many ways. Our mass transit provider, AMTRAN, plays a critical role in providing that service. Downtown Altoona is undergoing a renaissance of sorts that is being driven primarily by investments by our healthcare system and our education system. Our Eds and Meds are definitely critical to the future of the downtown. Of specific need here is the ability of AMTRAN to provide transit services to Penn State Altoona to move students, faculty, and staff between the Ivyside Campus and the emerging Downtown Campus. Without that service it is unlikely that Penn State will continue to be able to grow its presence in the downtown.

One last comment.

When redeveloping a downtown, like developing a new business park infrastructure becomes very important. But unlike a Brownfield or a Greenfield site that requires the extension of water lines and sewer lines and access improvements, downtowns require a different type of infrastructure improvement called parking. This element

has never really been recognized by the State as part of necessary infrastructure. The City of Altoona through its Parking Authority is in need of an additional 500-car parking garage to support the growth of the downtown. Funding for this type of improvement has really never been recognized as an important element.

Thank you for your time today, and I hope these comments give you a perspective to how we in the economic development business rely on transportation improvements and the necessary funding to make those happen.