

Senate Transportation Hearing  
Altoona PA.  
August 20, 2013

Good Afternoon, my name is Geoff Clarke, I am the VP of Construction for New Enterprise Stone and Lime CO. Inc. a central PA highway material producer and Highway contractor. I have been invited to today's hearing to comment on the impact on Central PA of enacting comprehensive Transportation Funding Legislation. (SB#1)  
I will offer comments about:

**JOBS**

The Local Economy  
Members of the Transportation Coalition  
The Transportation funding GAP  
Rural Roadways  
Quality of Life

Before I begin I would like to thank Senator Rafferty, Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, Senator Wozniak the Co-Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee and Senator John Eichelberger, for holding this hearing on the need for Transportation Funding. I would also like to recognize Senator Brewster for his joining this hearing. It is important that those of us in central PA have an opportunity to share our thoughts on the importance of Transportation as it plays a huge role in our everyday lives. Senators Rafferty, Wozniak, Eichelberger and Brewster understand this importance and they have provided an excellent opportunity to advance the needed discussion on Transportation Funding specifically, Senate Bill #1.

**PAUSE**

Now, you might be thinking that "I am just a highway contractor" that will directly benefit from supporting the expansion in spending on transportation in PA. Kind of self serving don't you think? Well, If you are thinking this, you are absolutely right, I along with over 3000 co-workers at NESL are all hoping for some long overdue expansion in the funding for transportation projects in PA. Over the last 4 years we at NESL have seen a rather steep decline in spending on transportation projects in central PA and this reduction in spending equates directly to a reduction in jobs. Specifically in Dist. 9-0 (represented by the 6 counties of Blair, Bedford, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset) we have seen a 63% decline in the value of the Highway lettings. Yes, the folks at NESL would directly benefit from an increase in spending on transportation infrastructure but so to would our local economy. Think about the fact that Dist 9-0 was spending about \$140 mil per year in 2007 thru 2010. We are now seeing about \$52 million per year being spent, which is an \$88 million bite being taken out of our local economy each year. This drop in transportation spending hurts a good many more people than just the contracting industry. Everyone in the supply chain locally is hurting without this infusion of transportation spending.

So, besides the obvious highway contractors that support SB#1, what other groups are in favor of the increased spending that is part of the long term comprehensive transportation package called SB#1?

To name a few of the supporters

AARP,

various Bike groups,

Transit riders, (Transit has an important role in any legislation on transportation)

Blair and Bedford Chambers of Commerce,

PA Assoc. of Convention and Visitors Bureau,

County Commissioners Assoc.,

10,000 friends of PA,

Norfolk Southern,

AAA,

PA Motor Truck Assoc.,

PA Builders Assoc.,

NE PA manufacturers and employers Assoc,

PA State Assoc. of Twp Supervisors,

Altoona Metro Transit,

PA Business Council,

PA Farm Bureau,

Rails to Trails,

PA Chamber of Business and Industry,

All of these groups are supporters of SB#1. I have hi-lited 19 of the over 140 groups and associations that are members of the Keystone Transportation Funding Coalition. I think that you can see by the diversity of these groups that there is a broad base of support for SB#1.

Why is transportation so important to these groups and to you? Obviously jobs for those directly involved with the Transportation market as discussed, however if we look beyond the initial jobs created, there is a second level of jobs created when those folks employed in transportation begin to spend their earnings locally on goods and services. The end result in improved infrastructure provides all of us with access to more opportunities, and more options. When transportation is done well, transportation provides the freedom of movement with safe roads, with less congestion which provides us all with an improved quality of life. The efficient movement of goods and services throughout PA helps to keep the cost of living down. A quality transportation system supports this efficient movement. With today's tractor trailer fleets filling our highways delivering products (basically warehouses on wheels) we are able to purchase the items that we want and need at our convenience. The more efficient tractor trailers are delivering the products we purchase, the less costly the transportation component of the price of that product. As congestion on our roads increases and the quality of our transportation system declines we will likely be paying more for the transportation component of our needed goods and services.

What is the issue with the current level of funding for transportation? The gap between Transportation infrastructure spending and Transportation Infrastructure needs is currently estimated to be a shortfall of \$3.5 billion per year. By 2020, without action, this shortfall is estimated to become \$7 billion per year. It is clear that over time this spending shortfall will lead to an accelerated deterioration of our bridges and roadways. This is an alternative that Pennsylvanians should not have to face and with the passage of SB#1 we can cut into this spending gap and reverse the decay of our infrastructure.

Why is SB#1 important to **rural** Pennsylvanians? Traveling around on the rural roads in the Commonwealth can be a real eye opener. The vast majority of these three digit and four digit roads were originally designed and built over 80 years ago. (Pinchot Roads, for example, were built to get the rural communities out of the mud and to get their farm products to market.) These roads still exist today and are used by today's faster, larger, and heavier vehicles. To be honest, many of these rural roads are obsolete by today's standards.

## TWO FACTS ON RURAL ROADS

1. While the majority of pedestrian accidents occur in crosswalks in urban areas, the majority of the fatalities from pedestrian accidents occur in rural areas. (PDT)
2. The fatality rate on PA non-interstate rural roads is 2.5 times higher than the fatality rate on all other roads in the state according to TRIP.

Our rural roads need attention. There are over 8000 miles of roads in Dist 9-0 that have a rural designation. Dangerous curves and poor sightlines need to be addressed. The outdated intersections need to be upgraded. Rural road surfaces need to be improved, their bridges need to be brought up to current loading and safety standards, drainage facilities should be cleaned and corrected and rural road shoulders need to be widened for safer travel for bikes, walkers and motor vehicles. The investments made by our forefathers to get us "out of the mud" have served us well but our rural roads are starting to fall into disrepair. It really is past time to take action, but better to take action now than to continue to procrastinate. Our roads are important to our way of life. Repairing and improving them now costs money – but it will cost much more if we wait and allow them to fall into total disrepair.

Of course, it's not just roads that need attention – bridges are a problem as well. Just in Dist 9-0, without additional funding we can expect the number of structurally deficient bridges to rise from 334 to 419. The growth in poor roadway miles will rise from 520 miles to 1,123 miles and while this is occurring the decrease in excellent/good roadway miles will decrease from 2538 in the district to 1411 miles. We are seeing one of the outcomes from our transportation spending shortfall and that is the posting of bridges throughout the state. 1400 bridges statewide are being posted. Locally we will see 50 bridges being posted in District 9-0 on the state system. As Local and Municipal bridges are evaluated we could see some additional postings and possibly some closings.

When bridges are posted and or closed the detours create inconvenience. We all spend more time getting to our destinations and some services will spend more time getting to us.

Looking forward, we need to consider our investment in our transportation's future. The population growth will continue. Current transportation facilities will become congested. Our roads and transportation systems will continue to require maintenance and upgrades.

How will SB#1 start to reverse the trend of Transportation system decay?

As stated earlier, The gap between Transportation infrastructure spending and Transportation Infrastructure needs is currently estimated to be a shortfall of \$3.5 billion per year. With the passage of SB #1 we can start to chip away at that funding gap. SB#1 will provide an infusion of funds (\$2.5 billion) to reverse the current Dist 9-0 trend.

In the end, Safety, Economic Efficiency, and Quality of life are really at the core of this discussion on Transportation funding. With adequate funding we can improve upon these things that we all value. Without adequate funding safety, economic efficiency, and quality of life will start to become compromised. The Senate understands this and has put up their well thought out proposal. The coming fall legislative session in Harrisburg will determine the outcome for Transportation Funding in PA, and we at NESL along with many others in Central PA are hopeful that this important issue is resolved.