

*Blair County Chamber of Commerce*  
**TRANSPORTATION TESTIMONY**

*August 20, 2013*

*Altoona City Council Building*

*Testimony provided by:*

**Robert Kunselman – Chair**  
Blair County Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee

## TESTIMONY

Good afternoon everyone. I am Bob Kunselman of The EADS Group, Chairman of the Blair County Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee.

I am testifying today on behalf of The Chamber as we continue to support efforts leading to the passage of a Transportation Reform bill that will address the infrastructure needs of the Commonwealth for the short and the long term.

Based upon the findings of the Transportation Funding Advisory Commission, our Transportation Committee was one of the first business associations to formally draft a transportation reform resolution. That resolution, which very closely resembles the legislation that the Pennsylvania Senate overwhelmingly passed a few months ago, was approved by the Blair County Chamber Board of Directors in September of 2010 and was sent to Governor Corbett a year later. I have attached a written copy of my testimony for your review.

Our committee remains undeterred by the gridlock that appears to exist in the State Legislature regarding passage of a transportation reform bill and we appreciate this opportunity to be represented here today.

The economy of Blair County and, to a broader extent, the economy of our region is heavily influenced by the condition of our transportation infrastructure. Past investment of both state and federal dollars has made it possible for us to establish a strong retail and hospitality economy to replace the manufacturing economy lost to foreign competition. To allow that infrastructure to decay nullifies

much of that initial investment and compromises the ability of tourists and shoppers to visit here. A sound transportation system is essential for economic growth and long-term prosperity for the region.

As an example of the trend that has been occurring within the highway system alone, information obtained from PennDOT District 9, which includes Blair County, indicates that:

- The available funding for District 9 Infrastructure Improvements has decreased by \$55.3 million, or 39.7% from 2003 to 2013.
- Funding for maintenance operations in the District has decreased 60% since 2003.
- In Blair County, at the end of 2012, there were 37.1 miles of PennDOT owned roads that were classified as poor. Without additional funding, that number is projected to grow to 162.2 miles by 2024.
- Even with implementation of funding thru Senate Bill 1, the number of poor roads in Blair County is projected to increase to 48.7 miles.

Our area also has a considerable number of people employed by companies that do road construction and highway maintenance. That potential loss of jobs is also an economic blow, as many of those jobs pay family-sustaining wages.

Beyond the local impact is the obvious reality that Pennsylvania cannot afford to diminish its reputation as a destination for visitors and businesses looking to potentially relocate here. Accessibility is a huge consideration in both cases and we are already losing ground in that regard.

On behalf of the Chamber, I applaud the State Senate for its forward thinking in passing legislation that would begin to address a problem that grows in magnitude every day and I thank you for this opportunity to share the thoughts of our organization and its Transportation Committee.

Please count on our support as you look for allies in this critical effort to keep Pennsylvania strong.

## **Proposed resolution on transportation funding for the Blair County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors**

**Whereas** in May 2010, the Pennsylvania Transportation Advisory Committee's report on the Commonwealth's transportation system funding needs established that \$3.5 billion in new revenue annually was necessary to ensure the safe and reliable operation of all components of the Pennsylvania transportation system including highways, bridges and public transit systems; and

**Whereas** a healthy and well-maintained transportation network will improve the quality of life for our residents and will support economic development for our businesses; and

**Whereas** the Commonwealth is responsible for almost 40,000 miles of state-owned roads equal to that of New York, New Jersey, and all New England states combined; and

**Whereas** in July 2007, Act 44 was enacted with bi-partisan support in both the House of Representatives and the Senate to make improvements to Pennsylvania's transportation system partly through the tolling of Interstate 80; and

**Whereas** on April 6, 2010, the Federal Highway Administration made its final determination and rejected the Turnpike Commission's application to toll I-80; and

**Whereas** as a result of the rejection of the tolling of I-80, Blair County's Act 44 allocation for highways and bridges is \$4.1 million in the current year and will decrease by 63% to \$1.5 million next year; and

**Whereas** if no additional money is provided to replace these funds, Blair County and the Commonwealth will experience significant deterioration in its transportation infrastructure, including highways, bridges and public transportation, resulting in increased vehicular accidents, increased traffic congestion, and increased long-term costs of infrastructure maintenance resulting in decreased mobility for our residents and decreased competitiveness for our businesses;

**Now therefore** the Blair County Chamber of Commerce resolves to support a comprehensive, multi-modal transportation funding solution at the state level to include roads, bridges, public transportation, air, rail, ports, bicyclists and pedestrians that provides an adequate, dedicated, predictable and growing source of funding:

- Of \$3.5 billion in additional funding annually as supported by the Transportation Funding & Reform Commission (2006 report) and the Transportation Advisory Committee (2010 report);
- From revenue sources that could include reasonable increases in fuel taxes, vehicle registration fees and driver's license fees; removing the cap on the Oil Company Franchise Tax; and/or from public private partnerships, strategic borrowing and by shifting State Police funding from the Motor License Fund to the General Fund;
- With legitimate efforts to eliminate waste, fraud and corruption in all modes of transportation;
- With the caveat that all revenue collected must be used for transportation purposes.