

# **2013 Transportation Program Testimony**

**Presented to:**

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**

**PA Senate Transportation Committee**

**Submitted by:**

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**Altoona City Hall**

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Chairman Rafferty and Distinguished Members of the Pennsylvania Senate Transportation Committee, welcome to beautiful central Pennsylvania. Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony regarding impacts to our emergency services by proposed transportation infrastructure restrictions to Huntingdon County bridges.

It is common knowledge that Pennsylvania's needs in regards to its aging infrastructure remain significant, and Huntingdon County is not immune to the visible impacts of limited financial resources. In respect to the challenges your committee faces, I wish to convey my respect for the magnitude of your responsibilities as you determine infrastructure funding priorities.

Among the many potential issues associated with potentially restricting traffic on the bridges identified by PENNDOT, my testimony focuses particularly on the issue of community accessibility to fire and rescue emergency response. While these impacts are not unique to Huntingdon County, I am confident that the potential impacts we could realize are representative of those which will be realized by communities across the Commonwealth faced with similar restrictions.

Each fire department maintains legal agreements or other authorizations with municipalities that establish their response coverage area. As illustrated on the map, each station is shown with its coverage area shaded. Within each service coverage area, colored dots represent an addressable structure which is impacted in some fashion by the inability of a fire department to access its location. Response times are obviously the impacts of greatest concern, but are not the only impacts. For example, many of these structures are covered by homeowner's insurance policies whose pricing is based on, in part, the calculated actual loss within a zip code. If losses increase in a zip code due to inefficient response of fire apparatus, homeowner insurance rates could potentially increase across the span of a given zip code. Fire companies also rely on donations in our region for sustainment of their operation. If residents perceive that they are no longer being served to their expectation due to de-facto alterations of the existing coverage, donations may decrease at the same time as public dissatisfaction with their fire services may increase.

In order to assist you in understanding some potential impacts on emergency response time for such assets as firefighting and rescue apparatus, I have identified a few specific examples which highlight the difference in time from an existing coverage area's home station to the next available mutual aid station. Each example will show the current projected response time (at the posted speed limit) and the projected next alternate station response time using the same metrics.

**RESPONSE TIME EXAMPLES:**

In the Mill Creek coverage area: a structure at 10688 Heidel Lane, Mill Creek

Current Response Time	Projected Alternate Response Time	Difference
2.48 miles / 5 minutes	7.48 miles / 10 minutes	+5 miles/ +5 minutes

In the Marklesburg coverage area: a structure (the Juniata College Field Station / Shuster Center) at 14322 Field Station Road, James Creek

Current Response Time	Projected Alternate Response Time	Difference
5.31 miles / 12 minutes	16.24 miles / 26 minutes	+10.93 miles/ +14 minutes

In the Robertsdale coverage area: a structure at 570 Main Street, Robertsdale

Current Response Time	Projected Alternate Response Time	Difference
.26 miles / <1 minute	10.36 miles / 17 minutes	+10.1 miles/ +16 minutes

Based on projections and information available, lives could be affected or possibly lost due to potential delays in response. When considering the human, legal, economic and social impacts, in addition to the public sentiment regarding these potential response delays, there is an imperative to study the dynamics of abruptly restricting access to these bridges prior to implementation.

Across our County alone, there are 2289 total addressable structures in Huntingdon County which stand to suffer some form of impact due to proposed bridge restrictions.

**Structures affected by Bridge Posting**

- Markleburg Fire Company (706)
- Shavers Creek Fire Company (148)
- Shade Gap Fire Company (189)
- Mill Creek Fire Company (209)
- RWBT Fire Company (667)
- Stone Creek Valley Fire Company (306)
- Stone Creek Valley Fire Company (31)
- Three Springs Fire Company (33)

These do not include all potential impacts, as some fire service coverage areas are very large and, with multiple stations, alterations may be made to apparatus placement plans that could somewhat mitigate potential impacts. Some impacts that cannot be shown are certain specialty response assets that may travel from out of our area to support us (Urban Search and Rescue, PEMA, National Guard, etc.) PENNDOT heavy equipment and personnel also play key role in emergency response and disaster recovery that cannot be adequately replaced with local resources. It is also appropriate to express concern that, during common flooding events, these bridge restrictions may further impact response time delays as some mutual aid resources from outside of the home coverage area may not be able to access some locations through the alternate routing at all. It is a terrible feeling to be helpless and know that the professional responders you rely on cannot reach you with needed resources to help.

A particularly special feature of Huntingdon County is the rural nature of our communities. Agriculture, tourism and forestry are some of our important contributions to Pennsylvania's economy that are among the many other users of our bridge network. In order for Huntingdon County to maintain its interconnection with the broader Pennsylvania economy, these industries among others must be able to move commodities and resources in and out of our community. Should these and other key industries in our communities suffer due to inaccessibility, resources (both financial and personnel) currently available to sustain our predominantly volunteer emergency services will diminish. Our emergency services already invest, in some cases, more time in fundraising than in training out of necessity and cannot afford this potential loss. Any negative impacts that reduce the capacity of our communities to sustain their economy will be translated into tangible, potentially crushing effects on our already strained volunteer response system. I respectfully request this committee considers the symbiotic nature of our rural County's network and the impact it has on the greater state of resilience for our Commonwealth as you consider your future urgent investments to preserve our existing bridge network. Most importantly, I ask that you consider avoiding the necessity of these restrictions by any reasonable means possible, including but not limited to, investment in critical repair and preservation activities to maintain access throughout our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the concerns of our emergency services, and for your efforts to ensure the safety, welfare and future of our communities. Please also accept my appreciation for the outstanding service we receive from our local PENNDOT maintenance district staff. Pennsylvania is blessed to have so many dedicated professionals in PENNDOT standing ready to respond to the needs of our communities. I wish to extend to all of you an invitation to spend some time taking advantage of the beauty and hospitality that our region of Pennsylvania has to offer.