

Pennsylvania Senate Transportation Committee
August 20, 2013, Altoona City Council Chambers, Altoona, Pennsylvania
Testimony of Honorable Jeffrey Thomas

Honorable members of the Pennsylvania Senate Transportation Committee.

Good afternoon. My name is Jeff Thomas. I serve as a Huntingdon County Commissioner as well as Vice-President of the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission Board of Directors and Vice-Chair of the Southern Alleghenies Rural Planning Organization's Rural Transportation Coordinating Committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony today on behalf of the Southern Alleghenies. As a public official it is my duty to emphasize the need to address the transportation infrastructure crisis and the obvious necessity for passage of a comprehensive transportation funding bill as was embodied in Senate Bill 1. I hasten to add that the Southern Alleghenies Board has adopted several resolutions in the past two years, including a resolution supporting Senate Bill 1. The situation is of critical importance to Pennsylvania's economic development future.

It seems as though Pennsylvania has been debating how to address funding of transportation systems forever, and while I don't want to repeat in any great detail how we've reached the current impasse, it is worth noting for the record the last six years' history of frustration.

- In July 2007 former Governor Rendell signed Act 44 into law.
 - This created a partnership between PennDOT and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission to lease I-80 to the Turnpike Commission for a period of 50 years. The Turnpike Commission was to provide annual payments to PennDOT for various transportation uses statewide.
 - Act 44 was to generate revenue via:
 - Tolls on I-80,
 - Increases in Turnpike tolls,
 - Debt financing, and
 - Savings on I-80 maintenance.
 - In total, Act 44 was projected to generate an additional \$750 Million the first year, and an additional \$900 Million per year by year four.
 - Under Act 44, the four –county Southern Alleghenies RPO region of Bedford, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset Counties was projected to receive 2.73% of this additional highway/bridge funding. This meant an additional \$9.5 Million the first year, and an additional \$11 Million by the fourth year.

- To put this in perspective, the Southern Alleghenies RPO's yearly funding allocation in 2007 was \$38 Million. The additional Act 44 funding would have represented a 25% increase.

But in April 2010 the Federal Highway Administration denied Pennsylvania's request to toll I-80. As a result, the Southern Alleghenies RPO has seen an average of only \$3.7 Million in additional annual revenue from Act 44.

So where are we today? To answer this question I'll need to restate some recent facts. These are beyond dispute.

- In 2009 federal recession stimulus funding provided a one-time infusion of over \$26 Million for the Southern Alleghenies RPO. This funded 11 "shovel ready" projects, a good start to be sure.
- Federal SAFETEA-LU transportation legislation expired September 30, 2009. While this legislation was extended ten times, it also created continued uncertainty with predicting available future transportation funding.
- The Pennsylvania State Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) commissioned a report in 2010 to identify Pennsylvania's transportation funding needs.
 - This Committee Identified an annual "unmet need" of \$3.5 Billion for the entire transportation system, and this was projected to grow to \$10.7 Billion in 20 years.
- In April 2011 Governor Corbett established the Transportation Funding Advisory Commission) to develop a comprehensive strategy to address Pennsylvania's transportation funding needs.
 - This Commission met its reporting obligation and outlined potential revenue resources totaling \$2.5 Billion a year by year five.
- MAP-21, the current federal transportation legislation, was signed into law in July 2012. Although MAP-21 maintained relatively consistent funding levels, it is only a two year bill, causing continued uncertainty of available future transportation funding.
- Calendar year 2013 saw new and stronger state efforts to address this very real crisis.
 - Beginning with February 2013, Governor Corbett announced a plan to generate an additional \$1.8 Billion of transportation funding annually.
 - Senate Bill 1 was introduced in May 2013, projecting an additional \$2.5 Billion of transportation funding annually.
 - Unfortunately, neither plan has passed.

The real question today is “what now”? Without the immediate passage of a solid and comprehensive transportation funding bill the answer is not a pretty one as evidenced by the following facts:

- The Southern Alleghenies RPO’s annual funding allocation was \$32 Million on the current 2013 TIP update a decrease from 2007.
- One year remains before MAP-21 expires with Fiscal Year 2014; accordingly, federal transportation funding uncertainty continues.
- The average cost of a 100’ bridge replacement and the average cost of one mile of two-lane roadway resurfacing are by some estimates as much as 80% more than cost estimates in 2007. Moreover, the average monthly motor fuel tax paid by the average Pennsylvania driver is significantly eroded due to inflation, more fuel efficient engines and changing driving habits.

In terms of which projects are “on-hold” due to insufficient transportation funding, the examples are numerous.

- Peggy Westover Curve/Pleasantville Mountain Curve Improvement: This safety project would relocate a portion of PA 56 around a sharp, hair pin curve in northern Bedford County. Total project cost is estimated at \$56 Million.
- Wellersburg Truck Ramp: This safety project on PA 160 near Wellersburg in southern Somerset County was removed from the TIP due to lack of funding. Total project cost is estimated at \$1.3 Million.
- Route 22 Corridor Study Safety Projects just in Huntingdon County are all on hold, and include:
 - US 22 and PA 829 Intersection
 - US 22 and River Road Intersection
 - US 22 and 4th Street Intersection
 - US 22 and PA 453 Intersection
 - US 22 and Penn Street Interchange
- Waterfall Road and North Hess Road Intersection would make much-needed safety improvements in Taylor Township, Fulton County.

It was recently announced that weight restrictions will likely be placed on numerous bridges statewide.

- There are 40 State Bridges at-risk of new or increased weight restrictions in the Southern Alleghenies RPO region alone.
 - Bedford County has nine such bridges.
 - This includes the bridge over Barefoot Run on PA 56 west of Pleasantville, a major route between Johnstown and Bedford with 3,400 ADT and 375 trucks a day.

- Fulton County counts two.
 - These include the bridge over Barnett Run on U.S. 522 near Needmore, with 1,600 ADT with 160 trucks per day.
- Huntingdon County has 13 bridges likely to be posted.
 - These include a bridge over a branch of James Creek on PA 26 near Marklesburg with 2,500 ADT and 256 trucks per day.
- Somerset County counts 16 candidate bridges.
 - Included are two bridges on U.S. 30 near the Flight 93 Memorial entrance that sees 3,500 ADT and 485 trucks a day.

A quick review of structurally deficient bridges is equally disturbing.

- We know 16.9% of state bridges in the Southern Alleghenies RPO region are structurally deficient.
- Even worse, 43.3% of local bridges are structurally deficient and include, by Southern Alleghenies RPO counties:
 - Bedford County: 36 out of 86 (41.9%)
 - Fulton County: 12 out of 25 (48%)
 - Huntingdon County: 19 out of 56 (33.9%)
 - Somerset County: 43 out of 87 (49.4%)

One final area I believe warrants a few comments and this pertains to the Appalachian Development Highway System. For those of you not familiar, this System, designated in 1965, includes selected highways in the 13 Appalachian States, including U.S. Routes 22, 219 and 220 in the Southern Alleghenies region of Pennsylvania. Because of past transportation funding issues similar to the current situation, these three highways are not yet completed. Dedicated federal funding available for the past 50 years is going away, leaving these critical highways to compete with every other surface transportation project in Pennsylvania. I don't need to tell you that good highways mean economic development; that's why you are here today, so you know the importance I give to these critical roads. Route 220, known as I-99, is very nearly done. Route 219 needs funding for a final seven-mile segment to connect to I-68 in Maryland. Route 22 east from Blair County through my own home County of Huntingdon now seems like an afterthought. Designated Corridor M, U.S. 22 for years has been referred to as the "missing link". I refer to Corridor M now as "The Forgotten Link". We cannot let that happen. Our regional efforts to promote major Route 22 improvements that we know will ensure our citizens and their children an even chance for a prosperous future will never cease.

Honorable Members of the Senate Transportation Committee, I want to again express my appreciation for the opportunity today to offer testimony. Whether you're from Harrisburg, Philadelphia or rural Pennsylvania, we know that all modes of transportation are important and it's fair that all needs are addressed. So in closing I want to reiterate my willingness to assist and support passage of a Commonwealth transportation funding bill that meets both our immediate and long-term needs. The facts I have attempted to highlight speak for themselves and I challenge the Commonwealth's Legislature to do the right thing in the name of Pennsylvania's future.