

# COUNTY of BLAIR

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### **Pennsylvania Senate Transportation Committee**

### **Public Hearing on Impact of Lack of Comprehensive Transportation Funding**

**Altoona, Pennsylvania      August 20, 2013**

### **Testimony of Blair County Commissioner Terry Tomassetti**

Good Afternoon. My name is Terry Tomassetti. I am the Chairman of the Blair County Board of Commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Blair County on the vital need for comprehensive transportation funding, particularly with respect to our many bridges.

Blair County is a fifth (5th) Class County located in the south central region of Pennsylvania. It covers an area of 530 miles and it has a population of 127,089 residents pursuant to the 2010 U.S.Census. The County has 24 municipalities including fifteen (15) townships, eight (8) boroughs and the City of the Altoona. Hollidaysburg is the County Seat. These municipalities have approximately twenty-three (23) some fire departments, sixteen (16) police departments and 4 ambulance services plus three (3) hospitals, all of which underscore the vital need for adequate transportation funding for public safety purposes.

Blair County has sixty-five (65) bridges and six (6) roads for which it is responsible. Of those bridges, fifty-eight (58) are twenty (20) feet in length or longer. We currently have two (2) closed bridges, twelve (12) posted bridges and thirty-five (35) structurally deficient bridges. Reports available as of 2011 indicate that we also have twenty-three (23) functionally obsolete bridges, fourteen (14) of which were also structurally deficient.

County-wide there are a total of 112 bridges having a length of 20 feet or greater. Seventeen (17) of these bridges are posted and fifty-three (53) are structurally deficient.

Regionally in the six county area included in PennDOT District No. 9, there are sixty-seven (67) posted county bridges and ninety-nine (99) structurally deficient county bridges. These numbers give further support for the need to provide funding alternatives to counties to meet the ongoing concerns of public safety, commerce and daily living.

County governments are limited in their revenue sources. As opposed to school districts and municipalities, county tax revenues are limited to real estate property taxes. For example, we do not receive income taxes or real estate transfer taxes to meet our financial burdens like school districts and municipalities. We must rely -- too heavily, quite frankly -- on taxing the homes and business properties of our residents.

Like most counties, Blair County is subject to a 30 mill maximum with respect to real estate taxes. We are now taxing our residents at the 27.5 mill level, leaving little room and additional revenue to meet our expenses. It is unrealistic to

expect that Blair County, as well as other counties, would have the ability to meet the significant cost of road and bridge repair and replacement, left to its own taxing resources.

The three state sources of funding are helpful to meet ongoing minor repair and maintenance expenses. They do not, however, come anywhere close to providing the necessary funds for the maintenance, repair and improvement of our 65 bridges and 6 roads. In the past five years, Act 44 funding has annually averaged \$102,876.87. Act 13 Marcellus Shale Legacy funding has averaged approximately \$178,270 in each of the last two years.

The largest source of funding has been Liquid Fuels which totaled \$484,936 in 2012. This account currently has a balance of only \$190,350, although the second annual installment of approximately \$200,000 is expected in December of this year.

Blair County has indeed been fortunate to be included in PennDOT's pilot bundling project. Over the next two years, PennDOT will remove Bridge No 38 in Antis Township which has been closed for years and will re-deck 13 other Structurally Deficient/Functionally Obsolete county bridges. Without this state-funded program, these 13 bridges would have stayed on the Structurally Deficient/Functionally Obsolete list. Needless to say, the County could not have afforded the expense of performing this necessary work and we are deeply appreciative for being included in this project.

Notwithstanding our inclusion in the pilot bundling project, there remain many bridges that require attention. Bridge No 26 known as the White Bridge in Franktown Township would now have the highest priority for purposes of replacement. Unfortunately it includes a price tag of \$2.5 million to \$3.0 million

for design and construction. The next four highest PennDOT prioritized bridges carry an estimated overall price tag of \$325,000 for repair and \$4.5 million for replacement.

As matters now stand, counties do not have the resources available to meet these types of obligations. We must look to our governor and our state legislature to provide a plan for comprehensive transportation funding. The convenience of our citizens requires it. The desired growth in our economy compels it. Public safety - the primary obligation of government- demands it.

Thank you on behalf of the citizens of Blair County.