

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
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Chairman Rafferty and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, my name is Amy Sheaffer Wise. I currently serve as the Executive Director of Huntingdon County Business and Industry, Inc., the lead economic development corporation for Huntingdon County. I am pleased to join with others today from the 30th Senatorial District to present testimony here today.

Weight Restrictions and Deteriorating Roads

The impacts of not passing a transportation bill as of June 30th are going to be felt immediately in Huntingdon County. An alert issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDot) in early August highlighted over 1,100 bridges that have been identified for weight restrictions. Thirteen of these bridges are in Huntingdon County, with seven of them on primary highway arteries in the county. These restrictions will make commerce even more difficult in a county that already suffers from inadequate transportation. There are no four lane highways in the county. Rail freight options are virtually non-existent in the county. We do not have a public air or water port. Huntingdon County depends on our limited highway options for the movement of goods, services and people.

Weight restrictions and closures will directly impact commerce causing additional delays in movement of goods. These impacts will translate into higher costs which will be paid by the consumers as pass

through costs from companies. Individual motorists, school buses, and emergency responders will also feel a direct impact from these measures.

Businesses

While Huntingdon County has lost a significant portion of its manufacturing base, the county is still home to several large manufacturing firms. Each of these companies has expressed concern about the transportation situation in Huntingdon County. The county also has a significant number of forestry and timber companies that will be adversely impacted by weight restrictions and poor roadway conditions. There will be added expenditures and project delays that will result in the end user of their products paying higher prices for their goods and services. Marcellus Shale, and especially Utica Shale are both present in the county as well. If the weight restrictions had been in place just two years ago, the well drilling projects in the county may not have happened.

Jobs

Huntingdon County has lost nearly 1,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector alone since 2001. Additionally, a large number of Huntingdon County employees work for firms that are tied to the road construction industry. Many were laid off from their positions in 2012 and 2013. Many more face layoffs as a result of inactivity by the Pennsylvania legislature. The estimated layoffs that will occur in the highway industry and supporting businesses will most likely exceed 10,000 employees across Pennsylvania. A tremendous loss to an already stressed economy, especially when Senate Bill 1 has the capacity to save those 10,000 jobs AND add 50,000 new ones. As an economic development professional, this missed opportunity is extremely frustrating. The unemployment rate in Huntingdon County is 9.4%. This number does not even take in to account all those who have exhausted their

unemployment compensation benefits. Job opportunities are extremely hard to come by in the county. Even if a transportation bill passes in the fall, this year's construction season is a loss.

Refilling the Losses

Since the start of the recession in 2007, Huntingdon County has lost several prominent large businesses including FCI USA, LLC, Warnaco Distribution, and the majority of the workforce at AGY, Inc. In surrounding counties, the losses continue – Seton Corporation in Bedford County, New Holland Corporation in Mifflin County, and the list could go on. Three of those firms employed over 1000 people EACH at their height. Every single one stated that the lack of adequate access to quality highways played a role in their decision to leave.

As we try to recover from these losses and refill the empty manufacturing spaces, we struggle. Corporations rank transportation as one of their top three site selection criteria. The lack of highways places small towns in rural counties like Huntingdon County at a significant disadvantage. Businesses will continue to consider relocation to areas with less expensive connections to markets.

Route 22

The delay in addressing the funding issue will mean that a maintenance only approach will continue as there is not enough funding to adequately address the needs of the current infrastructure system. Capacity add projects will stay on the shelf and development will be delayed many more years in to the future. Our complex system of state and federal funding combined with the regulatory process require a significant lead time from project initiation to construction/completion. Capacity-add projects can require ten years or more of planning before they ever reach the construction stage. Areas like Huntingdon County will continue to struggle with access to adequate highways and this in turn has a

direct impact on the economy. Pennsylvania missed a tremendous opportunity to utilize federal funds to complete ADHS highways at a time when ADHS had money to utilize on projects. Due to a change in Federal Law several years ago, Pennsylvania was responsible for a 20% match for ADHS projects. At the time, ADHS projects STOPPED because Pennsylvania could not fund the match. US Highway Route 22, identified as Corridor M in the ADH System, is a prime example. The corridor is four lane complete to the Western side of Blair County and four lane complete through a portion of Mifflin County. However there is a sixty-one mile stretch, often called the "Forgotten Corridor" through Blair, Mifflin and Huntingdon Counties, that may never see expansion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to thank the Senate Transportation Committee and its Chairman – Senator Rafferty for their work on getting Senate Bill 1 completed. I am encouraged by the bi-partisan actions of the Senate to move this bill forward. HCBI, through partnerships with local organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and the Visitor's Bureau, as well as through its state partnerships with groups like the Pennsylvania Manufacturing Association and the Keystone Transportation Funding Coalition, will continue to be an advocate for transportation funding. The investment in infrastructure is vital to economies of all size in Pennsylvania. Huntingdon County has tremendous assets to offer businesses of all size – a solid workforce with a reputation for being hardworking, property taxes that are extremely reasonable, nationally ranked institutions of higher education at all levels, low crime rates, stable weather conditions that are not prone to large scale natural disasters. Transportation is the missing link. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.