

# MAYOR'S OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION AND UTILITIES



## **TESTIMONY TO SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

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CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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Good morning, Chairman Rafferty, Ranking Member Wozniak and members of the Senate Transportation Committee. My name is Rina Cutler, I serve as the Deputy Mayor for Transportation and Utilities in Philadelphia. I want to start by commending you and your Senate colleagues and all of the elected officials in the Southeast Region for trying to advance a serious measure to address the transportation needs of the Commonwealth.

The Philadelphia region's transportation challenges are significant. Much of our interstate system –especially the structures – is reaching its useful life and needs to be reconstructed. Thirty two percent of the City's 193 bridges are structurally deficient. Our expansive transit system needs continued capital investment. Many of our most critical freeways are becoming increasingly congested with "rush hour" type congestion spanning more hours each day. What the City and region faces is not unique, but how we respond could place our region and the entire state at a competitive advantage or disadvantage compared with regions across the nation and around the globe. Global economic forces demand that we compete at higher and higher levels of efficiency and connectivity. Insufficient investment in our transportation infrastructure threatens to jeopardize the economic competitiveness of the Philadelphia region, and therefore, ultimately the Commonwealth.

As you know too well, our roads, bridges and transit system need to be fixed. Without repair, replacement and maintenance, they will deteriorate until they can no longer be used. There are only four options: repair it, replace it, close it or let it fall to the ground. That is not a political issue, "it is an engineering reality." How to pay for these repairs however is a political matter. Since there is near universal agreement about the scope and extent of the problem, working in a bi-partisan manner across both houses and with the Governor's Office is the only way this

issue will get addressed. It will take a great deal of political courage to get this done.

I applaud the work of the Governor's Transportation Funding Advisory Commission and the Senate for rejecting a head-in-the-sand approach and engaging in these transportation infrastructure challenges by presenting a revenue and investment plan that could place Pennsylvania and our region on a firm foundation for economic growth. The Advisory Commission's report recognizes that this will not be inexpensive. The report presents a strategy that is both reasonable and realistic.

I would like to share the city's perspective on a number of the proposed legislative action recommendations for the Senate to consider as it advocates for the proposals.

### **Supporting Transit**

The passage of Act 44 in 2007 breathed new life into SEPTA and the increase in ridership due to this investment is significant. As a member of the SEPTA Board, I am gravely concerned when I hear the words transit and welfare in the same sentence. Combining the Pennsylvania Public Transportation Trust Fund into a single pool has provided SEPTA with the breathing room to focus on customer service, advance long planned capital projects and engage in thoughtful planning for capital investments. The Commonwealth must support converting the planning for capital investments into actual investments. We must work together to continue to support SEPTA's and other public transit agencies planned capital investments in rolling stock, station improvements and fare payment systems. From the City's perspective there is no greater economic development tool than a first class transit system. These investments are critical to all of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Philadelphia and ultimately the Commonwealth. Moving people from home to work within the five county region is a necessity – not a luxury.

Due to excellent transit connectivity, Center City is easily accessible to the nearly 245,000 residents from outside of Center City who work downtown. The overwhelming majority, 69.5%, of non-Center City residents arrive at work by public transit; only 19.8% report commuting by car, well below national averages. Depriving SEPTA of funding would bring this region – the economic engine of the Commonwealth – to a grinding halt. No Pennsylvanian can afford for that to happen.

The City strongly supports a dedicated funding source for mass transit and welcomes the Advisory Commission recommendation to direct all required Act 44 payments to transit and to transition all Act 44 payments currently used for transit

operating revenue, to be used for capital projects. In the absence of legislation that allows each of Southeastern Pennsylvania's counties to raise new revenue for transportation, the City supports the current 15 percent local match for transit and would oppose any increase.

### **Local Option Revenue for Transportation**

The City supports enabling legislation that allows local government the option to raise revenue to support transportation investments. Across the United States, voters from rural areas to the nation's largest cities have voted to tax themselves to support investment in public transportation and highways. Pennsylvania voters and municipalities deserve the same chance. However, this legislation must be accompanied with the requirement that PennDOT maintain or expand its efforts in the local areas that elect to raise additional revenues for transportation.

### **Conclusion**

Our infrastructure is in terrible shape and getting worse. We must make investments in our roads, in our transit systems, in our airports, and our freight transportation infrastructure as well as ports and water and sewer systems. The region's economy is critically dependent on an efficient and well maintained infrastructure system. Our current highway and transit systems are gifts given to us and paid for by previous generations. We have an undeniable responsibility to pass these assets on to future generations in good condition. Those who purport to oppose any increase or new taxes must recognize that opposition to investing in our transportation infrastructure is imposing costs to today's taxpayers and increasing the taxes that our residents and businesses will pay in the future. There are two choices – pay more and improve the system or pay no more and accept the costs of the woefully inadequate service we have now with the much worse to come.

I hope that the Senate will help advance a transportation bill this session with your colleagues in the House and the Governor. The City and the Metropolitan Caucus of Southeastern Pennsylvania stand ready to support genuine efforts to address our transportation infrastructure challenges. For those of you who may not know the Metropolitan Caucus, it is a bipartisan convening body of elected executives from the five counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The caucus meets regularly to collaborate around issues of common interest and develop a shared regional agenda. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.