



Testimony of County Executive Rich Fitzgerald before the Senate Transportation Committee
Public Hearing on Reforms & Investments to Advance Transportation Innovations

Good morning, Chairmen Langerholc and Sabatina and members of the Senate Transportation Committee. As County Executive and the current Chair of the Southwestern PA Commission, I welcome you to Allegheny County and to the SPC offices where this hearing is being held. Thank you for the invitation to join you today and to offer testimony on reforms and investments to advance transportation innovations in Pennsylvania.

The committee had the opportunity on Thursday to see demonstrations of some of the vehicle technology our region has to offer. As you heard, the work in these areas continues and is much broader than can be shown in a few hours. These innovations are moving forward rapidly. We welcome those developments and have partnered with companies to make our county an opportune place for that work.

For policy makers in Pennsylvania, including this committee, it is imperative that the laws, policies, rules and regulations also adapt just as quickly to ensure that this Commonwealth can fully take advantage of the intellectual capital here. We will continue to lead in the research and development of transportation technology and innovation, but we should also benefit from the capitalization and deployment of these efforts. As a state, we should want to be home to all of these efforts – from cradle to grave, if you will.

We are thrilled to be a hub of companies working on the development of self-driving vehicles. Companies like Aptiv, Argo AI, Aurora (which recently acquired Uber’s Advanced Technologies Group), and Locomotion along with related support businesses including the Ehrlichman Group, Koop Technologies, and others call our region home. Yes, other states also have ecosystems supportive to autonomous vehicles, but we continue to see investment in the businesses in Pittsburgh (and PA). Your continued attention to these needs will ensure that they remain here. We must remain competitive to keep those businesses here and that requires forward momentum.

The future of self-driving vehicles is limitless. Imagine a future where residential or commercial developments do not need to provide for parking garages or parking areas because a driverless vehicle can take tenants to and from their workplace each day – or to any other location they may wish to go. Now apply that technology to buses, delivery vehicles, trucks, shuttles and yes, even airplanes, thanks to the partnership of Ansys and Airbus and companies like Near Earth Autonomy. While the work of PennDOT and its AV Task Force has done significant work to frame what the development of those

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

companies may look like, it has also stalled. Today, these companies are still left on test tracks rather than having the opportunity to test and improve their vehicles with real-world operations.

We have seen action on a similar technology with the enactment of Act 106 which establishes basic rules for the operation of Personal Delivery Devices (PDDs) in the state. While limited to small radiuses and having different parameters for use than vehicles, the effort focused on enhancing public safety while embracing new technologies. That work can serve as a model for other initiatives that would allow for the deployment of technologies, tools and resources. Its success in complementing and supplementing the existing workforce while also creating new jobs in other fields is a success story for Pennsylvania.

Over the last 5-10 years, we have also seen a shift in vehicle transportation that also makes a broader conversation about transportation infrastructure even more important. Not everyone wants their own vehicle. In fact, our county and region has seen a growing number of young people who have no interest in owning a vehicle or, in some cases, even knowing how to drive one. Instead, they are seeking neighborhoods that have pedestrian access, bicycle lanes, trails, a robust transit system and more.

As a result, we have seen the expansion of bicycle share programs like HealthyRide and the addition of e-scooters like Scoobi to neighborhoods. Rather than displace other modes of transportation, unique partnerships between those companies and our transit agency, the Port Authority of Allegheny County, for last-mile connections have embraced opportunities. For instance, by using one's ConnectCard, a user can also get a free 15-minute ride on HealthyRide to connect a person to their workplace or home, or any other location.

Our region is also fortunate to have so many colleges and universities focused on encouraging and supporting the intellectual capital in its students. They have developed additional transportation-related technologies. As one example, consider smart roads and signaling, developed through the work of Carnegie Mellon University's Traffic21 Research Institute. The Institute's goal is to design, test, deploy and evaluate information and technology-based solutions to issues facing transportation systems and the Pittsburgh region serves as a learning lab for that research.

In 2011, the sensors, antennas and connective traffic signals were installed in Penn Circle in the City of Pittsburgh to allow for the traffic to be "watched" at each intersection. The data collected then allowed for ongoing adjustments for traffic to move in the most efficient way. By doing so, traffic congestion eased and air quality improved. That work served as a springboard for even more opportunities using smart roads – including research into roads that can communicate with vehicles and people on a constant basis.

Roads are the foundation of today's transportation system. With the support, championing, and deployment of smart mobility options, roads can talk to traffic signals, bicycles, pedestrians, and vehicles. They can store and generate energy. They can monitor and mitigate weather impacts to further increase safety. With organizations like Traffic21 and others envisioning additional innovations, roads will continue to serve as a foundation of our transportation system for generations to come, which brings me to my final point.

We must invest – today – in our transportation infrastructure. To do nothing is no longer an option. Instead, it's the most expensive choice. Each day that we delay, the impact on our roads, bridges and transit providers continues to compound, as does the cost to address these needs. Investment in our infrastructure is imperative for our economy and the health, safety and welfare of our residents. Even in the strictest interpretation of infrastructure, the lack of investment and attention cannot continue. If it does, we will never be able to battle the backlog of work. When you add in other infrastructure needs like water systems, ports, utilities, and broadband, it's very clear that we can no longer kick the can down the road.

In my over 20 years in elected office, both part-time and full-time, I've never met an elected official who relishes the idea of raising taxes or fees. And the conversation surrounding infrastructure needs has certainly not created any exceptions. But it must be done. Just like with our own households, when we identify ongoing maintenance or new capital needs, we must find a way to pay for those needs – either through new revenues or by figuring out how to increase our existing revenues. We need to take action now before our households collapse around us.

Let me be clear. Local officials are not asking the state legislature to make these difficult decisions and then to take even more difficult votes. We are asking for sustainable revenues that can be relied upon for infrastructure needs – and we are asking you to give local officials those options so that they may choose the ones that work best for them. We are a large state with many different interests and needs. What works in Allegheny County may not be of interest to officials in Cumberland County or Wayne County. By providing local officials with options, we can make the decisions that are best for our communities. With choices, we can invest in our network, making it safe for our residents and businesses, and ensure that it is there for generations to come. And for the transportation future to come.

Thank you for allowing me to offer this testimony to you today. I welcome your questions and the discussion about this important issue.