



**Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority**

1060 Lehigh Street, Allentown, PA 18103  
Phone 610-435-4517 – Fax 610-435-6774  
[www.lantabus.com](http://www.lantabus.com)

October 1, 2024

Testimony Provided By:

Owen P. O’Neil  
Executive Director  
Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority  
1060 Lehigh Street, Allentown, PA 18103

Good morning, my name is Owen O’Neil, I am the Executive Director of the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority, or LANTA. LANTA is the regional public transportation agency for Lehigh, Northampton, and Carbon Counties. We provide fixed route bus service and human services paratransit service throughout the three counties. LANTA utilizes a fleet of 95 full sized transit buses and 85 paratransit vehicles to carry between 15,000 and 20,000 passengers each day allowing Lehigh Valley residents to travel to and from work, school, medical appointments, grocery shopping, and all other life needs.

The purposes of my remarks today are to, first, provide a picture of the changing nature of transit and mobility in Pennsylvania, and second, to reinforce that transit is not just an urban issue, but instead affects and benefits all communities in the Commonwealth.

In terms of the changing nature of moving people in our communities, historically, transit in Pennsylvania consisted of one of the nation’s five biggest transit systems in Philadelphia, a big city system in Pittsburgh, several small city systems, and rural shared ride systems.

The small city transit systems, of which LANTA has been one, have generally been characterized by a limited network of fixed bus routes operating on a service frequency of a bus once an hour or less – with some, but not all routes, providing service in the evenings and on weekends.

While this service model worked well for decades, and is still appropriate for many communities, there are many parts of Pennsylvania that have outgrown the small city service model. The Lehigh Valley is one of those places.

The Lehigh Valley has been transforming for the past few decades. Rapid growth in population, employment, and land development are combining to make the Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton area a major metropolitan area in its own right.

Population in Lehigh and Northampton Counties has grown by 100,000 people since 2000 and is projected to grow by another 40,000 by 2030 and will surpass 750,000 people by 2040.

Total Employment in the two-county region has grown faster than population with approximately 75,000 new jobs projected in the region by 2030. Since 2015, 46 million square feet of industrial space has been approved for development with another 23 million currently in the approval process. Also since 2015, 22,000 new housing units have been built with an average of 5,000 new units being proposed each year.

These growth factors have combined to create a dynamic \$50 billion economy in the Lehigh Valley, which has been globally recognized. Within the past month, the French newspaper Le Monde published an article highlighting the economic growth of the Lehigh Valley and realtor.com identified one of the valley's zip codes as one of the ten hottest zip codes in the country.

Governor Shapiro has repeatedly recognized the importance of the Lehigh Valley and the role it plays in the overall success of Pennsylvania. The Governor has called the Lehigh Valley "a driving force" in the economic growth strategy of the Commonwealth.

The continued success of the Lehigh Valley is important not just to our region, but to the Commonwealth overall. The residents of the valley recognize that and support the continued accommodation of economic growth. However, in our most recent regional comprehensive plan, Lehigh Valley residents underscored the importance of balancing this growth with maintaining the high quality of life we enjoy. This includes the continued development of our traditional city and town centers and protecting the system of trails, parks, farms, creeks, rivers, and nature preserves that are so present and accessible.

This balance requires a transit system that reflects the area it serves. The valley's regional comprehensive plan, FutureLV, recognizes this and identifies a vital role for local transit to play. To provide a transit system commensurate with the type of metro area the region has become, a network of high frequency routes is key. Bus routes operating every hour or less will no longer meet the needs of our growing metro areas. That is what LANTA has been working towards with the implementation of our Bus Rapid Transit type service, the Enhanced Bus Service network, or EBS. The EBS service is designed to develop a core set of high frequency bus routes connecting the major destinations in a more rapid way from one end of the Valley to the other. These high frequency routes connect to the legacy route network to allow for comprehensive mobility.

And while transit in the large urban and rapidly growing areas of the state seem fitting, it should not be construed that transit is not a statewide concern. Pennsylvania has a transit system in all 67 counties, and these services are just as important in the most rural communities as they are in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, or Allentown. LANTA is also the transit provider for Carbon County and we see firsthand the importance of transit there. Shared Ride services in rural counties are often the only transportation option for seniors, disabled or other special needs populations to access work, medical appointments or much needed social interaction. Transit also plays a role in the economic development of rural counties.

In Carbon County, we worked with the County to provide transit routes connecting satellite parking lots with the most popular tourist destinations during the peak fall foliage season. This service alleviated traffic, made parking more convenient, and greatly improved the visitor experience for the tourism market which is a key economic growth sector for the county.

The current funding mechanisms, and the funding levels they generate, will not keep pace with needs. Transit systems in our large urban areas, as well as the rapidly growing areas like the Lehigh Valley will soon be faced with difficult decisions and the need to reduce service without new resources. In the rural counties, it will be worse. The funding levels and model for Shared Ride service is unsustainable. Many rural shared ride systems are already running significant deficits which cannot be sustained. These systems will soon have to dramatically limit service or eliminate service altogether.

A comprehensive, long-term solution to funding for public transportation is needed. A solution that recognizes the different nature of our communities and allows for our transit systems to reflect that nature. The transit systems throughout the Commonwealth recognize that any solution must utilize all tools available to us, including strategies to maximize revenue and minimize cost, and we stand ready to be part of that solution.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Owen P. O'Neil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'O' at the beginning.

Owen P. O'Neil