



NARBERTH BOROUGH

100 Conway Avenue Narberth, PA 19072

www.NarberthPA.gov - 610.664.2840

September 19, 2024

Senate Transportation Committee

Michael Gaudini, Narberth Borough Council Member

Introduction

Chair Langerholc, Minority Chair Flynn, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee – thank you for the time, energy, and effort you are taking to study funding solutions for SEPTA and transit systems across Pennsylvania, and for the opportunity to speak with you today about how critical SEPTA funding is for our local collar county communities.

My name is Michael Gaudini. I'm a longtime SEPTA rider and a Council Member in Narberth, a half-square-mile borough in southeastern Montgomery County. Last month, our Borough Council unanimously approved a resolution of support to "respectfully convey its support for efforts to establish permanent and recurring funding sufficient to provide safe, clean, comfortable, frequent, and reliable service for the entire SEPTA network, including the Paoli/Thorndale line."

This is a pivotal moment for SEPTA. SEPTA has been making real progress on improving cleanliness and service levels – and has been bringing riders back into the system. But all of that progress hinges on SEPTA's ability to continue to operate. SEPTA currently faces drastic cutbacks that would severely impact our communities and make public transportation much less usable for many residents throughout the region. The work that this committee is taking on will ultimately define SEPTA's future – whether we can fund SEPTA and continue to build a frequent and reliable system that serves communities throughout southeastern Pennsylvania, or whether we will allow our transportation investments to languish.

The answer to that question will be critical for my own community of Narberth and for many other collar-county communities outside of Philadelphia – and I would like to use the remainder of my time to speak to why frequent and reliable SEPTA service is so critical for our residents.

Discussion

Like most train-station communities, Narberth has a lot of residents who take SEPTA on a 9-to-5 basis, during regular morning and afternoon commutes. These are the times where our residents see the highest level of SEPTA service – trains coming through frequently, picking folks up, bringing them to Center City in the morning, and then dropping them back off in Narberth in the evening.

Especially during peak hours, every time someone commutes on the train, that's one less person stuck in front of you during rush hour or trying to grab that open parking space. Not every commuter in the region has direct access to a SEPTA station, but every commuter benefits when more people start choosing to ride regional rail instead of driving.

That type of 9-to-5 commuting service is critical and needed, and is also one of the most visible ways in which SEPTA can benefit and sustain our local communities and our regional economies.

However, I would also like to take a moment to reflect on the many other transit needs in our local communities.

I think of our own local workforce – people trying to get to Narberth to work in our restaurants and shops. I think of stories I've heard of someone missing a train because they had to spend a little extra time finishing up their work in the evening and then having to wait around for an hour or more just to start their nighttime commute home.

I think of the mom trying to figure out how her daughter can reliably get to her new job and back during off-peak hours, when the trains do not have the funding for frequent and reliable service.

I think of all the people who use SEPTA to visit friends and family, to go to restaurants and shops, and just to travel around the region – friends who come to visit me in Narberth by taking the train, so that we can grab dinner and drinks. Every time someone makes that trip on the train, they're helping support our local Narberth businesses – and are doing so without having to compete with patrons for limited parking.

I think of the roughly half of Narberth households – according to Census Bureau data – that have either no car or only one car – and how frequent and reliable SEPTA service could help them take short trips to the grocery store or to run errands.

I think of all the people who do not regularly take SEPTA right now but have told me very similar stories time and time again – that they want to take SEPTA but they need it to come more frequently so that they can rely on it. That includes connections, as well – because when the trains are more frequent and reliable, you are able to more easily transfer to other lines – and then you are really able to tap into this system's full economic and mobility potential.

And, speaking from my own firsthand experience, I think of my fiancé, who has a pain condition that can flare up in situations in which she is experiencing physical stress for extended periods of time.

We have found that she can easily use transit when it is frequent and reliable. For her, frequency and reliability suddenly makes the entire transit system usable.

To put that into perspective, if we are even slightly delayed in getting to the station, she cannot physically sprint to catch the train. And when missing the train by 30 seconds means a one-hour wait, which raises the likelihood that she's going to find herself in a pain flare, that makes the entire system less usable for her. It makes it into a 'sometimes' system rather than an 'everyday' system. But that equation changes when the service is safe, frequent, and reliable – it allows SEPTA to be an 'everyday' system, both in the city and across the collar counties.

Conclusion

I believe that type of frequent and reliable system is within our power. We are very fortunate to have inherited a truly impressive network of rail lines and other transit infrastructure. You look across the country and many other cities are playing catch-up to try to build out the type of infrastructure that we already have.

Our predecessors – leaders in the private sector, in the General Assembly, and at the local level – have gifted us these major infrastructure assets, which they spent decades building. Our challenge is to put that infrastructure to good use – to fund this critical service such that our residents can use it frequently and reliably.

Thank you again for your time, and for your work on this important subject – and I hope we can count on your support to help fund these critical services for our residents.

**BOROUGH OF NARBERTH
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PA**

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-15

A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF ESTABLISHING PERMANENT AND RECURRING FUNDING FOR SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA TRANSIT AUTHORITY (SEPTA) SUFFICIENT TO PROVIDE SAFE, CLEAN, COMFORTABLE, FREQUENT, AND RELIABLE SERVICE FOR THE ENTIRE SEPTA NETWORK, INCLUDING THE PAOLI/THORNDALE REGIONAL RAIL LINE

WHEREAS, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)'s ability to operate safe, frequent, reliable rail service is important to Narberth's local economy and to the ability of Narberth residents to move around southeastern Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, Narberth Station, a station on the Paoli/Thorndale regional rail line, is located at the heart of the Borough and was critical to Narberth's growth and development in the early 20th Century as a community with a mix of residential and commercial uses as well as to its incorporation as a Borough – and remains important to Narberth's local economy today; and

WHEREAS, Narberth residents use the Paoli/Thorndale line to commute to work, visit friends and family, travel to shops and restaurants, and for day-to-day transportation needs, among other things; and

WHEREAS, as a compact, developed community, there are few spaces available in downtown Narberth to accommodate substantial additional parking as the region continues to grow – which increases the Paoli/Thorndale line's long-term importance for Narberth's businesses and residents; and

WHEREAS, the Borough has approved policies that will help support Paoli/Thorndale line ridership, including: approving new transit-oriented housing opportunities in downtown Narberth that allow more people to live a short walking distance from Narberth Station and downsize their number of household vehicles, planning for accessibility and pedestrian improvements to the public space immediately adjacent to Narberth Station, and planning for a strong active transportation network that can help residents more easily walk and bike to Narberth Station and other SEPTA stops (through the Lower Merion and Narberth Active Transportation Plan and the Main Line Greenway planning); and

WHEREAS, Narberth Station currently needs significant accessibility improvements in both the underpass access tunnel and at the platform to further support ridership and ensure that all residents, including those with varying needs and abilities, can safely and comfortably access our public transportation system; and

WHEREAS, SEPTA is in the process of implementing the Bus Revolution plan, which will run the 44 bus less frequently and reroute it farther away from most Narberth residents and from

downtown Narberth businesses – increasing the Paoli/Thorndale line’s importance as the only remaining transit option accessible to most of the Narberth community; and

WHEREAS, SEPTA recognizes the importance of the regional rail system and is working to support ridership and access for residents of all ages and abilities through its Station Accessibility Program, which aims to make stations “more accessible for all, including seniors, anyone with mobility disabilities, and those with baby strollers or groceries;” and

WHEREAS, SEPTA service levels declined meaningfully during the COVID-19 pandemic and have not yet fully recovered – and are at risk of declining even further due to the expiration of pandemic relief funding; and

WHEREAS, the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) notes that transit frequency and reliability are directly related to ridership, noting that “If wait time and travel time vary significantly, or are routinely much longer than the scheduled time, passengers build this time into their transits, and transit becomes less useful for them” – and that, conversely, “Greater frequency and shorter trip times yields higher ridership, raising revenue and permitting still greater service frequency;” and

WHEREAS, the Philadelphia Inquirer’s Editorial Board has noted that “SEPTA receives significantly less local support than peer transit agencies. While SEPTA’s local funding amounts to roughly \$17 per person, peer regions — such as Boston, Denver, Chicago, and Seattle — are spending, on average, nearly \$70” and that “Service cuts and fare increases would only lead to fewer people riding SEPTA’s buses, trolleys, and trains, further eroding fare revenue and trapping the system in a doom spiral;” and

WHEREAS, NACTO states that “Transit service is most valuable for riders when it is always coming soon throughout the day, allowing riders to easily take both routine and spontaneous trips;” and

WHEREAS, the Narberth Borough Council is committed to working together with our local, state, regional, and federal partners to support mobility solutions that serve our residents and businesses and improve our quality of life;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Narberth Borough Council wishes to respectfully convey its support for efforts to establish permanent and recurring funding sufficient to provide safe, clean, comfortable, frequent, and reliable service for the entire SEPTA network, including the Paoli/Thorndale line.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Narberth Borough Council expresses its support for SEPTA’s Reimagining Regional Rail planning effort – and specifically for a goal of providing 15-minute, all-day frequency within the regional rail’s core system, including Narberth Station.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Narberth Borough Council expresses its support for SEPTA's Station Accessibility Program and looks forward to collaborating with SEPTA on future accessibility improvements to Narberth Station.

RESOLVED AND APPROVED this 15th day of August, 2024.

ATTEST:



Matt West, Borough Secretary

Narberth Borough Council



Frederic Bush, Council President