

September 18, 2024

Representative Kyle Wagonseller
Executive Director, Pennsylvania House Transportation Committee

Senator Nolan Ritchie
Executive Director, Pennsylvania Senate Transportation Committee

Senator Justin Gensimore
Executive Director/Policy Director, Pennsylvania Senate Transportation Committee

Part of NeighborWorks Northeastern Pennsylvania's mission is to create stable and vibrant communities, so we have a vested interest in ensuring safe and dignified transit for our local community. Establishing strong systems of safe connections to amenities and services for people of all abilities is central to this mission.

In West Scranton—where our team is leading the implementation of the West Scranton Neighborhood Plan, a 10-year strategy for improving the community—many residents walk, bike, and use the public transit system as a daily part of their commute to work, school, and other local amenities. Most of the amenities and bus lines that people access are located on the busiest and most dangerous roads in Lackawanna County. That includes Main Avenue and Luzerne Street in West Scranton, which were identified as two of the most dangerous streets in the state in the Commonwealth's recent Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment. Additionally, the roads that people use to access public transit are plagued by deteriorated and uneven sidewalks, faded crosswalks, lack of ADA-compliant ramps, inconsistent lighting, and a lack of covered bus stops. As a result, using public transit is not just inconvenient and unreliable but also dangerous.

The danger to active transit users is present every day, and we identify this as an urgent need. To address this, we have worked with various state and national entities and organizations to make minor safety improvements to temporarily make crosswalks more visible while funds are obtained for permanent solutions. We have had challenges navigating governmental systems to install quick-build temporary solutions. PennDOT sets the standards for roads in Pennsylvania and that results in municipalities following suit. However, those standards often make it difficult to respond to threats to pedestrian safety promptly and effectively. We hope to see updates to policy that makes these improvements easier and prevents these dangers from being created moving forward.

We have heard from many residents about their lived experiences trying to navigate the community without access to a car and using the bus system, walking, or rolling to commute. Residents have commented on the unreliability and inconvenience of the local bus system. Many people use public transit because they need it. Some people have expressed a desire to use the bus system, but that it is too inconsistent, inconvenient, and expensive to be a reliable alternative to using a car. Multiple parents have also expressed fears for their children who have almost been hit by people speeding or distracted driving while trying to get to school or walking to a park along Main Avenue.

A wheelchair user also shared their experience commuting along Main Avenue. This person often rides their wheelchair on the street rather than the sidewalk because of the extremely poor conditions. They reported difficulty crossing the street due to cars speeding, unmarked crosswalks, and unmaintained roads, ramps, and sidewalks. They had also reported falling over in their wheelchair while attempting to

cross the street on multiple occasions and had broken multiple ribs because of this.

Active transit users need to have safe and dignified access to their sidewalks, buses, and roads. Implementing policies and authorizing funding to ensure safe and dignified transit for people through all points of their commuter journey will have positive long-term impacts on our local economy, social cohesion, and sense of community safety.

Regards,



Shane K. Powers
President & CEO
NeighborWorks Northeastern Pennsylvania