



September 17, 2023

## **Senate Transportation Committee**

### **Optimizing Pennsylvania's Multimodal Transportation System**

Strong Towns Harrisburg Testimony

Amber Blaylock, Organizer

#### **Introduction**

Hello to Chair, Senator Wayne Langerholc; Minority Chair, Senator Marty Flynn; the Senate Transportation Committee; gathered transit agencies and officials; and the public. My name is Amber Blaylock, and I am an organizer for Strong Towns Harrisburg, a group dedicated to transportation equity in the Harrisburg metropolitan area. It is our goal to make our area more vibrant, connected and accessible by making it easier for everyone to get around safely. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony today.

I am a homeowner living in midtown Harrisburg. While I have a driver's license, I do not drive for neurological reasons. I work from home as a full-stack JavaScript developer, and like many people in Pennsylvania, I take public transit. I take public transit for activism to attend meetings and events. I take public transit for shopping, to get things from local businesses instead of buying them online. I take public transit when visiting Philadelphia, to get around just about everywhere. But unfortunately, more often than not, I don't take public transit, because I *can't*. I don't take public transit because it doesn't run at the hours I'd need to get there, or get home afterwards. I don't take public transit because it doesn't run on Sundays. I don't take public transit because the buses just plain don't run there.

And unfortunately, even when I am able to take transit, it can often be a difficult experience. Taking transit can mean wandering around in the dark looking for a bus stop that you'll never find, because there is no sign. Taking transit can mean standing an hour and a half at a stop in the baking sun and 90-degree weather with an armful of fabric and nowhere to sit, because you *just* missed the last bus getting out of Joann. Taking transit can mean trudging a half a mile in the snow along a road with no sidewalks, because that was the closest option to your destination. Taking transit can mean wasting half an hour at a kiosk at 30th Street Station in Philly because SEPTA's system is on the fritz again. Taking transit can mean my Dad having to call my Mom to pick him up at Giant, because he tried to take the number 12 bus home and somehow ended up on the *wrong* number 12 bus.

These experiences can give people the idea that transit is inherently flawed, or inefficient, or that it will never be anyone's first choice. But that's not true. I have been to places where the public transit has been amazing. I have taken transit in D.C., in Virginia, in New York City, in Massachusetts, and seen transit serving not as a neglected last resort, but as the backbone of a local economy. And these systems work not because of some fluke of geography, but because of the attention, development, and above all investment given them by the community.

Already, nearly 1 million Pennsylvanians use transit every day. With support, public transit in our state could be even more. But we need funding by whatever means necessary to stop service cuts and fare increases that have only increased since the onset of the pandemic. Ridership follows reliable service, and with proper investment Harrisburg and other communities can hire more drivers, expand routes, replace signs and seating, and run buses every day of the week. The measure proposed by Governor Shapiro at the beginning of this year wouldn't even raise taxes on residents! With reliable operating funding, we can focus on much needed upgrades. By investing in transit, we can invest in our communities' whole health. We can invest in ensuring that disabled folks can get the places they need to go; that our elderly can live full and independent lives well after they can no longer drive; that those who cannot afford cars can get to jobs and stores and doctors and just go visit friends without having to spend exorbitant Uber fees; that the air in our communities most impacted by traffic can be cleaner and our streets safer.

But we need your help. That's why Strong Towns Harrisburg asks the members of the House Transportation Committee and full Pennsylvania legislature to act before it's too late, and ensure that our vital transportation services are funded without service reductions or fare increases.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Pennsylvanians are counting on you to act to help save our transit. Please, don't let us down.