

Testimony to the Pennsylvania State Transportation Committee regarding House Bill 140 from Josh Krug, Deputy Director, Planning, Indiana County Office of Planning & Development.

From my perspective as a County Planner, this bill in its current form is very straightforward and to the point in its language and, in my opinion, the impacts that it would have on the planning, programming, and overall successful project development and implementation of multimodal/active transportation improvements in communities throughout the Commonwealth. I have organized my thoughts regarding the bill into eight key points of discussion.

The first point is that the bill will open the door to new possibilities as another “tool in the toolbox” for consideration during preliminary engineering and conceptual design to be considered by project managers, steering committees, and the public early on in the project development process. Project design concepts do not currently feature or propose parking protected bike lanes due to the fact that it would be illegal to implement them under the current law. Excluding them from consideration means that the concept will not be implemented even if it may be the most suitable alternative for a particular situation. Not every situation calls for or allows for parking protected bike lanes, and they are also not always going to be the best alternative based on engineering, safety, roadway geometry or other situational characteristics, but, again, the current law removes them from consideration from the start.

Second, introducing this change to the law does not change the planning and development process for multimodal/active transportation projects. As planners, we encourage and incorporate robust stakeholder and public participation into those processes. I can certainly speak to this from direct experience at both the local and county level as well as at the regional level in working with our partners at the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC). The Department of Transportation (PennDOT) has also evolved their planning, programming and project development process to include key stakeholders and the public through the introduction of PennDOT Connects, which I have personally seen the positive impacts of here in Indiana County.

Another key point of discussion concerning this bill is the way in which it promotes and supports the concept of Complete Streets. This widely adopted concept and policy focuses on providing a “complete street” that provides safe and convenient access to all practical users, as applicable, in a vast array of contexts across the spectrum from rural country roads to downtowns and urban built environments. Complete Streets is supported and promoted at the regional, state, and national level as a best practice in community/transportation planning. This additional tool will provide increased opportunities to implement multimodal/active transportation improvements that satisfy the Complete Streets policy and concept. Utilizing a grant from the Pennsylvania WalkWorks Program, White Township, Indiana County is developing a Complete Streets Policy to be adopted at the local level. Allowing for parking protected bike lanes to be considered as a possible improvement would be to the benefit of communities like White Township that are looking to implement a Complete Streets or similar policy.

From my experience, the concept of parking protected bike lanes is not applicable to only large cities and major urban centers, but rather there are potential suburban applications for the concept as well as potential uses in small to medium sized towns throughout the Commonwealth. Of course, this would only be in instances where it is the most suitable design solution to apply to a particular situation based on engineering and design principles. In 2018, Indiana County collaborated with Indiana Borough, White Township and the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) to complete an extension of the Hoodlebug Trail through the Township, IUP campus, and into downtown Indiana Borough. The concept of a parking

protected bike lane may have been considered and included as part of those improvements as the most useful improvement for the situation. It was not considered or presented as an option to stakeholders or the public due to the current law.

My next point regarding HB 140 is focused on parking as a contentious issue, especially in small to medium sized towns. Maintaining existing parking inventory, keeping parking in the same location, and minimizing the number of parking spaces moved or lost are often major determining factors in deciding whether or not to introduce multimodal/active transportation improvements into a community. Sometimes a project is not even considered or pursued by a municipality due to a proposed parking change and the perceived negative fallout or pushback from such an impact. Other times proposed parking changes may be received negatively by segments of the community, making it hard to reach consensus and move forward with implementing a multimodal project. Having one additional tool that would allow for more situational versatility in project design, potentially saving parking spaces while still allowing for multimodal/active transportation improvements to be introduced is another positive outcome of this bill.

Another benefit of the increased versatility that HB 140 will provide bicycle, pedestrian, and trail advocates as well as project planners, designers, and engineers is regarding the concept of Regional Trail Connectivity. This is another statewide and nationally promoted concept and goal that is mostly self-explanatory. Regional Trail Connectivity provides recreation, multimodal transportation, economic development, transportation safety, and even environmental benefits. At least from a Western Pennsylvanian perspective, connecting small towns that dot a mostly rural landscape is always an opportunity and sometimes a barrier in working to achieve the goal of connecting regional trail networks. Referring back to some of the other points already stated, adding tools to potentially address the challenges in connecting trails to and through communities and their built environments will make it easier to accomplish the important goal of increased Regional Trail Connectivity. It is also important to note and consider that the impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic spurred an increase in trail usage and bike sales.

This bill will enable designers and engineers to implement this new tool in the tool box, but only under the appropriate circumstances. I would expect that best practices specific to Pennsylvania as well as implementation and maintenance guides and other resources will be developed and shared at the state, regional and, to some extent, even the county level by agencies and organizations such as PennDOT (Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)), Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), and County and local planning commissions. This will ensure that parking protected bike lanes will be utilized more widely and appropriately with respect to safety and other considerations throughout the Commonwealth.

Along a similar line of discussion as the previous point, allowing for and implementing parking protected bike lanes is not without precedent, and there are many examples throughout the United States of successful multimodal projects featuring parking protected bike lanes. A quick search turned up examples in Madison, WI, Columbus, OH, and Modesto, CA, each in different types of built environments. Having existing examples as well as related safety data and experiential knowledge from other places that have already introduced these types of improvements is to the benefit of those looking to design and implement these as part of multimodal and active transportation projects here in Pennsylvania.

In summary, if House Bill 140 were to be adopted, communities and advocacy groups throughout the Commonwealth will more easily be able to advance multimodal and active transportation policy initiatives that they have and continue to adopt and commit to. I have provided discussion regarding eight key points relevant to the proposed bill from my experience and perspective as a County Planner for Indiana County and my time as a local planner for White Township, Indiana County. Of course, there are many other points of discussion and consideration, such as traffic, safety, engineering, and other relevant aspects. My goal was to shed light on some of the important impacts of the proposed bill from my perspective. I hope and expect that the others on the panel will be able to address some of the other important aspects to consider.