



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Testimony of

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Pennsylvania Department of Transportation

Public Hearing on Safety and Sustainability of Public Transit

Senate Transportation Committee

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Good Afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to share my perspective on safety and security in public transportation systems across the Commonwealth. Our investments in public transportation across the state are critical to a safe, and reliable transportation network that is essential to the economic vitality of the state. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's (PennDOT) involvement plays a role in funding safety enhancements at facilities and on busses, technology investments, and training through a collaboration with the Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association through PennTRAIN. Additionally, we have provided technical support to transit agencies by developing an easy-to-use public transportation safety planning template that meets all federal criteria. We review transportation safety as a part of our mandated Transportation Performance Reviews, which are conducted every five years and share opportunities for improvement and best practices.

PennDOT provides nearly \$600 million annually in state capital funding to transit systems as part of our Asset Improvement program. Transit agencies are encouraged to maintain a state of good repair in both facilities and busses. Over 87 percent of that funding is directed specifically to SEPTA and Port Authority, which they use to maintain and improve safety in their systems. In FY 2021-22, PennDOT funded 10 separate projects (outside of SEPTA and Port Authority) totaling more than \$3 million in federal and state funds across Pennsylvania that will augment safety and security of public transportation.

Projects included new camera installation and upgrades on buses and throughout facilities, improved lighting at transit facilities, enhanced access control at facilities, and IT/server upgrades. Additionally, as part of our Fixed Route Intelligent Transportation System Project, additional camera systems are being installed separate from agency capital requests. In the prior fiscal year, PennDOT funded eight safety/security related projects. Many agencies installed driver barriers/shields as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, using federal relief funds in 2020 and into 2021 which further protects drivers.

Agencies also receive over \$1.1 billion in state operating assistance to subsidize public transportation. This is just the state investment and does not include the millions of dollars in federal assistance that is used for operating and capital assistance. Driver training programs are funded using these operating dollars. Systems in larger urban areas can also use these funds for their own transit security or police departments. Public transit agencies often take advantage of nationally developed training for staff and operators to ensure their safety and that of the riding public.

One such training program is PennTRAIN, an award-winning collaboration between PennDOT and Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association (PPTA) to offer training on a variety of topics important to the public transportation industry. The curriculum is designed with public transit and PennDOT input to meet the needs of the transit industry. Training topics specific to safety run the gamut from conflict avoidance to Safety/Security/Evacuation procedures. As needs arise, PennTRAIN quickly adapts to offer additional coursework. The following is a sample of courses offered in the last year:

- De-escalation training;
- Awareness and assertiveness training;
- Conflict avoidance;
- CNG system inspector training;
- Accident investigation; and
- Certification training for Safety and Security Officers.

As a supplement to PennTRAIN, the State Association for Transportation Insurance (“SAFTI”), who represents 25 small urban and rural systems, provides additional training opportunities including partnering with PennTRAIN for accident investigation, catastrophic loss scenarios, de-escalation training, fatigue and other related safety issues. All members of the organization must meet robust risk management requirements to remain a member of good standing in the insurance pool- which includes annual safety inspections by a third-party risk management consultant.

Additionally, transit agencies have a long-standing partnership with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to conduct site visits and mock exercises, which provide real-world training on a variety of safety topics from minor workplace accidents to terrorism.

New federal regulations require urban transit agencies to develop a Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan, or PTASP. To assist our agencies, PennDOT researched and developed a federally approved template to help agencies understand how to create a Safety Management System. The planning document guides agencies to proactively create a safety culture through buy-in from employees. Agencies are encouraged to communicate their safety plans to stakeholders, including PennDOT and their local planning partners. PennDOT has also conducted one-on-one technical assistance to help agencies adopt the Safety Management System regime. While the federal rules only require agencies receiving federal urbanized area funding to implement the PTASP, PennDOT has encouraged all systems to adopt this strategy and culture.

Act 44 of 2007 requires PennDOT to implement a Transportation Performance Review (TPR) every five years at every transit system. PennDOT has identified safety as a critical review area. Each TPR has time devoted to exploring agency safety practices. PennDOT reviews specific safety data such as employee reporting systems, insurance claims, and worker’s compensation claims. The dollar values of claims are reviewed in comparison to other agencies. Outliers and atypical safety incidents are identified and discussed as part of the review process. These results are outlined in the agencies performance reports and agencies are required to report on areas of improvement.

PennDOT provides funding and technical assistance to transit agencies to deliver a service that is safe and reliable for the riders of Pennsylvania. In FY 20-21, they provided over 141 million trips on fixed route and nearly 2 million shared ride trips. At the worst point of the pandemic, ridership was down by 90 percent in some systems, yet transit agencies continued to offer service to the transit dependent, allowing people to continue to work, shop and receive healthcare services. Our transit workers are on the front line offering services to people who have no other options for transportation and for those who choose to ride to save money or improve the environment. Safety at our bus stops and stations, on our buses and in our facilities is everyone's responsibility.