

Opening Remarks – Confirmation Hearing

The Honorable Pasquale T. Deon

Senate Transportation Committee

October 24, 2022

Good morning, Chair Langerholc and Chair Flynn. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss my nomination as a Commissioner of the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission. It is an honor for me to have been nominated again by Governor Wolf to continue working to advance modern mobility improvements at the Turnpike for the benefit of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

I come before you having served through the terms of 4 governors and planning to serve during the term of a fifth. In this time, I and my fellow Commissioners have worked to guide the commission in expanding, rebuilding and restoring America's First Superhighway to its rightful place as one of the safest and most innovative roadways in the country.

When I began as a commissioner, we were just getting started with E-ZPass and the roadway was showing its age in very unflattering ways. Today, we have fulfilled several legislative mandates to expand the roadway and provide vital transportation funding to meet the mobility needs of the people of the Commonwealth. 153 miles of roadway have been rebuilt and widened from the New Jersey Line to Ohio and up the Northeastern Extension with another 23 miles currently under construction and 78 in design. We have removed significant bottlenecks and improved the driving experience on much of the current 565 miles of roadways under Commission responsibility.

The Commission is continuing to build new roads supporting vital economic development in Southwestern Pennsylvania, opening the latest addition of 13 miles of new road on the Southern Beltway and working to complete the Mon-Fayette Expressway.

We have been expanding access to the Turnpike in the east by adding and planning to add new interchanges in Bucks, Carbon and Montgomery Counties. An excellent example of the value of these new access points is at Route 29 in Chester County where hundreds, maybe thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in economic progress were created simply by being able to add one interchange. The potential under All Electronic Tolling to transform communities across Pennsylvania remains one of the top priorities for my time as Commissioner.

Also, we recently opened a direct connection to I-95 in Bucks County that starts the process of completing one of the only sections of the Interstate Highway System plans from the 1950's that remains unfinished. We have also begun the process of replacing one of the largest bridges in the Commonwealth, the Delaware River Bridge that we jointly own with the New Jersey Turnpike Authority.

While these accomplishments are worth celebrating, there remains a great deal to do going forward. As all of you know, the decision to move to all electronic tolling in 2020 has been both transformative and controversial. All Electronic tolling, soon to be followed by Open Road Tolling starting in 2026, was necessary part of our evolution and will enhance much of the progress I have discussed above. The number of toll systems nationwide that have converted or are planning to is growing each year. It is notable that the conversion of the New York State Thruway occurred in 2020 as well. The obvious and

controversial part of non-stop tolling is the chasing of payments from non-E-ZPass customers. This part of the process is that our decision was planned out and is revenue neutral to the Commission. We are still returning the total toll revenue that our financial plans predicted and the amount that allows us to maintain our commitments to the Commonwealth under Act 44. Even at maintaining 93.6 percent of paid transactions throughout the conversion, we are not satisfied with that status. The Commission has undertaken several aggressive programs to ensure payment from all customers. These efforts include utilizing the tools provided by the legislature under Act 165 to suspend registrations for those who fail to pay after \$500 in invoices have been ignored. We are working with DA's and outside counsel to find the best path to prosecute those who owe us larger sums of tolls. The General Assembly has been helpful in advancing House Bill 2139, which will enable us to go after more people who use the road but fail to pay for it. On the more positive side, we have reworked our entire invoice, after the suggestion from Chair Flynn, to make it more user friendly and add new ways to pay tolls including a cash payment network and an individual QR code that will allow quicker access to online payment tools. We are not done and I commit to you that I will ensure that we continue to maintain the trust of those who do pay their tolls by pursuing those who do not.

Finally, I must thank the legislature for making the hard choices in 2013 to responsibly restructure Act 44 by capping the funding requirement that has amassed \$7.9 billion in bond financed funding from the Commission to statewide transportation needs. Prior to the Act 89 amendments, the plan would have likely resulted in the inability of the Commission to maintain and rebuild our nearly 83-year-old roadway. I know no one likes the toll increases that have come with that contribution, but unfortunately, they will continue as the Commission works to pay down the massive debt accumulated for this purpose. The 5 members of the Commission continue to challenge our staff to both minimize budget growth and maximize innovation and modernization meet our mission in serving the Commonwealth. While toll growth has been a topic of many public discussions, it is important to note that the per mile toll rates for the Pennsylvania Turnpike remain in the middle of the pack nationally among all toll road systems.

As I noted at the beginning, much work remains to be done and with your approval, I look forward to continuing making our Turnpike, the finest, safest and most valued roadway in the nation.

Thank you,