

Testimony
to the
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
House of Representatives
Transportation and Policy Committees

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on Pennsylvania's transportation funding issues and, more specifically, their direct impacts in Berks County.

You've asked us to address the question "Do you believe that our public transportation and state highway and bridge systems are in a financial crisis?" Absolutely.

Berks County's highway system consists of 1007 miles of State highways. Of these, 402 miles or 40% of the pavement surface is rated as either Fair or Poor. Emphasis has been made in focusing surface improvements on the most heavily travelled roadways. Only 2% of our Interstate miles and 9% of our higher volume routes are rated Poor while 26% of the low volume routes have this same rating.

In 2009, PennDOT's District 5-0 estimated that \$82 million was needed to address these pavement surface needs. Berks County is scheduled to receive about \$16 million in base funds for all highway projects in FFY 2011. Assuming all of these funds were used just to address the current pavement needs, it would take over five years worth of funding just to catch up.

These figures only address the surface needs. More recent data provided to us indicates that over 55% of our Interstate and other National Highway System roadway miles are in need of repairs to their underlying base. Without the funding to address these needs, our surface improvements do little more than "paint rotting wood".

With regard to our bridges, there are 630 State-owned bridges in the County. Of these, 107 or 17% have been determined to be structurally deficient and it has become a routine occurrence to read of additional bridge postings and closures due to their deteriorating conditions. PennDOT's 2009 estimate to repair or

replace these was approximately \$250 million. Berks County is scheduled to receive about \$24 million in base bridge funding in FFY 2011. At that rate, it would take over 10 years worth of bridge funding to clear the backlog.

These figures do not include the additional lane miles or bridges that will fall into disrepair while we were spending all of our resources addressing the backlog. It also does not account for funds that will be required to address the needs of municipal roads and bridges in Berks County where nearly 1 in 3 municipally-owned structures greater than 20 feet in length are structurally deficient and the rate for municipal bridges with a length of between 8 and 20 feet, while largely undocumented, is expected to be at least as bad or worse.

The direct result of the I-80 tolling decision to the Reading MPO has been the immediate loss of about \$7.5 million per year or \$30 million over the next four years. These funds were targeted towards the restoration of six bridges and one complete bridge replacement on the US 422 West Shore Bypass as well as the replacement of one additional structure in Amity Township. It also resulted in the deferral of two betterment projects on sections of Interstate 78 valued at nearly \$5 million. On the transit side, it has meant that BARTA must defer five (5) bus replacements valued at \$2.4 million. Going forward, BARTA will continue to struggle to modernize its aging fleet of vehicles, maintain their existing assets, and provide service at reasonable costs to its users.

Another indicator of the situation that municipalities are faced with in our region came earlier this year when the MPO, in conjunction with PennDOT District 5, solicited municipal recommendations for the use of up to \$3 million that was proposed to be made available for use on local federal-aid eligible projects from an anticipated federal jobs bill similar to ARRA. With no advance notice and only five days to prepare and submit responses, 16 municipalities submitted 23 requests for projects with a total value of \$12.1 million. Nearly all of these candidate projects related to basic highway and bridge maintenance needs and

met program guidance. Unfortunately, the federal legislation has not been advanced and these projects will not proceed.

Not responding to this funding situation at this time is unacceptable. Our infrastructure continues to deteriorate. The ultimate cost of making necessary improvements continues to grow under the combined impacts of escalating construction costs and decreasing buying power of the dollars that are available. One of the great ironies of our current situation is that we are asking for this action at a time of nearly unprecedented levels of construction fueled by the Department's use of the first three years worth of full Act 44 funding and bond funding to implement its Advanced Bridge Program and the sudden influx of one-time federal funds under the ARRA program. The build up that these programs have created in the short run only makes the oncoming abyss that much deeper.

What will it take to get us out of this hole? Given the figures I discussed earlier relating to the backlog of needs to address pavement surface condition and structurally-deficient bridges in Berks County, a 50% increase in base funding would clear the backlog in about 17 years. Doubling the current base allocations would allow the backlog to be cleared in eight (8) years. I present this only to illustrate the magnitude of the problem. The Reading MPO has taken no action to prescribe either a specific goal for increased funding or a method to achieve that goal. It has continued to express a desire that whatever funding be generated occur in a way that is viable and sustainable, addresses highways bridges and transit, and is distributed in an equitable manner. We do not assume that the State will bear the full burden of this need alone but that it will work closely with our Federal partners to ensure the passage of new transportation funding legislation at their level. Since no one source generates sufficient revenues to cover all of our needs, a blend of options will be needed.

To this point my discussion today has focused exclusively on basic maintenance needs only. Our Draft Long Range Transportation Plan Update that will be

available for public review beginning next Monday identifies a list of over 40 highway projects relating to Safety, Mobility, Congestion Relief and System Modernization that can not be funded under the current scenario. These projects are valued at over \$850 million. I have come before some of you earlier during our presentations to the State Transportation Commission expressing our desires for projects. In each of these cycles we have continued to take our needs and break them up into smaller and smaller project phases in the hopes that at least some portion of them could be implemented within reasonable time frames. In some cases we have been successful – in others we have not. Additional funding beyond the basic needs discussed earlier would allow us to begin addressing some of these more significant needs such as: upgrades to the bridges, pavement and substandard interchanges on the US 422 West Shore Bypass through the heart of our urban area; improvements to US 222 North between Reading and the Lehigh Valley and to US 422 East to enhance our economic viability; and improvements to the US 422 West, PA 100 and PA 23 corridors and expanded transit services to ease congestion in our communities. We realize that the days of grand expressway building are over but any funding scenario that does not include at least some opportunity for modest capacity adding projects will lead to the stagnation or decline of our economies and communities as the efficient movement of people, goods and services will be compromised.

I thank you for your time and am available to answer any questions that you may have.