



JUN 17 2010

Civil Engineers & Surveyors

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June 14, 2010

Honorable Joseph F. Markosek
314 Irvis Office Building
P.O. Box 202025
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2025

Honorable Richard A. Geist
144 Main Capitol Building
P.O. Box 202079
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2025

Re: State Transportation Commission Hearing
Transportation Funding

Dear Representatives Markosek and Geist:

First let me echo the comments of other presenters at the Lehigh Valley hearing by thanking you for the opportunity to provide comments and your leadership on this very difficult issue. My purpose in writing is to respond to several questions by Commission members about our efforts to support your cause and, more specifically, what we recommend as a solution to the funding problem. As one small voice in a crescendo of voices of fellow professional engineers who understand all too well the severity of this problem, let me offer my opinion in the form of a "Your View" piece which appeared in The Morning Call.

On another point, you will recall Pete Terry's reference to my comment to him about a marketing plan. Having attended numerous transportation forums and hearings over the years, I have concluded that we will not win the hearts, minds and pocketbooks of the constituents unless we roll out a major public relations effort to convince the users of our transportation systems that we must move our country into the 21st century before we are "left in the dust" by other economies around the world. Let's be honest, if marketing can convince the American public to purchase bottled water at a ridiculously inflated price based on the simple premise of convenience, we can surely convince people through a well-orchestrated marketing effort that we must invest in our infrastructure, including transportation.

Thank you again for your leadership and willingness to listen.

Sincerely,

KEYSTONE CONSULTING ENGINEERS, INC.

William A. Erdman, PE

WAE/mgz

Enclosure

pc: House of Representatives Transportation Committee Members
Michelle Young – Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce
Peter Terry, PE – Benchmark Civil Engineering Consultants, Inc.
Attorney Bruce Davis

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YOUR VIEW

It's time to levy a gas tax to fuel critical improvements to nation's roads and bridges

April 8, 2010

Earlier this year, I attended the Engineer's Week banquet, where Andrew Herrmann, chair of the advisory council for preparation of the American Society of Civil Engineers 2009 Report Card, presented our most recent infrastructure grades. I will summarize the report card by stating simply that the infrastructure in this country is in deplorable condition. Yes, the infrastructure that America's Greatest Generation had the foresight to build has been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair by our generation, a generation I suspect that will not share the accolades of our predecessors when the history books are written. As an engineer, I find this very troublesome.

Although each and every one of us must accept our share of the responsibility for this sad state of affairs, I am most disappointed with the conduct of politicians in dealing with this problem. We elect our leaders to look out for our best interests and, in times of crisis, to make tough decisions. The greatness of our country is not built on a foundation of politically popular decisions but on those tough, unpopular decisions made by great leaders who had the foresight to rise above politics and become true leaders.

Let us focus on one aspect of infrastructure to assess our legislative progress -- transportation and specifically the gas tax. In the midst of collapsing bridges and deteriorating roadways, we are witnessing legislatures at all levels in a catatonic state of non-decision. Our legislators tell us we will not support a gas tax increase. I beg to disagree. If we dispel the rhetoric and focus strictly on the facts, I have absolute confidence that we share the same patriotic spirit that motivated the Greatest Generation to support its leaders when tough decisions had to be made.

What are the facts? My research reveals that our 2008 consumption of gasoline was 138 billion gallons per year. Therefore, a 25 cents per gallon increase in the gas tax would raise \$34.5 billion a year of additional revenue to address our infrastructure crisis. In addition, numerous studies have confirmed that infrastructure projects provide the "biggest bang for the buck" in creating jobs.

What would such an increase cost the average driver? For a motorist who drives a 20-mpg vehicle 15,000 miles per year, the 25-cent increase would cost \$188 per year, or about 52 cents a day.

Do you think the real estate agent who could sell a house to a gainfully employed construction worker would be willing to pay 52 cents a day for this sale? What about the unemployed carpenter or electrician who would be hired to build the house? Finally, what about the cadre of unemployed workers who would manufacture and sell the materials and products to build and furnish the house?

I submit that 52 cents a day is a small price to pay given the ripple effect it would produce in our economy. In other words, we will not only be fixing our deteriorating infrastructure but also providing gainful employment for numerous construction workers and employees in many support businesses.

In advocating a gas tax increase, I recognize there are alternatives that must be implemented to truly address our

transportation needs. There are alternative modes of transportation, primarily mass transit, and different land development patterns, which would reduce our dependence on the automobile. There are also alternative billing mechanisms such as toll roads, vehicle mile fees in lieu of a gas tax and congestion management fees.

But let's face it, change takes time. Witness the long, protracted debate over the tolling of Interstate 80, whose plan, we learned Tuesday, was rejected by the federal government. As an engineer, I can state unequivocally that deterioration of our infrastructure and increasing congestion will not wait for us to make decisions. The gas tax has been the backbone of our transportation funding and must remain as such until we work through the other alternative funding mechanisms.

But before we "cast the first stone" at our legislators, let us recognize that we also bear responsibility for not supporting them when they are compelled to make the tough decisions. We owe it to our children and grandchildren who will hopefully be able to look back with pride at our generation.

William Erdman, P.E., is a consulting civil engineer from Upper Macungie Township.

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