

**PA House of Representatives
Transportation and Policy Committees
2010 Special Session on Transportation
June 17, 2010 Hearing**

**TESTIMONY OF JAKE S. WELSH, AICP
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Good morning members of the PA House of Representatives' Transportation and Policy Committees. I am Jake Welsh, Director of the Erie County Department of Planning, and Secretary of the Erie MPO.

As we all know, transportation investments play an essential role in facilitating the vision for any region's future. The County's land use, community facilities and utilities, housing, and historic and natural resources plans, which express that vision, and provide guidance and direction for making sound infrastructure and development investments throughout the County, are all inextricably tied to, and reliant on, the region's transportation system. As such, implementation of the transportation plan for Erie County is arguably the most important component of our comprehensive planning efforts. The transportation system acts as the vehicle which allows the other components to be achieved.

With the recognition of this direct relationship between our land use and economic development aspirations and transportation, adequate funding to implement transportation improvements is critical to sustaining our existing systems and supporting future growth. Considerations for the Erie region relating to our transportation infrastructure:

Land Use / Population – Land use in Erie County is diverse, including large areas of urban and suburban development, and small rural villages, agricultural and undeveloped areas. The majority of the population and development in the county is concentrated along the urbanized-suburbanized Lake Erie / I-90 corridor, in a strip from the Girard-Lake City area to North East, comprising roughly 80% of the County's

280,000 residents. There are several rural development centers (i.e., Albion-Cranesville, Corry, Edinboro, Union City, and Waterford), which are all focused on one or two major highways, generally along the southern tier of the County. The remainder of the county is less densely settled and largely rural in character, with considerable agricultural areas. Though the population in Erie County is relatively stable, land development is continuing to occur, predominately along the I-90 and I-79 corridors.

Employment / Industry – Erie County has historically been recognized as a manufacturing center, and though employment has fallen over the last three decades, continues to have a large manufacturing sector in relation to other PA counties and the national average, with roughly 15% of its workforce employed in that industry. Other significant employment sectors include education, health care & social assistance, and retail services. Erie County is also a very active agricultural area, ranking in the top ten counties in PA, with exceptional fruit and vegetable growing operations (particularly grape and potato production). The county is also a significant tourism and recreation area. Along with Presque Isle, the county's 44 miles of lakeshore provides all of the amenities associated with water, beach and fishing activities, including renowned high quality walleye, perch and steelhead trout fisheries. The Great Lakes Seaway Trail and PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor also attract visitors seeking to experience the regions' many natural, cultural and recreational amenities.

The diversity of the area's geography, population and industry has served to define Erie County's identity and role in northwest Pennsylvania as a regional economic center, and will likely determine its sustainability as such into the future. The importance of maintaining the transportation infrastructure to foster that sustainability cannot be overstressed. Providing the necessary funding for transportation is critical. Without a commitment of adequate funds, the infrastructure, economy and character of our region will greatly suffer, as will the Commonwealth's.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns, we greatly appreciate and urge your continued support.