

Genevieve E.T. Barbee

Community Organizer

Community Human Services

<http://www.chscorp.org>

Testimony for PA House of Representatives' Transportation and Policy Committees

June 18th 2010

"The changes in the routes, the times on those routes and the names of the busses themselves changing make it very difficult to get to appointments with my clients on time."

"Bus changes prevent me from getting to certain clients on time or at all. I don't feel everything was taken into consideration when they made the rider changes. This could directly impact my job security as a homemaker if I am continually late."

"The changes in the busses are crazy. It takes two busses now to get where I need to go where before there was a direct route. This makes it incredibly difficult to get to where I need to go on time. This impacts the amount of time I spend with each of my clients."

Each of those comments is from a homemaker from Community Human Services' Homemaker Program. Every day, a group of ten women travel across the city of Pittsburgh and into the homes of adults between the ages of 18-59 who are disabled in order to assist with chores and other basic needs around the home. This program keeps 103 disabled adults in their homes instead of being placed in an institutional setting such as a nursing home. All of the homemakers use public transportation to get to their clients -every single one. Many of the women do not have regular access to the internet. This makes being aware of changes to the routes that they use every day very difficult. Instead, they are required to make several phone calls into the Port Authority to get updated information. Many feel as the one commenter above that their voices haven't been heard. There have been public meetings in the past about these issues, but as these meetings are not well publicized or planned many riders that the current changes have the most impact on have not been heard at all. There is a sense of distrust that the Port Authority doesn't have its rider's best interest in mind. The increase in fares is also not understood by most. When a bus pass increases by more than \$10 a month, that severely impacts lower to middle incomes in the city and outlying areas that use public transportation. With all that being said, what many don't realize is that the Port Authority is only part of the problem. There is the larger issue of state funding for a clean, prompt, and reliable public transit system in South Western Pennsylvania. The impact of funding cuts for many isn't completely understood until the monthly bus pass is being bought, rumors of cuts start to circulate, and then the morning comes when your bus doesn't show up and you are very late to work. This seems to be irrelevant to those who rely on personal automobiles and what needs to be understood is that they are just as affected when the roads are congested, the roads continue to rapidly decay, and there is nowhere to park.

These scenarios are only a few of so many more here at Community Human Services. Our Homeless Assistance programs, Residential Mental Health programs, Youth, Health, Outreach, and Community programs – all of them have staff members and consumers of services that use public transit on a daily basis. The following is a comment from a staff member at CHS and her thoughts about her public transit experience:

"I'm concerned where is the money going when they increase fares? As we are paying more, the service gets worse. Traditionally, you pay more for an improvement in service. Instead routes are being cut and the bus driver's attitudes become increasingly atrocious. "

She's right. Why pay more for less? The reality in our area is that we suffer from multi-personalities. We want to be a green city and one of the most affordable to live in, and yet with such a dysfunctional public transit system that is an impossible goal. Clean, safe, and prompt public transportation is the hallmark of a vibrant city. New York, Chicago, London, and Berlin are all cities that people want to live in partly because of their public transit systems, their bike friendly roads, and their walk-ability. It is simply a fundamental part of urban living.