



Pittsburgh Regional Transit

Good afternoon Chairman Neilson, Chairman Benninghoff and Distinguished Members of the House Transportation Committee:

Thank you for inviting me here to speak on behalf of Pittsburgh Regional Transit's riders and employees.

I want to express our deep appreciation for the state funding that has been appropriated for public transportation and to emphasize the critical need for additional investment to maintain and grow the level of transit service that the people of Allegheny County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania desperately need.

Public transportation is more than a simple means of getting from point A to point B; it is a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of riders across the Commonwealth, in cities like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and smaller communities in every corner of the state. Transit is key to a thriving neighborhood, a healthy environment, and a robust, interconnected community.

Transit provides access to opportunity. Public transit enables Pennsylvanians from all walks of life to earn a living, receive an education, attend medical appointments, and participate in their communities. Transit access has also been linked to improved physical and mental health, and physical activity contributing to an improved quality of life.

Beyond that, public transit increases economic activity, supports local businesses, and allows our neighbors to live independently without the expense, burden, or hassle of owning a car. High-quality public transit fosters accessible and walkable communities, often reflecting higher property values, and helps businesses thrive when they are near fast, affordable, and reliable transportation.

Transit drives the economy. Pennsylvania has 53 transit systems statewide, which provide service to all 67 counties in Pennsylvania. Public transit across the state directly employs over 16,800 people. Every single resident, whether they ride a bus, railway, or trolley every day or not, benefits from the public transit systems that serve Pennsylvania. Transit supports nearly 39,000 jobs within the state. These jobs are a combination of direct employment by transportation providers and indirect jobs supported by their spending.

In Allegheny County, Pittsburgh Regional Transit provides more than 100,000 trips to our residents every weekday. As the second-largest transit agency in Pennsylvania and the 20th largest in the country, we operate 95 bus routes, three light-rail lines, and the historic Monongahela Incline. Our 2,600 employees maintain a fleet of 720 buses and 80 light-rail vehicles, serving approximately 7,000 stops and stations and 50 park-and-ride lots. Additionally, we own and maintain 79 bridges, 11 tunnels, four bus garages, a light rail center, and a heavy equipment maintenance facility.

ACCESS, a PRT sponsored program, is a coordinated, shared-ride paratransit service, which has been providing door-to-door, advanced reservation transportation in Allegheny County since 1979. The average age of a senior shared ride ACCESS customer is 82. There are many riders aged 90 and over. Most senior shared ride ACCESS customers also have at least one disability. ACCESS provides about 3,400 trips each weekday, and close to a million rides last year. About 2,000 ACCESS rides per month are provided for people with disabilities aged 18-64 through the PwD Program. Close to 35,000 ACCESS Senior Shared Ride trips are provided each month. About 300 seniors register for the ACCESS Senior Shared Ride program each month. They live throughout Allegheny County and most have no other form of transportation.

Over 150 agencies partner with ACCESS as third-party sponsors, thanks to the Pennsylvania lottery funded benefit. Those agencies help pay for part or all of the fare for trips they sponsor for their participants. The partnership with the Area Agency on Aging is long standing and robust, helping people get to senior centers, grocery shopping medical appointments, and senior companions to visit their homebound clients. About 190,000 ACCESS senior shared rides riders were sponsored by the Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging last year.

This service has positively impacted our riders including 28-year-old Joseph who has autism but is becoming more independent by the day. He just moved into his own apartment and now uses ACCESS to go to and from his job at a school every weekday and 27-year-old Ian who has an intellectual disability and travels 5 days a week to his job as a cafeteria worker where he is able to interact with people in his community and earn a fair wage. Without access to public transit and the vital services we provide, many of our riders would be unable to leave their homes.

Today's ridership levels continue to improve. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was profound. Ridership in March 2020 fell by more than 90% and fare and advertising revenue dropped just as precipitously. Although ridership has partially recovered, it remains about 40% below pre-pandemic levels.

Today, state operating assistance constitutes a little more than half of our 2025 operating budget, with the remainder coming from fares, interest income and advertising (13%), Allegheny County (8%), and the federal government (8%). If not for federal Covid relief funding filling a 12% gap in our budget, we would be in a more dire financial position.

Earlier this year, Governor Shapiro proposed an additional \$282.8 million for public transit statewide, which would have provided nearly \$1.5 billion over five years through a 1.75% shift of sales tax revenue. For PRT, this would have added an estimated \$39 million per year, representing a 14% increase. This proposal marked the first major proposed increase in state funding for public transit in more than a decade. However, the proposal was ultimately reduced to a one-time allocation of \$80.5 million, of which PRT will receive just over \$11 million, an amount similar to prior funding increases.

While we're grateful for this allocation, it will unfortunately not be sufficient to negate our budget shortfall, move public transit ahead, or to support the long-term needs of the communities and people we serve. Without additional, sustained funding, the impact on transit agencies statewide could be devastating. For PRT, it would likely mean drastic cuts in service and force us to shutter at least one of our bus garages, leaving hundreds of employees out of work and many more without a way to get where they need to go.

Despite these unprecedented challenges, we have continued to offer robust public transit throughout Allegheny County. Our 25-year long-range plan includes more than two dozen projects, programs, and policies that seek to expand and improve service throughout Southwest Pennsylvania, including extending the busways, building a new garage, redesigning our network to improve efficiency, reach transit-dependent and vulnerable people, and improving the quality of life for riders across our region.

The work we are privileged to do is critical to the economic stability, growth, and vibrancy of our region, yet continued funding uncertainty threatens our very ability to support the communities we serve. We run the service, but our communities own it. Therefore, we are seeking dedicated, reliable, and growing support to maintain, expand, and improve our system. Not only is it what the people of Allegheny County want, it is also what they so desperately deserve.

We humbly look forward to continuing the discussion regarding long-term, sustainable, and reliable funding solutions for Allegheny County and all of Pennsylvania. Thank you for your consideration of this request.