

*Transport Workers Union, Local 234 President Brian Pollitt's address to the House Transportation Committee's Informational Meeting in Philadelphia on Thursday, September 19, 2024.*

Public transit in Philadelphia is the engine fueling the economies of the region and the state. The five counties served by SEPTA generate 41% of the state's economic activity, adding jobs, purchasing power and energy to the economy. This degree of economic productivity and density is not possible without transit to efficiently move people throughout the region---to work, to shop, to school, to doctor's appointments and for recreation.

In addition to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, fixed-route transit service operates in 19 urbanized areas and 18 rural areas in Pennsylvania, spurring economic activity statewide for the benefit of all Pennsylvanians.

But public transit needs help. SEPTA, along with other providers in Pennsylvania, continues to suffer from the effects of the pandemic, as evidenced by a drop in ridership---down by about 40% on SEPTA's rail lines---and a corresponding loss of farebox revenues.

While SEPTA is taking steps to win riders back, I come to tell you, we cannot revitalize our public transit systems without additional financial support from the state.

Over the past few years, federal dollars helped SEPTA, and other transit agencies, cope with the post pandemic realities. Federal dollars kept the system afloat. However, those funds are no longer available. As a result, the state must step into the breach. Otherwise, we risk a catastrophic decline in transit services, a prospect that does not bode well for the region, for Pennsylvania's economy, or for 700,000 riders who depend on public transit.

It is undeniable that SEPTA, and other transit agencies in Pennsylvania, need a source of dedicated funding to maintain and grow bus and rail service; to hire and retain qualified operators and maintenance employees; and to enhance the safety and security of our employees and the riding public. While steps have been taken, in

this regard, my members have to still deal with assaults, fare evasion and other anti-social behaviors.

In order to maintain current levels of service, while addressing the safety, security and training concerns of transit agencies statewide, it is imperative that the Commonwealth make a renewed investment in transit. Dedicated funding will foster further economic growth in the region and in the Commonwealth, while the failure to sustain public transit will inevitably result in hardship for transit dependent riders and business.

Governor Shapiro's 2025 budget proposed an increase in transit funding supported by an increase in the share of state sales tax revenues allocated to transit, a plan that would increase transit funding by over \$283 million dollars statewide and provided SEPTA with an additional \$161 million in desperately needed operating funds.

Democrats in the State House and Senate support the Governor's plan. Republicans, especially those representing rural districts, with fewer transit services, understandably prioritize money for roads, bridges and other transportation related infrastructure.

Local 234 supports comprehensive transportation funding legislation, legislation that provides transit with the resources it needs, while also supporting the needs of transportation projects *writ* large throughout the Commonwealth.

The supporters of transportation funding in the state house and senate, and the Governor's office, along with political leadership in cities and towns across the state, must now fulfill their stated commitments and coalesce around legislation that addresses everyone's concerns when the legislature returns to session at the end of the month. We can't wait. If service cuts are imposed due to budget restraints, we'll lose more riders, and more revenue.

As a recent Inquirer editorial indicated, "cuts and fare increases would lead to fewer people on SEPTA buses, trolleys and trains---further eroding fare revenues

trapping the system in a doom spiral. This would be a disaster for Greater Philadelphia,” and I might add, a disaster for the state.

Local 234 has called for a demonstration in support of transportation funding on October 1, in Harrisburg. A broad coalition of transportation stakeholders from around the state, including labor unions, politicians, riders, business leaders, transit authorities, big and small, across the Commonwealth, along with advocates for road and infrastructure improvements, is taking shape to fight for a funding package that covers public transit, as well as roads, bridges, airports, and other statewide infrastructure needs.

Transportation funding legislation has support across party lines, the only question is whether that support is strong enough to secure a majority in both the Democratic controlled State House and the Republican controlled State Senate.

Given the benefits that a comprehensive transportation bill would bring to both democratic and republican districts, we see no good reason for political leadership being unable to galvanize bipartisan support for transportation legislation.

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