

Pennsylvania House of Representatives Transportation Committee
Public Hearing: Transportation Funding: Issues Affecting the Southwest Region
June 18, 2010
Gateway High School, Monroeville, PA

Remarks by: Court Gould, Executive Director, Sustainable Pittsburgh

Sustainable Pittsburgh is a nonprofit organization that works to advance the policy and practice of sustainable development in the 10-county region of Southwestern Pennsylvania. I am pleased for this opportunity to provide remarks although regret being back again to comment on the transportation funding crisis which last came to a head in 2005.

We in Southwestern Pennsylvania and the whole Commonwealth, despite the well-intended efforts of the Governor's Transportation Funding and Reform Commission of 2006, find ourselves back in the same crisis position absent a source of long term, reliable funding for transportation, particularly public transportation. I applaud the Governor and state legislature for convening a special session and making it a priority to address long term funding needs. We agree with the Governor on need for a comprehensive package to fund transportation for at least the next decade. Our 5,600 structurally deficient bridges and more than 7,000 ailing roads and fiscally compromised public transportation systems are a state-wide economic problem whose time is long overdue for a long term solution.

With the estimated state shortfall of \$3.5 billion a year in transportation funding needed to maintain our existing highway, bridge and public transportation systems, it is time to find long term solutions to the chronic problem of underfunding transportation in the state. Simply increasing vehicle registration fees or legalizing video poker will not suffice.

A long term, reliable source of funding surely needs to be in step with current mobility trends. As Pennsylvanians drive less and demand more fuel-efficient vehicles, it is increasingly important that the state find a new way, other than the gas tax, to finance our transportation system. It is time to start the transition from reliance on per-gallon tax on motor fuels to taxing drivers for miles driven. Traditional revenue tied to gallons at the pump are and will be going down --- happily I might add -- as people drive less and switch to public transportation, as vehicle fuel efficiency increases, and as greater use of alternative fuels and even electric vehicles is sure to rise. Other states and metro regions around the nation are years ahead having already deployed pilot programs. In 2007, Oregon was the first state to study replacing gas taxes with a vehicle miles traveled fee. California, Nevada, Texas, and the City of Atlanta also have vehicle miles traveled fee study or pilot programs underway. If not vehicle miles based, at least we should be indexing the motor fuels tax to increasing costs and inflation.

Other innovations to be considered foremost include making public transportation reliable and affordable to those who depend on it every day as well as attracting more and more riders out of their cars to switch to public transportation. Public transportation is an investment that accelerates the process of sustainability given the positive and simultaneous benefits transit makes to economy, environment and social equity.

Strategies to increase public transportation ridership and decrease regional vehicle miles traveled necessarily entail hastening the pace of smart growth planning and programming to stem the tide of suburban sprawl and the dual pernicious trend of urban decline. This can be done by linking land use with investments in transportation, public infrastructure and economic development to focus growth in existing communities. Transit is a highly effective means to attract and channel growth and development to appropriate places contributing to resource efficiency. Thus, as advocated by the 2006 report of the

Governor's Transportation Funding and Reform Commission, more incentive-based funding programs are needed to coordinate land use development with the transportation system.

In striving to address this crisis, it is recommended that transportation funding solutions be conditioned upon and leveraged to ensure state and regional commitment to the following principles:

- Predictability and reliability, including automatic inflation adjustment, of funding for public transportation in urban, suburban, and rural areas.
- Equity as a major criterion in identification of transit funding sources, recognizing particularly that transit systems provide a major public service that cannot and should not be supported primarily by user fares.
- Increased public transportation system operation efficiencies and effectiveness, avoiding solutions that would negatively impact systems currently operating efficiently and effectively. Of note, we applaud the Port Authority of Allegheny County for its recent remarkable gains in efficiency and cost containment to the tune of \$52 million annually.
- Reforms in the way regions plan and program to better integrate multi-modal and inter-modal transportation systems, so that they are modernized and coordinated with land-use planning and economic development investments, including congressional earmarks.
- Mitigating congestion through tolling, other market mechanisms, and investment in technology.
- Applying new resources such as tax credits to stimulate development around existing transit.
- Enhancement of opportunities for safe and efficient pedestrian and bicycle travel, ride-sharing, and other alternatives to present levels of automobile traffic.
- Increased state and regional investment in and adherence to Maintenance First criteria (per regional plans and the "Keystone Principles For Growth, Investment & Resource Conservation") to address the current backlog of highway and bridge repair projects and to achieve community redevelopment and sustainable development objectives to bring local infrastructure to a state of good repair.
- Increased latitude for local governments to raise local revenues for public transportation while not displacing current local match funds for state and federal resources.
- Use of project prioritization criteria that is transparently used to determine what gets funded. Performance criteria would include measures of: improving public health and air quality, lowering transportation costs, expanding transportation options, growing jobs near where people live, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, congestion mitigation, providing access for all people, and steering growth and development in step with regional plans to build a prosperous, sustainable future for Pennsylvania and Southwestern Pennsylvania.

A failure to act on funding and reforms will be a significant detriment to the Commonwealth's economy, the environment, and social equity. While seemingly prudent, short-term fixes ironically end up costing transportation agencies more.

Thank you.