

The Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT) is a membership organization comprised of the local governments of the City of Pittsburgh and the 38 municipalities that surround it. Representing nearly 700,000 residents, CONNECT works to address policy issues that are common and of concern to our region's urban core. Transportation has been one of CONNECT's main policy issue areas since shortly after the organization's inception in 2009. At each of CONNECT's annual congresses, resolutions supporting changes and innovations to transportation have been passed by our membership. At CONNECT's first Congress in 2009, the membership passed resolution #9-9 that very broadly stated, "The 36 communities represented by CONNECT embrace public transit as a means to maximize economic development and quality of life in the urban core. Therefore, CONNECT hereby commits to a broad policy of using transit as a tool to achieve those ends."

CONNECT's commitment to working towards the achievement of innovations to the transportation system that would benefit our membership and our region has not wavered. CONNECT's 39 member municipalities represent the vast majority of the Port Authority's ridership and serve as multimodal hubs for many more of the region's commuters. The Port Authority estimates that over 75% of its directional service miles, and 93% of all customer boardings take place within the borders of CONNECT member municipalities.

Quick access to reliable public transportation has long been seen as a necessity, yet it is something that is not a reality for many. In early 2015, recognizing that the fragmented nature of local government in Western Pennsylvania makes coordination and management of a public transit system that adequately addresses the needs of its communities difficult, CONNECT conducted an analysis of community needs in order to identify both areas of need and potential opportunity. An important recommendation that came out of this report reiterated the necessity to establish a meaningful partnership between CONNECT and the Port Authority that would allow our municipalities a seat at the planning table, before critical decisions are finalized. This past year, CONNECT and the Port Authority solidified their relationship, and have held regular bi-annual meetings to discuss potential route changes, cuts or additions, fare policies, or initiatives such as transit oriented development and wayfinding. This relationship has resulted in the municipal voice being heard and considered in advance of final decision making.

In addition to its robust relationship with the Port Authority, CONNECT has partnered with other local organizations including Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group (PCRG), the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), the Allegheny Conference, and others to coordinate our policy work and to compliment other work that is being done in the region.

Additionally, a recent report that demonstrates where the jobs are located within Allegheny County compared to where people live showed that jobs are distributed throughout Allegheny County, but are highly concentrated in the urban core, where 64% are located, but not just in the City—25% are located in ring communities (or "alsoUrbs") that border the city.

These findings lead to the recommendation that policies to more effectively integrate these alsoUrbs be developed into the economic development activities of the region, and the recommendation that policies should be developed to increase the role and voice of the alsoUrbs in transportation planning, particularly as it relates to movement into and around this urban core. CONNECT has been working closely with SPC and the Allegheny Conference to advance this issue in transportation planning.

In closing, we believe CONNECT has created a new geography, wherein the decision makers of these urban core communities can be accessed as a group, as opposed to via 39 separate outreach efforts. This union has generated a new voice that speaks for the economic engine of the region. This voice has been and will continue to be used to advance transportation policies and innovations that benefit the residents of our region. Thank you.