

Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission Testimony

Senate Transportation Committee Hearing

Wednesday, October 7, 2015, Pittsburgh, PA

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to testify before the Senate Transportation Committee. My name is Steve Craig; I am a Lawrence County Commissioner and Chairman of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission.

SPC is the region's forum for collaboration, planning, and public decision-making, and is charged with developing both the long range transportation plan and the comprehensive economic development strategy for the region. As the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization and Local Development District, for the ten-county region of Southwestern Pennsylvania, SPC is responsible for planning and prioritizing the use of all state and federal transportation funds allocated to the region for transportation and economic development.

The SPC region is very diverse and is really a microcosm of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Southwestern PA includes a dense urban core in the City of Pittsburgh as well as suburban and rural areas and many small towns throughout Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland counties.

The region encompasses over 7,100 square miles; 2.6 million Pennsylvanians; 548 municipalities; 3 PennDOT Districts; and 10 Transit Agencies. The region contains a complex network of state, county, and locally-owned roads and bridges, bus and light rail lines, as well as railroads, locks and dams, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, ridesharing services, and social service transportation agencies.

SPC works to meet the requirements of Federal mandates for the development of the region's official Long-Range Transportation Plan and Short-Range Transportation Improvement Program (or TIP). The TIP and Plan are developed through a cooperative regional effort of local, state, and federal agencies, stakeholders, and the public. Using regional events, public meetings, and personal engagement, the Commission actively engages the public from the earliest stages of transportation planning to identify needs and resources, develop alternative plans, and implement public solutions. And using the statewide process of linking planning and NEPA, SPC has been recognized by PennDOT and FHWA for being on the forefront of coordinating planning, environmental resource consideration, and proactively involving the public and stakeholders in the planning process. By identifying up front in planning the community needs, potential environmental constraints, and other factors that can impact a project, we are able to develop better project scopes, schedules and budgets that ultimately lead to cost and time savings in delivering high quality projects that meet the needs of our local communities.

The region's long-range transportation plan, which provides a 25-year strategy to guide investment of public funds in multimodal transportation facilities within the context of the regional vision, was recently adopted by SPC in June. It provides the basis for the region's Transportation Improvement

Program, which is currently being updated to encompass the 2017-2020 timeframe. The TIP identifies the region's highest priority transportation projects, develops a multi-year program of implementation, and coordinates available funding, both federal and non-federal, for identified projects.

The development of a long-term regional plan presents a daunting challenge in large part due to the instability faced in federal transportation funding. It's well-known that the Highway Trust Fund has not seen an infusion of new revenue since 1993, and the effects on our existing infrastructure are apparent. As SPC plans for the future of the region, we remain cautious and hopeful that a long-term solution can be found, and that the constraints of short term extensions will be a thing of the past. There are still significant needs in the region's long range transportation plan, specifically 60 projects identified by the region that can't move forward because they are not fully funded.

For this reason, I would like to thank and commend the legislature for the passage of Act 89, which has provided a measure of stability to our planning efforts, at least on the state side. In the months since its enactment, SPC has seen the positive effects of the legislation and is appreciative of the additional funding and authorizations it has provided. I would like to specifically make note of the increased liquid fuels funding to local governments, the new Multimodal Transportation fund, and the P3 Rapid Bridge Replacement Program, which has helped our region significantly.

I would like to take a moment to highlight one of the things we are doing at a regional level that illustrates how SPC works to assist local governments, implements the latest technologies, and works collaboratively with our partners to maximize the public's transportation investments.

One of the priorities established by SPC in previous planning efforts was to address traffic signals around the region – recognizing that there was an opportunity to provide sizable benefit to the transportation system at relatively low cost. The Commonwealth also recognized that opportunity in Act 89 by establishing the Green Light Go Program.

In the first cycle of SPC's Regional Traffic Signal Program, we undertook 23 projects, in 43 municipalities that improved 251 traffic signals; for every dollar we spent, \$90 was saved on gas consumption and people's time. Our second program cycle included collaboration with the City of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University to deploy new adaptive signal technologies and communications equipment to establish a test bed for future connected vehicle testing.

SPC's Regional Traffic Signal Program is currently funded with an 80-20 ratio of federal to local funds. Frankly, we have had a hard time keeping up with the demand for these signal improvements. The Green Light Go Program is a 50% state funded program with a 50% municipal or private match. It's our understanding that municipalities are having difficulty in fully utilizing this program, mostly due to the 50% match requirements.

To continue our efforts to constantly look for collaboration opportunities and ways to maximize the public investment, one suggestion we would be to modify the requirements of Green Light Go program to simply say "50% non-state match". This would allow us to integrate our Regional Traffic Signal Program with PennDOT's Green Light Go Program, leveraging federal dollars further with the

expectation to make the state's Green Light Go program even more effective and saving municipalities money that can be spent elsewhere.

In closing, SPC is grateful to the Senate Transportation Committee for this opportunity to testify before you today. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss some of the efforts we've undertaken in the region in terms of collaboration, innovation, and the most effective use of resources. But there is more work to be done, and we look forward to working with you to maximize the effectiveness of the public's transportation investments and enhance the regional economy of Southwestern Pennsylvania and the communities within it.