

TESTIMONY OF

RICHARD CHEVREFILS
STATE DIRECTOR, AARP PENNSYLVANIA

REGARDING
THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

BEFORE THE
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
PENNSYLVANIA SENATE

HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
AUGUST 4, 2010

Good morning. My name is Dick Chevrefils and I am the State Director of AARP Pennsylvania.

AARP has about 1.8 million members in Pennsylvania and our state office works on behalf of their needs and interests.

I am very pleased to be here today to talk about how seniors need access to transportation options.

The current special legislative session offers the General Assembly an opportunity to create a comprehensive transportation plan to provide accessible, safe, and affordable choices for

Pennsylvanians, with particular emphasis on our older residents. AARP believes action taken during this special session should consider long-term solutions for our growing transportation problems, instead of just reacting to Washington's rejection of the proposal to toll I-80.

AARP believes taking a comprehensive approach is especially important for our seniors who need transportation assistance more than ever before, particularly in suburban and rural areas of the state.

By 2030, almost one in four state residents will be over age 65. The availability of transportation services, the safety of roadways and vehicles, and the design of communities are essential to helping older Pennsylvanians live independently and are crucial concerns for our seniors.

In our view, any updated transportation plan must address the limited availability of public transportation in suburban and rural areas where most older Americans live. According to an AARP nationwide survey, 60 percent of people age 50 and above do not have regularly scheduled public transportation service within a 10-minute walk of their home. One alternative we have in the Commonwealth is Pennsylvania's Shared Ride and Transportation for the Elderly programs, which

provide seniors with millions of rides annually and are available through contracted services arranged by Area Agencies on Aging--including suburban and rural areas where there is no other public transportation.

4.8 million shared rides were provided in 2008, with the lottery paying 85% of the costs of those rides, while passengers pay 15%. This program helps older residents access medical care, groceries and other necessities of daily life. The same goes for Pennsylvania's Free Transit for the Elderly program which allows older residents to travel at no cost weekdays during non-peak hours and on weekends on established bus routes, trolleys and rapid-transit lines. 37.1 million free transit rides were taken in 2008.

The Shared Ride and Transportation for the Elderly programs are largely paid for through lottery receipts. \$154 million was allocated to these services from the lottery in FY 2008-09. The difficulty in expanding this allocation, of course, lies in the fact that lottery dollars are limited and other necessary programs, such as PACE, PENNCARE, and the Property Tax/Rent Rebate program, compete for these resources. All of these programs, including the Shared Ride and Transportation for the Elderly programs, are designed to help older Pennsylvanians maintain their independence and in the end are good investments for the Commonwealth because they lessen the need for expensive institutional care, which consumes an increasing amount of the DPW budget each year.

The challenge of expanding public transit options in suburban and rural areas means we must also prepare for more seniors on the road in Pennsylvania. Research shows one in four drivers will be age 65 and over by 2025, which has significant implications for the planning, design, operation and

maintenance of our roads and bridges--many of which are already overcrowded and in need of significant repair. As they get older, the first generation raised in the suburbs will still want to rely on their personal automobiles or those of family and friends to get around. We know that drivers' skills change as they age, however. AARP attempts to address this by sponsoring safe driving programs for older drivers, with a state-mandated incentive of lower auto insurance premiums as an enticement to take the course.

As Pennsylvania plans for upgrades to its transportation infrastructure we need to be sure we're following the Federal Highway Administration's Highway Design Handbook for Older Drivers and Pedestrians by considering both the physical layout of our roadways and use of traffic control devices to increase safety for all road users. For example, older drivers favor more left-turn lanes with green turn arrows and stoppage of oncoming traffic; reflective roadway signs that have larger fonts; wider and brighter pavement markings; and roundabouts that channel traffic continuously through intersections.

An often overlooked element of transportation planning is providing safer streets and sidewalks for pedestrians. AARP survey results show four in 10 pedestrian fatalities are over the age of 50, and that many of those deaths occurred at traffic intersections. A lack of sidewalks altogether or those that are poorly designed or maintained discourage walkers of any age, particularly those who are elderly or disabled.

As an example of how transportation planning can have a positive impact on the lives of older Pennsylvanians, AARP and the Institute of Transportation Engineers recently joined forces in Pittsburgh for a pilot project to evaluate the accessibility and safety of three city intersections

frequented by older pedestrians. Our audit brought together traffic engineers with four AARP members who live in Pittsburgh and routinely use the city's streets to get to where they need to go. We tested a number of factors, including pedestrian and vehicle traffic, crosswalk signage and overall safety conditions. Our audit showed there's work to be done to increase pedestrian safety by taking steps to improve visibility at intersections, adjusting traffic signal timing to allow more time to cross the street, implementing traffic countdown timers so pedestrians know how much time they have to safely cross the street and enforcing existing yield to pedestrian signs.

In the end, we need to be providing a wide variety of transportation options that enable Pennsylvanians, especially older residents, to retain their independence and stay engaged in the community. Obviously there is a dilemma on how to fund transportation improvements in the Commonwealth. But we must look at this situation as an investment in our future. AARP research shows people who don't live in areas with integrated housing and transportation, and who don't have reliable means to get out of the house can become socially isolated and more likely to suffer physical and mental health declines, which in the long run will be an expensive proposition for Pennsylvania.

We look forward to working with lawmakers during this special session to develop a transportation plan that truly improves the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.