

PENTRANS

Pennsylvania coalition working together for better transportation

Testimony of Peter Javsicas
PenTrans Executive Director
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Harrisburg, PA

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Thanks to all of you for paying attention to this issue that is critical for our economic, environmental and social well-being.

I'm Peter Javsicas, head of Pennsylvanians for Transportation Solutions, Inc. – PenTrans. PenTrans works to get adequate dedicated funding for public transportation and other improvements in mobility and access – for all the people of Pennsylvania. Two of our PenTrans Board members, Richard Voith and Beverly Harper, were members of the 2007 Governor's Transportation Funding and Reform Commission.

In March of this year, polling experts conducted a survey of 400 registered Pennsylvania voters regarding their views on transportation and transportation funding. The survey was commissioned by Smart Growth America, a nationally respected advocacy group and 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, organizers of the Transportation for Pennsylvania coalition...

The poll found that 64% of voters would be willing to pay an additional \$50 annually to get those improvements.

With about 12 million Pennsylvania residents, 50 times 12 million would be \$600 million, right? Five times twelve is sixty, so 50 times twelve is 600, so that would be \$600 million dollars. That's more than the \$484 million dollars we're told is needed right now to close the transportation funding gap for both highways and transit. \$600 million is \$116 million more than \$484 million. So we could put that \$116 million toward the \$3.5 billion we need long term, right?

Does this send a message to our legislators? I hope so.

Pennsylvania has 26 rail manufacturing locations – second only to New York. The rail manufacturing industry here – and the workers who depend on it – stand to benefit immensely from greater investment in public transit, says a new study by Duke University. A new Federal transportation bill would assist at least [247 manufacturing locations in 35 states](#), especially New York and Pennsylvania. But we don't know when or if such Federal legislation might be enacted. There are no plans for it to happen this year.

Yet Governor Rendell recently pointed out that 8,000 new transportation industry jobs already were made possible by the Federal stimulus program. Now, however, Pennsyl-

vania is faced with a \$484 million shortfall in state transportation funding. Were we to raise those funds, many more jobs could be created – or at least saved.

At the Federal level, many are calling for a \$500 billion federal transportation bill. According to the Economic Policy Institute, a \$500 billion federal transportation bill would support more than 7.2 million jobs - 400,000 more jobs than would be created by continuing the current federal transportation law. Again, many of those jobs would be here in Pennsylvania. But as recent news from Congress indicates we can't rely on federal support. What we can do is adopt the approach already recommended to the feds in a proposal from Transportation for America. It's an approach that will be an effective and swift job creator because it calls for investment in some of the more labor-intensive sectors of the economy, such as repair and maintenance of existing infrastructure and public transportation. Many highway expansion projects take longer to move because they require permits and land acquisition, and many of these projects also end up employing less people.

But wait a minute. Suppose you live in a rural or small town Pennsylvania. You don't have the huge transit and traffic needs of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Yet you still have mobility and access problems – big time. Because the price of gas is only going to go up over the coming years. Not only gas but every form of energy will get way more expensive. And one way or another, driving is going to get less and less affordable.

Meanwhile, because of the funding crisis, rural and medium size transit agencies are getting the breath squeezed out of them. Just when they are more needed than ever, they're cutting back on service, raising fares and not making the capital improvements needed just to stay reliable. Old equipment means more breakdowns and higher operating costs. Just read the earlier testimony from the Union Snyder Transportation Alliance at the Lock Haven public hearing.

So, all too often, folks in the rural regions see driving as the only way to go. And they don't want "their tax dollars" going to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Never mind that more tax dollars come from the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh regions than from all the other 61 counties combined.

Yes, rural and small towns need transportation alternatives – but they might be different alternatives than what the cities need. And if you're a legislator, you've got to listen to your constituents. So like many other states, we've got that urban-rural divide that stalls a lot of crucial decision making.

Same thing in Georgia, for instance. And Georgia is trying a new, bipartisan, rural-urban approach that might work here in Pennsylvania too. Georgia is going to let each region have a 1% sales tax specifically for transportation. And let each region decide how to best use the funds to deal with the transportation challenges of that region. The state can incentivize the process with its own share of funds. If you want to know more, you can read about it in the PenTrans newsletter which you can find on our web site and on Facebook.

Or maybe there's a better idea. The central point is that we need to make a bigger investment in alternatives to driving. Whether the funding is from increased fees, oil franchise taxes, gaso-

line taxes, Marcellus Shale taxes, alcoholic drinks or tobacco taxes – or some combination of the above, the public has shown that they are willing to make that investment – if they have a clear understanding of how they will benefit

Adopting a fix-it-first approach would give a leg up to Pennsylvanians hardest hit by the economic downturn, especially low-wage workers and Pennsylvanians who did not go to college. In fact, 80 percent of the new jobs created would be filled by Americans without a four-year degree.

And these are not just jobs for jobs sake – this T4 America approach puts people to work building a transportation system for the 21st century, an all-of-the-above approach that rebuilds and maintains roads and bridges, expands travel choices, implements real benchmarks for how we spend precious taxpayer dollars and ensures that America’s small towns and rural areas take part in our economic recovery as well. We need this strong infrastructure approach to achieve steady growth and opportunity in the decades to come.

The ability of T4 America’s proposal to create good-paying jobs and promote economic growth has won broad support. Sam Williams, president of the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, a T4 partner, praised the proposal as “critical to economic development not only in metro Atlanta but across the country.” Teamsters General President Jim Hoffa says the kind of investment in clean transportation advocated by T4 America “will create millions of good paying quality jobs and put our nation on a path to a lasting economic recovery.” Those jobs in turn produce “induced effects” that lead to the creation of yet more supporting jobs throughout the economy. Previous studies found that induced jobs could be double the directly related jobs figure. To reiterate,

T4 America’s proposal would provide high-quality jobs to those hit hardest by the recession.

- Low wage workers and Pennsylvanians without a college degree would gain the most under T4 America’s plan.
- 80 percent of the new jobs created would be filled by Pennsylvanians who lack a four-year, college degree.

By rebuilding and repairing existing transportation infrastructure, we can put more people to work- both in rural areas and cities.

Legislators and all of us need to work harder to highlight those benefits, mobilize public support and take a decisive step in Harrisburg.

And \$50 times 12 million would be nice. It would be like everyone winning the lottery.

Thank you.