



PENNSYLVANIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS

**TESTIMONY BY
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF
TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION, HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY,
AND HOUSE REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEES**

**CONCERNING
TRANSPORTATION FUNDING**

**PRESENTED BY
MARVIN METEER
PSATS EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER**

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SCRANTON, PA

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Chairman Markosek and members of the House Transportation Committee and the House Democratic and Republican Policy Committees:

Good afternoon. My name is Marvin Meter, township supervisor for Wyalusing Township, Bradford County and an executive board member for the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. With me is Elam M. Herr, assistant executive director for the Association.

Wyalusing Township had to remove a box culvert in the village of Camptown a few years ago because DEP determined that it was too small to handle the amount of water that is now associated with unusually heavy rain storms. In the same storm, we had a complete washout of a stone arch on a tributary to Wyalusing Creek. DEP required that we perform an engineering study of the two sites, with no additional funding for engineering or the replacement of these structures.

Since then, the culvert was replaced by a footbridge built by Eagle Scouts and the township replaced the stone arch with a 60 inch diameter pipe as a temporary remedy to allow access for the school bus and mail. Now our township is faced with additional maintenance costs on our roads due to the development of the Marcellus Shale. While we are pleased with the response of the gas companies to any damage they cause, we do indeed have additional costs. For example, I go out everyday to check on the roads where the gas company is working. While I choose not to be paid for my time or mileage, it would considerably increase our payroll if we had to hire an inspector to perform these daily inspections. In addition, it has become increasingly difficult to mow roadsides and to maintain our road name signs.

Our liquid fuels allocation has decreased over the last two years and townships are very limited in the ways that we can increase our revenue. Transportation funds must be increased if we are to maintain the level of service necessary to keep our roads in good condition for our residents.

Please note that we provided a statewide perspective at the May 27 hearing and would be happy to provide copies of that testimony today.

The Association believes that local roads, state highways, and mass transit comprise a single transportation network for the Commonwealth's traveling public. Pennsylvania has more than 117,000 total road miles and two-thirds of these are owned and maintained by local government, including those in District 4. Local government also maintains more than 6,400 local bridges over 20 feet and thousands more bridges that are less than 20 feet. These local roads and bridges are a vital link in our transportation network and provide children with safe transport to school, workers with reliable access to jobs, patients with transportation to doctors, and farmers with a means to move food to consumers across the state and country. As such, the Association believes that local government is an essential partner with the state in maintaining our transportation system.

The time is now for action to be taken and PSATS will support your actions as long as local government receives adequate funding for its roads and bridges.

PennDOT District 4

In 2008, municipalities in District 4 spent \$82.7 million on local roads and bridges, yet only received \$20.4 million in liquid fuels funds. District 4 has 345 local bridges, of which 46 percent are currently posted with a weight limit. Of all local bridges in District 4, 15 percent (51) are posted at 10 tons or less and another 7 percent (25) are currently closed.

Local officials have been squeezing as much as possible out of their transportation dollars for years. However, the combination of increasing prices, expensive mandates, and decreasing income from liquid fuels and local tax sources are driving our transportation system to a financial crisis. Local government has tightened its belt once again and is forced to defer badly needed maintenance projects, which will only serve to sharply increase the dollars needed to complete these projects in the future. Local roads are vital to not only District 4, but to the entire Commonwealth transportation network, and these local needs are just as important as in other parts of the state.

Following are a few examples of transportation needs in District 4 and cases where townships have used partnerships to stretch their transportation dollars.

Fell Township, Lackawanna County has tried since 2000 to replace a one lane, 106-year old bridge that services the north end of Carbondale Industrial Park and needs \$180,000 in repairs. A concrete plant located at the park plans to expand by at least 25 jobs this year. The township has about half of the needed funds needed to undertake this badly needed shovel ready project should additional funds become available.

Butler Township, Luzerne County has two important roadways in need of resurfacing. The first is the five-mile Butler Township section of St. Johns Road, which serves as a major east-west connector road between State Road 93 and State Road 309. This section is in desperate need of resurfacing and the township prefers to pave the entire road surface with a finish layer or, at minimum, an application of a half-inch of micro-surfacing material.

The second major roadway that needs work is about a 2-mile section of Old Turnpike Road from St Johns Road to State Route 309. This is a major connector route from Sugarloaf Township, Conygham Borough, and Butler Township to Wilkes-Barre, the county seat and major retail and entertainment area. The road is narrow with little or no shoulder areas, so it needs to be widened, regraded in sections, and then repaved in its entirety.

To hold down road maintenance costs, Butler Township has entered into an intermunicipal agreement with two nearby boroughs and two other townships to establish a paving task force. Each municipality supplies manpower and various pieces of equipment. The group works together on any paving project within any one of the participating municipalities and the municipality itself only pays for paving materials.

Delaware Township, Pike County is in the process of determining the extent of deterioration to a concrete bridge beam seat that was noticed at the bridge's last inspection. The extent of repair work is not yet known for this bridge, which services a large residential

subdivision and a girls summer camp, nor has the township determined how it will fund this project. Liquid fuels funds are not sufficient to cover this project.

Dingman Township, Pike County is beginning to fall behind on the maintenance of its roads because of the increased cost of materials and the recent *Youngwood* decision that requires the township to pay prevailing wages for what had previously been considered to be maintenance activities, such as resurfacing. Without an increase in liquid fuels funds, the township cannot undertake the amount of paving necessary to keep its roads resurfaced, which is about every 10 years. The township also stated that their state roads are in horrendous shape, particularly considering the amount of traffic they now support.

Damascus Township, Wayne County is one of the largest townships in the state, with 100 miles of township road and dozens of bridges, 4,000 residents, and virtually no commercial activity to help pay for transportation costs. While liquid fuels funding has decreased by 8 percent in the past two years, no road related expenses have decreased.

For many years, the townships partnered with Wayne County to handle bridge inspections. The county engineer kept current in his training for bridge inspections, the county handled the paperwork and assisted with the cost. This engineer had years of experience with all of the bridges. Then PennDOT informed the county that this process could no longer be used and the townships would have to use contract engineers on the state's rotation. The county attempted to place the county engineer on the state list, however this was unsuccessful. The township now has bridge inspections completed by engineers from outside their region, whom they never see, and who do not have previous experience with these bridges. The township just receives the bridge reports and engineering bills.

Damascus Township has 6 miles of dirt road along the Delaware River, a National Scenic and Recreational River, as well as additional miles of dirt road along and crossing various tributaries of the Delaware. Over 30 years ago, Trout Unlimited developed the concept for the Dirt and Gravel Road program to upgrade dirt roads along streams and rivers. This program has not had an increase in funding since that time. At best, the township can obtain a grant to improve a mile of dirt road each year. Some years, there is only funding to improve a few hundred yards. At this pace, it will take the township decades to reduce pollution from road materials into these high quality streams and rivers.

Preston Township, Wayne County has a bridge that desperately needs replacing which would cost \$250,000. The township has applied for grants since they can never seem to save enough extra funds for this project and raising taxes is out of the question because most of the townships residents are middle to low income and cannot afford a tax increase. In addition, the township wanted to construct a building to cover anti-skid materials, but have realized that it will never be able to raise the funds for this project. The township operates on a shoestring budget and has cut back on the use of dust palliative and road maintenance. The township also performs all equipment repairs and maintenance, as well as building repairs, with township employees if possible.

Eaton Township, Wyoming County has a heavily traveled road that is only partially paved. The remaining half-mile needs paving due to the high traffic volume which makes this portion nearly impossible to properly maintain as dirt and gravel. Paving this remaining half-mile would cost \$60,000, which the township does not have even though this is a high priority project. Additional transportation funding for municipalities would allow Eaton Township to complete this much needed project.

Eaton Township routinely cooperates with its neighboring municipalities to stretch its transportation dollars. The township jointly purchased a mowing machine with Monroe and Northmoreland Townships, saving nearly \$15,000 each. Eaton routinely shares equipment with, and borrows equipment from, adjoining townships, including a roller, trailer, and dump trucks during the last two years. Sharing of equipment has saved Eaton about \$4,000 per year. In addition, the township has informal agreements with adjoining townships to plow and cinder roads that are closer to Eaton's routes and the neighboring townships take care of portions of Eaton's roads, which saves the township about \$1,000 per year.

Local share of transportation funding

The Association believes that the commonwealth must maintain a predictable and reliable funding method for local roads, state highways, and mass transit. PSATS supports a blend of revenue enhancements, and has gone on record supporting a gas tax, realigning the cap on the oil franchise tax, tying Pennsylvania's registration fee structure to the consumer price index, and the use of public private partnerships, to fund the state and local highway and bridge systems. We also support any reasonable means to streamline the approval process for transportation projects. We urge that any and all solutions include the following components: at least a 20 percent local share, depositing all proceeds into a restricted use account, and linking any tax or fees to the consumer price index.

Decrease mandates

There are several actions that the General Assembly can take that would significantly decrease the cost of maintaining their transportation infrastructure. These actions include:

- ♦ Provide relief from the Prevailing Wage Act by revising the act's criteria to return to the historical exemption for paving and similar maintenance activities while retaining coverage for new construction if state dollars are used.
- ♦ Require PennDOT to increase the maximum amounts for road bonding.
- ♦ Increase the required advertising and bidding amounts from \$10,000 to at least \$25,000, with an annual cost of living increase.
- ♦ Require PennDOT to maintain all storm drainage facilities on state highways.

In closing, transportation funding for highways and mass transit needs to be carefully examined and acted on now. Unless action is taken soon, our transportation system will crumble, driving economic opportunities away.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the committee today. We will now attempt to answer any questions that you may have.