

TESTIMONY OF

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REGARDING
THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

BEFORE THE
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA
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Good Morning. My name is Stanley Rothman, and I'm an AARP volunteer from Lords Valley in Pike County. I have been involved with AARP's Driver Safety Program and Mobility Options Initiative for many years, and I have a close working relationship with my local PennDOT officials, especially in the Safety Management Division.

I am very pleased to be here today to address the dire need for seniors to have access to transportation options. We believe lawmakers must use the current special legislative session to develop a comprehensive transportation plan that provides accessible, safe, and affordable options for seniors. That plan must also consider long-term solutions for our growing transportation problems, rather than merely adopting a stopgap approach.

AARP believes this comprehensive approach is especially important for seniors who need transportation assistance more than ever before, particularly in suburban and rural areas of the state. Thousands of our older residents require help traveling to and from medical appointments, grocery stores and other destinations necessary for living independently. And 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 will be essential to helping older Pennsylvanians maintain their independence. These issues are crucial concerns for our seniors and their adult children.

In our view, any updated transportation plan must address limited or nonexistent public transportation in suburban areas where most older Americans live. According to an AARP survey, 60 percent of people age 50 and above do not have public transportation within a 10-minute walk of

their home, creating a mismatch between communities designed almost exclusively for cars and a growing population that cannot drive or chooses not to drive.

Currently, we have Pennsylvania's Shared Ride and Transportation for the Elderly programs that provide seniors with millions of rides annually and are available through area agencies on aging-- including suburban and rural areas where there is no other public transportation. These programs provide an urgent and even desperately-needed service for many elderly residents who might otherwise be stranded in their homes.

However, I live in a rural section of Pike County where Shared Ride is the only form of transportation available to seniors. The service isn't available on weekends and trips need to be scheduled at least two days in advance. While those folks are doing the best they can with the resources they have, I can safely say the program is not meeting the total needs of our senior population—not by a long shot.

Now potentially, these transit programs can be expanded and better coordinated using lottery funds to help older residents access medical care, groceries or other necessities of daily life. The same goes for Pennsylvania's Free Transit 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, like COLT in Scranton.

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania's transportation issues extend far beyond access to public transit.

Research shows one in four drivers will be age 65 and older by 2025, which has profound implications for the planning, design, operation and maintenance of our already overcrowded roads

and bridges that also require significant repairs. We fully support efforts to enhance road and highway safety improvements that will benefit all drivers, including older Pennsylvanians. From personal contacts with PennDOT, I know the expertise and desire is there to make these necessary safety improvements throughout the state. All that's missing is the financial resources to get the work done.

Protecting the safety of our residents can't be limited to roads. Little attention is given to poorly designed and maintained streets and sidewalks that discourage walkers, especially the elderly or disabled. 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. Communities can improve pedestrian safety at a minimum cost by taking steps to improve visibility at intersections, adjusting traffic signal timing to allow more time to cross the street and implementing traffic countdown timers so pedestrians know how much time they have to safely cross the street.

It is clear that we need to be providing a wide variety of transportation options that enable Pennsylvanians, especially older residents, to retain their independence and quality of life. Our research shows that for many elderly people, available and affordable transportation is essential to successful aging. 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.