



Public Transportation Hearings

June 18, 2010

Presented By:
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PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TESTIMONY
Districts 11 and 12
Beaver, Greene, Fayette, Lawrence, Washington and Westmoreland Counties
(Plus Armstrong, Butler and Indiana)

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's important hearing on public transportation funding needs. My name is Mary Jo Morandini and I am the General Manager of the Beaver County Transit Authority. I'm here today representing the nine counties in southwest Pennsylvania outside of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County whose members comprise the Transit Operator's Committee of the Southwest Pennsylvania Commission.

The transit systems in the Region include small urban and rural fixed route and shared ride transportation providers including Allied Human Services in Lawrence County, the Beaver County Transit Authority, Butler Transit Authority, Butler County Community Action and Development, Fayette Area Coordinated Transportation, GG&C Bus Company, Indiana County Transit Authority, Mid-County Transit Authority, Mid-Mon Valley Transit Authority, New Castle Area Transit Authority, Washington County Transit Authority and the Westmoreland County Transit Authority.

These transit systems combined provide nearly 4.6 million rides annually in the southwest PA region. Of this total, over 3.6 million rides are provided annually on fixed route services and nearly 1 million on the shared ride systems. Nearly 1 million commuters travel into Pittsburgh from five outlying counties every year.

There is rich diversity in ridership in the Region and a strong transit dependent population. Since the passage of Act 44, the fixed route providers have achieved an average 20% ridership gain with a nearly 40% gain in Pittsburgh based commuter services even though the population in our Region has been on the decline.

The anxiously awaited predictable, dedicated funding provided under the Act 44 framework allowed agencies to advance their vision of transportation services in their own unique way and finally position them to meet the growing demand for transportation services. Rural Fayette County was able to begin commuter services to Pittsburgh. The small city of New Castle transported over 1 million riders last year. Butler Transit recognized significant rider gains this year and created a service plan for rapidly growing Cranberry Township. Beaver County is anticipating its eighth consecutive record ridership year and also lowered its cost per trip in each of those 8 years. Indiana County partnered with the University to make service accessible to the student population. Mid-Mon Valley Transit, Washington and Westmoreland County Transit Authorities were finally able to meet the ever growing need for commuter services to Pittsburgh.

In addition, facilities have been constructed or renovated and new buses have been placed in service. Transit oriented development projects are being undertaken by several transit authorities, coordination of human service transportation is more prevalent and the regional transit agencies are working together to make the transportation network more seamless and easier to use. Performance standards are being established to ensure the most productive and cost effective services.

The loss of Act 44 funds, exacerbated by the pro-rated 3.7% decrease in state operating assistance, will lead to service cuts, layoffs and fare increases, reverse ridership gains and prevent agencies from keeping buses and facilities in a state of good repair. Low income riders will not be able to get to their jobs, human service clients will not be able to get to the services they need and seniors and disabled people could very well become isolated within their communities.

The timetable will vary by agency; however I can note that in approximately one year, our agency will likely implement a \$.25 fare increase for fixed route service and a \$1.00 increase for shared ride services and our cumulative deficit will still reach \$4.1 million by 2018 and \$4.8 million the following year. This large deficit is in spite of an excellent safety record that resulted in a 33% reduction in fleet insurance premiums over the last five years, \$100,000 earned dividends in workers compensation and a nearly \$290,000 reduction in administrative costs since 2008; achieved through the advancement of new technologies and employee attrition. Public transit is a very labor and capital intensive business. Unfortunately, the need to maintain facilities and buses coupled with uncontrollable increases in other operating costs including fuel and health insurance can often negate most cost reduction efforts in our industry.

It is also extremely important to note that the loss of Act 44 has even greater ramifications if State capital funds are not available to match federal formula (and potential discretionary funds) that flow into our Region. Without the required 16 2/3% state share, our nine counties stand to lose millions of dollars in federal aid. These federal dollars would flow into other regions across the country that place great emphasis on public transportation infrastructure and are willing to provide the required matching funds. The impact on our transit systems would of course be devastating. Beaver County's deficit situation becomes even graver if State matching dollars are not available.

I brought numerous quotes from bus riders to share with you. They appear as an attachment to this testimony. I won't read all of them; however they are considered an important part of this testimony. Let me emphasize that these are riders from all walks of life who rely on public transportation more than ever. Their fears expressed in those quotes are understandably real. Two of these quotes I do want to share with you now. Kathy: "Not only am I saving money for myself, I am also saving money for the state and my country because I am not putting one more set of tires onto an already depleted highway system". And Therese: "My mother and I do not drive. We need this service very badly - please do not take it away". I do have to admit being surprised at the number of riders who rode the bus for the environmental benefits to the Region. I am not so surprised by the number of people in BCTA public hearings who tell us that they have chosen a place to live because it's on the bus line.

It is more important than ever that we all recognize the important role of public transportation in re-building our distressed communities, in reducing our reliance on foreign oil, in creating an environmentally friendly alternative to the automobile and providing a way for families to save their hard earned dollars in this economic downturn. Therefore we recommend funding levels consistent with the Pennsylvania Funding and Reform Commission.

On behalf of the small urban and rural systems in the southwest Pennsylvania region, I would again like to thank you for this opportunity and sincerely hope that you can find a viable solution to the current funding crisis for highways, bridges and the preservation of our public transportation systems.

**Mary Jo Morandini, General Manager
Beaver County Transit Authority (BCTA)**

RIDER QUOTES

Tina: "The buses are very comfortable and safe. It is convenient for me getting to work in downtown Pittsburgh."

Kelly: "It saves me a lot of money and is always very dependable. The buses are always clean, you always get a seat, and the drivers are very friendly. I honestly wouldn't be a happy camper if I had no BCTA."

Kathy: "Not only am I saving money for myself, I am also saving money for the state and my country because I am not putting one more set of tires onto an already depleted highway system."

Margie: "I am not a city driver; therefore, BCTA gets me to my job safe and sound and I have no worries about getting there. If this service was not available, my stress level would be greatly increased."

Rachel: "I highly value the Route 1 BCTA. The buses are clean, customer service is always friendly and helpful the few times I had to call, and the bus drivers are nice."

Erica: "I've been a BCTA rider for approximately 7 years! I LOVE everything about riding the BCTA. Because of taking the BCTA to work daily, we were able to keep our car longer."

Yvonne: "I do rely on BCTA for reliable transportation to commute to downtown Pittsburgh daily Monday - Friday. I most certainly hope that the services currently provided will not be reduced, because I have come to rely on BCTA for my commute to work."

Veronica: "The bus allows me a very relaxed ride to and from work. It's really nice to leave the traffic headaches to someone else, sit back, and simply enjoy the ride. I read, rest, chat with bus friends, and it's a nice quiet hour to prepare for the stressful day ahead."

Sue: "I've been a BCTA rider for over 20 years. BCTA has been vital to my being able to work in Pittsburgh throughout that time. It provides an invaluable option of public transportation which has a positive impact on the environment by keeping cars off the road."

Cheryl: "We live in an economically depressed area. This is the only means of transportation to a large population that cannot afford to purchase a vehicle."

Dennis: "BCTA is the best thing to happen to Beaver County. I bought my house where I did because there was bus service."

Ryan: "Without the bus I wouldn't be able to go to work or school. I picked a school (CCBC) that was on the bus line."

Chelse: "I have no transportation. Kids have places they need to go just like people who have cars need to go to."

Ron: "Service is crucial for me. I ride the bus back and forth to work, school, and grocery shopping. If there was no bus service, I would be restricted to one area."

Todd: "I use BCTA because there is a significant cost saving vs. driving my vehicle; there is a time saving; convenience is a big factor; it's good for Beaver County, and the bus saves gas and reduces pollution."

Deb: "I save gas, wear and tare on my car, my sanity; I save money on parking - gee \$7 round trip instead of \$20+.....no brainer."

Tammi: "Using transit makes sense, both for the economy and environment. I'd prefer to have one driver on the road instead of 40. It also gives me more family time which is important."

Annette (Caretaker): "Service is very, very important. Albert is a double amputee and this service gives me some free time and saves my back (from all the pushing and pulling)."

Arlene: "This is my only source of transportation to work. Drivers are all nice."

Ellie: "I do not drive. I live in a rural area. I like the way I am taken exactly to the place I want to go and then taken back home."

Therese: "My mother and I do not drive. We need this service very badly - please do not take it away."

Eleanor: "FACT is my only source of transportation. FACT takes me to the doctors, shopping, and to see my sister in the nursing home. If it weren't for FACT, I would have no way to get around. I tell everyone that FACT is a nice bus line. If it weren't for FACT, I would have to stay home."

Mary: "There has not been a taxi service in the area for years. Without FACT, I couldn't get to work or to the doctors or even for groceries. I really need and depend on this service."

Baron: "I am a single working man and a homeowner. Utilizing the FACT public transportation is my mode of transportation for work and shopping. If public transit were to cease, I would no longer have transportation to work. Public transportation benefits every aspect of my life. I do not want to lose my job, as I take pride in supporting myself."