

TESTIMONY OF

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REGARDING
THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

BEFORE THE
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MONROEVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA
JUNE 18, 2010

Good morning. My name is John Sparvero, and I'm an AARP volunteer leader from Pittsburgh and I'm a local instructor with AARP's Driver Safety Program.

I am very pleased to be here today to talk about how seniors need access to transportation options. Lawmakers must use the current special legislative session to create a comprehensive transportation plan that provides accessible, safe, and affordable choices for our older residents. That plan must also 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 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.

Now thankfully, 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. Those

programs potentially can be expanded using lottery funds to help more 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.

A lack of public transit options in suburban and rural areas means we must also prepare for more seniors on the road. 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 have to rely on their personal automobiles or those of family and friends to get around.

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.

Here in the Pittsburgh area, AARP and the Institute of Transportation Engineers recently joined forces 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 the overall condition at the intersections of 2nd Avenue and Glen Caladh Street, Murray Avenue and Bartlett Street and Liberty Avenue and South Mathilda Street in downtown Pittsburgh.

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. Our 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.

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.