

Testimony of John L Tague, Jr. Policy Advisor, UCPCLASS

Good Afternoon

I am here as a public policy advisory to UCPClass but I have also been an advocate for public transit for over a decade. I was President of the Allegheny Transit Council, a legislatively mandated advisory council to the Port Authority. I am currently a member of the leadership team of the Committee for Accessible Transportation, an advisory committee to the Port Authority and ACCESS primarily on disability issues.

I regularly attend Port Authority Board and Committee Meetings. In fact, Chairman Markosek, I remember when you served on the Port Authority Board. Chairman Geist, I was part of the Pennsylvania Transportation Alliance team that made a presentation to the Transportation Funding and Reform Commission in Harrisburg on the importance of public transit to the disability community. We also knew we had a strong supporter in Jim Roddey, who has always been a friend to the disability community. The late Senator Jim Rhoades was a key partner with the Alliance in advocating for a shared ride program for people with disabilities in every county in the Commonwealth. Secretary Beihler when he was with the Port Authority supported our ACCESS System here in Allegheny County. To us in the disability community transportation has always been clearly a non-partisan issue!

I spoke primarily to the Commission about the importance of local transit, over the road buses and trains to Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Other Alliance members spoke on the importance of the shared ride program for people with disabilities in rural counties.

One of the Commission's recommendations was to see that that every rural county in Pennsylvania had a shared ride program for people with disability and was incorporated into Act 44. I am happy to report that the shared ride program is active in all but one rural county. Chairman Markosek it is Westmoreland. The Funding for that program comes from Programs of Statewide Significance. It is our hope that this committee continues to support funding for the rural shared ride program for people with disabilities.

Even though I am an advocate for public transit, I recognize that without sufficient revenues for roads and bridges we will continue to see a deterioration of our roads and bridges, the same roads and bridges that the Port Authority Buses, ACCESS Vehicles and Greyhound buses use. We will continue to see more structurally deficient bridges, more weight-restricted bridges and more bridges closed. The Port Authority owns at least one bridge they cannot use.

Will we continue down this path until we see a Pennsylvania bridge collapse on CNN?

We support

Transit oriented development as a value added proposition

Public private partnerships. An example locally is the partnership between Classy Cabs and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission purchasing accessible Taxicabs.

The use technology, as a means of improving efficiency and reducing cost.

Smart card technology captures fares that are now being lost through an antiquated collection system and broken fare boxes. The use of easy pass on the PA Turnpike to keep vehicles moving to reduce back up and wasted fuel. I wonder why we do not use smart card technology on the Pike, where you flash a card and it deducts from a prepaid card. ACCESS our local paratransit provider uses e-purse to eliminate the need for a cumbersome paper ticket system. ACCESS now uses a GPS System to track vehicles and provide the drivers with the best route to transport passengers.

These are lessons we can be used statewide!

When I stated traveling to Harrisburg in the late Nineties, I used Amtrak, since other than flying it was the only accessible public transportation to Harrisburg. After Greyhound began putting lifts on buses, per an agreement with the Justice Department, I started using Greyhound. It gave me more choices and it had a better on time performance than Amtrak. I still use the train but mostly to go to DC.

For the past five years, I have rented an accessible van, mainly because Greyhound buses have inaccessible bathrooms so I understand the need for safe roads and bridges. The turnpike has improved over the past 10 years but is a toll road.

I believe taxes should be directly related to transportation whether it is a tax on tires or the tolling of I 79 or I 80 or yes an increase in the dreaded gasoline tax

In closing, I would say that while finding adequate funding for transportation is a daunting task it is our belief that with leadership from this committee, the Senate Transportation Committee and the Governor we can get her done. Ladies and Gentlemen, start your engines!

Thank You

Respectfully Submitted

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