

Monday June 14, 2010 (Flag Day)

FROM: Peggy Walsh

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Regarding: Legislative Hearing Friday June 18, 2010
re Ongoing Generous Funding for Public Transportation
(Busses and Paratraitit for non-Drivers - for those
who cannot afford or drive a car, for senior citizens
(Lottery funding helps, but is not quite enough) ... and
unquestionably for persons with disabilities - State-
wide

All too often, we consumers have had to attend and sometimes testify at meetings advocating for reliable funding to cover "the transportation-forgotten" (abovementioned). Personally, I have two disabilities which make it much harder to use busses, which I rode happily and often decades ago. I warmly commend the Allegheny County Port Authority for doing their utmost to make busses accessible for those of us in wheelchairs, and others with visual impairment who need stop announcements and better-contrast large-print signage at stop signs and on busses. There is a way to go, but it keeps on improving (with ongoing consumer reminders from out all-volunteer Committee for Accessible Transportation).

The ACCESS Transportation have done their generous part by sending notices in E-Mail - and in Braille for someone like me who as yet has no personal computer. This leads to the two disabilities: I have been completely blind since having been born prematurely, but earlier in life, that did not stop my using busses. For the next decades starting the mid-1990's, I got disabled with another condition which requires my using daily medications: My travel became hard due to balance problems, plus my diagonal street crossings (which are not recommended in any busy city). Without ACCESS, I would be unable to take part in social gatherings, cultural events, or even worship. (Once a month except throughout the summer, a Lutheran ministry has a Meal with Bible study before, and Vespers afterward. I'm thankful to meet old and new friends there, and to be taken care of with respect and emotional as well as physical nourishment.)

Earlier in life, I was a medical-records transcriber and a clerk-typist with the County. For ten years, I owned a small business selling paper products to the blind; I called it the "Paper Peddler," found it personally satisfying and probably took a financial loss but didn't mind since my purpose was to mail lower-cost supplies to customers who could not afford charges by agencies (who says I'm not competitive?).

Not only do I walk and sometimes shop at the Monroeville Mall - which would be unmanageable for me without ACCESS transportation; I enjoy cultural events such as The Pittsburgh Opera, and City Theatre (they both offer special audio-described performances on a special night; we blind/visually impaired patrons are also given a good discount so we can also bring a sighted friend/guide). I attend concerts by The Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society. My community involvements include not only our Committee for Accessible Transportation, but also Western Pennsylvania BOLD (Blind Outdoor Leisure Development), Inc. Both these commitments are all-volunteer.

(I went to a new beautician two days before the hearing, which I plan to attend in person. The commute to Gateway High School from home in South Oakland needed pre-arrangement, or none of us ACCESS or bus riders could realistically have managed it. I thank ACCESS and Representative Markosek for combining efforts to enabling us to come.)

Without independent transportation, I would be unable to keep medical appointments - or take part in these recreational and community activities. My life would seem bleak indeed - but in the City, I'm still better off even now than those in outlying areas.

Port Authority needs back-and-forth shuttle busses for McKeesport and nearby locations, which would enable senior citizens to stay involved in the community. There is almost no service to speak of in Emsworth or Mount Washington. Hopefully, other Hearing participants will offer feedback on the need for their areas.

Port Authority has done the best it can with all it has - arranging a new Transit Development Plan, arranging with the Union for copaid medical coverage for employees, early retirements and eliminating middle-management jobs. They have kept their promise; we State and Federal taxpayers are doing our part ... So now Pennsylvania needs to come up with several, not one solution (so we were back to Square One when I-80 could not be used as a Toll road).

Thank you all for my chance to come in person, and to send this written feedback in advance. Good luck to all concerned!