

## **JUNE18, 2020 WRITTEN STATEMENT OF**

**John D. Weinhold  
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**The results of Pennsylvania's flawed transportation policies are evidence of Santa's observation that if we do learn from history we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the pasty.**

- ♦ **The public transit authorities in the Philadelphia area and in Allegheny County experience periodically reoccurring serious budget deficits that threatened the quality and quantity of public transit they are expected to supply.**
- ♦ **The excessive mileage of Pennsylvania's state highway network has led to large numbers of bridges that are on the brink of becoming unsafe and miles of highways that are substandard because the size of the network has led to deferred maintenance.**
- ♦ **Problems of adequately funding the transit authorities in the Philadelphia area and in Allegheny County have, in the past, been alleviated with "band-aid solutions" and, after the bleeding has stopped, no thought was given to long term solutions to prevent these problems from reoccurring.**

**Although these appear to be local problems, the cause is more deep seated. The General Assembly must determine why these problems reoccur periodically and address long term solutions; solutions which can only come from major changes in the basic philosophies with which the Commonwealth funds mass public transit.**

**The following key questions must be asked and addressed.**

- ♦ **Are Pennsylvania's transportation policies archaic and/or flawed?**
- ♦ **Is the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation responsible for a network of state roads and bridges that is too large to be effectively and efficiently managed? (Compare the mileage of state maintained roads and the number of bridges in Pennsylvania with states with population and similar geographic area.)**
- ♦ **Why is Pennsylvania the only state, or one of th few states, in which, with the exception of Philadelphia and Allegheny Counties, there is no county highway system for managing local roads?**

Frankly, I have no solution to Pennsylvania's the immediate fiscal emergency, but, in my opinion, after the immediate crisis is alleviated both houses of the General Assembly must prevent take steps to prevent similar fiscal emergencies in the future. The only way this can accomplished is by drastically overhauling the Commonwealth's transportation policies and replacing them. The failure of Act 44 demonstrates the fallacy of depending upon funding sources over which the Commonwealth has no control.

The following should be considered when implementing new transportation policies.

- ♦ Mandate that each public transit authority that operates a fixed route, scheduled transit service and which receives an operating subsidy from the Commonwealth must organize a self governing rider's advisory organization similar to the Allegheny County Transit Council in Allegheny County.

The suggested organizations can be the instruments for establishing a communication channel between the local transit authorities and their patrons as well as provide a level of oversight and transparency.

Precedence already exists for these rider's advisory organizations. Many years ago the General Assembly mandated the organization of rider's advisory panels in the Philadelphia area and in Allegheny County. (There is one basic difference between these two rider's advisory panels. In the Philadelphia area the members of the panel are politically appointed while in those of the Allegheny County panel selects it members.

- ♦ If the General Assembly mandates the above suggested panels, it should then either mandate or encourage the panels to form a form a statewide coalition that can speak for the public transit riders throughout the state in a single and unified voice and represent a recognized organization to which the Transportation Committees of the House and Senate can consult with matters pertaining the needs and desires of public mass transit users throughout the state..
- ♦ Mandate every county in the Commonwealth to create a county road and bridge system to be under the direct control of the county government.
- ♦ Direct the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to transfer ownership and operating and maintenance responsibilities of every State Legislative Route with an Average Daily Traffic Count of 600 or less within a county to the respective County governments and require the County governments to accept them..

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- ♦ Separate funding for roads and bridges and for public transit into two independent dedicated sources. (Attached to this statement is a suggestion of one way this could be accomplished. This attachment is meant to be a seed to incubate new ideas as for how the Commonwealth's public transit policies and and funding could be changed.)
- ♦ Organize self governing roadway users advisory groups for either each Engineering or Maintenance District of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to establish a non-political influence on future highway and bridge projects and needs.

Yes, the above suggestions can be very unpopular. But, isn't it the duty and obligation of the members of the General Assembly to ensure the Commonwealth is operated in an efficient, cost effective and businesslike manner. The members of the General Assembly must govern with the greater good of the entire state in mind, not just to win popularity contests. Pennsylvania needs "tough love".

At the risk of appearing self-serving, I volunteer to meet with any member or his staff in either Allegheny County or in Harrisburg if any members wishes to hear more of my views.. Thank you for any consideration you give this statement.

**ATTACHMENT:**

**AN INOVATIVE APPROACH TO FUNDING AND ADMINISTERING  
PUBLIC MASS TRANSIT AND PARATRANSIT IN PENNSYLVANIA**

# **AN INOVATIVE APPROACH TO FUNDING AND ADMINISTERING PUBLIC MASS TRANSIT AND PARATRANSIT IN PENNSYLVANIA**

## **OVERVIEW**

Public mass transit is as essential a public service as is public safety, public education, refuse collection and the operation of water and sewage systems. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's attempts to provide for adequate financial support for local public transit operations have proven to be ineffectual and cumbersome. The public transit authorities in the Philadelphia area and in Allegheny County experience re-occurring fiscal crises almost every time they prepare their fiscal budgets.

The policies for the financial support of public transit are determined by elected officials, few of whom had experience in administrating or operating a public mass transit system or even use public mass transit. How can they understand the needs and desires of their transit dependent constituents.

Transit riders want lower fares and more frequent service, while they expect the transit to be fully supported by revenues collected in the fare boxes. Few transit riders understand that a transit operation that recovers 30% of its operating costs from fare box revenues is a very well managed system.

Riders and non-riders complain when they see transit vehicles running almost empty during rush hours. They don't understand that the transit vehicle has to run almost empty when travels against the predominant flow traffic during the peak travel periods in order to reach prospective passengers to carry a full complement of passengers traveling in the other direction.

Likewise, the more rush hour passengers a mass transit system carries in the dominant travel direction, the greater will be the need for higher operating subsidies. The key to a more effective and efficient mass transit system lies in carrying more passengers during the "off peak" travel periods.

In order to create effective transit operating and funding polices it is necessary to have direct knowledge of the daily problems encountered in operating a large transit system. It is time to consider a new approach to establishing the governmental policies that govern the operation and financing of public transit systems through the state. We must not repeat the errors of the past. It is time for Pennsylvania's General Assembly to establish innovative for funding and operating public mass transit recommended by experienced transit operators.

With this objective in mind, I, as a concerned frequent user of both public mass transit and paratransit, submit the following proposal.

## **A PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC TRANSIT COMMISSION**

The General Assembly should consider creating a Pennsylvania Public Transit Commission.

The purpose of this Commission would be to enable the managers of public mass transit and paratransit operating entities to develop the Commonwealth's policies and operating regulations and transit policies will be developed by a body of persons who have practical day to day managing and operating experience and know know transit systems should operate.

A Commission which creates transit policies would enable necessary changes to statewide public mass transit policies to be made in a more expedient manner, rather than through the slow and cumbersome manner associated with legislative action.

In addition, the members of the Commission could form formal or informal satellite bodies, on a regional basis, to coordinated the purchase of operating vehicles, diesel fuel, lubricating oil, health benefit plans, etc. so they can gain price advantages through larger purchase quantities.

The membership of this proposed Commission should consist of:

- ◆ One voting representative from each Transit Entity 1 and 2. (see Definitions – Transit Entities below.)
- ◆ A non-voting representative from each General Assembly recognized transit user's advisory organization (see Transit users' Advisory organizations below) in the Commonwealth to provide transit user's oversight and make comments upon items under discussion from the transit user's perspective.
- ◆ Non-voting members consisting of the chairs of or a staff person from the Transportation Committees of both houses of the General Assembly to provide legislative oversight and advice.
- ◆ A chairperson, appointed by the Governor, to give the Governor's Office oversight and advice. The Chairperson will have a vote only for the purpose of breaking a tie vote by the voting members in attendance.

Participation in this Commission would not be mandatory, but any Transit Entity 1 or 2 not choosing not to participate would have no voice in establishing statewide operating and funding policies and regulations and lose any other advantages of participation such as cooperative purchasing to realize a lower prices for equipment, parts and consumables, etc.

The full commission would meet annually, with additional statewide or regional meetings as needed.

## **DEFINITIONS - TRANSIT ENTITIES**

The definitions of Transit Entities as defined in Act 44 should be revised as follows:

Transit Entity 1 - A scheduled fixed route carrier that is eligible for an operating subsidy from the Commonwealth.

Transit Entity 2 – An on-demand carrier serving the elderly and the physically disadvantaged population that is eligible for an operating subsidy from the Commonwealth.

Transit Entity 3 - School busing.

Transit Entity 4 – No change from Act 44 and the previous Chapter 47 legislation.

## **FUNDING FOR PROPOSED TRANSIT ENTITIES 1 AND 2**

In the past the need for dedicated and predictable has been recognized, but funding sources and amounts was determined annually in the Commonwealth's annual budget process.

An authority has a different fiscal year than the Commonwealth's, it experiences a complication in the process of completing its budget.

If the local government's fiscal year is different from either the authorities or the Commonwealth's the complications are even greater.

The current fiscal emergency was created by the failure of Act 44 to provide the dependable and predictable funding for both mass public transit and the Commonwealth's highway and bridge system that it was expected generate.

In order to prevent devastating fare increases and service reductions in public mass transit systems throughout the Commonwealth, a new and innovative method of funding and governing public mass transit must be created.

One possible solution to this perennial problem is a statewide sales tax, possibly 1%, dedicated solely to public mass transit to supplement the current of subsidizing public mass transit operating subsidies. If this approach for creating a funding source for public mass transit subsidies is established, the use of the tax funds generated in each county by this proposed sales tax must be restricted to the transit entity or entities that serves that county . There is no reason why this funding cannot be augmented by additional local funding as determined by the local governments.,

### **FUNDING FOR TRANSIT ENTITY 3 – SCHOOL BUSING**

After the funding needs of the Transit Entities 1 and 2 in a given county have been met, any surplus funds would be made available to school districts to help defer the costs of school busing upon application

In order to receive this aid, the school district must agree to reduce the bottom line of its operating budget by the amount of the subsidy before computing the tax rate. Thus, any member of the General Assembly representing areas without public mass transit or paratransit services can claim he is making at least a small effort to reduce the school tax burden of his rural area.

### **TRANSIT USER'S ADVISORY ORGANIZATIONS**

The General Assembly should, through empowering legislation, compel each Transit Entity 1 and 2 that receives operating subsidies from the Commonwealth to organize a self-governing and self-perpetuating transit user's advisory panel similar to the Allegheny County Transit Council.

This will not be a complaint organization, but rather an organization to establish an orderly communication channel between the Transit Entity's patrons and the Transit Entity regarding the needs and desires of the patrons .

These transit user's organizations should be encouraged to form regional and statewide coalitions, to meet as needed, so the transit user's needs and desires can be addressed with a unified voice, both regionally and statewide, for any transit matter that would come before the General Assembly.

### **WHY THIS DOCUMENT?**

The purpose of this document is not to dictate a transit policy governing public mass transit throughout the Commonwealth, but rather as a seed to incubate and encourage the investigation of a new transportation policy to replace the existing policies that, historically, have proven to be ineffective and counterproductive.

This document was prepared by:

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June 18, 2010 Written Statement of John D. Weinhold (cont'd.)

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- ♦ **Organize self governing roadway users advisory groups for either each Engineering or Maintenance District of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to establish a non-political influence on future highway and bridge projects and needs.**

**Yes, the above suggestions can be very unpopular. But, isn't it the duty and obligation of the members of the General Assembly to ensure the Commonwealth is operated in an efficient, cost effective and businesslike manner. The members of the General Assembly must govern with the greater good of the entire state in mind, not just to win popularity contests. Pennsylvania needs "tough love".**

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