

## **TRANSPORTATION STATEWIDE HEARINGS – Keri Albright, June 1, 2010**

Hello, I'm Keri Albright, and I'm here to offer comments on behalf of both the **County of Northumberland** and a relatively new collaborative group called the **North Central PA Public Transportation Taskforce**. Before I speak regarding the interests of the Public Transportation Taskforce, I'd like to provide feedback on behalf of the Commissioners of Northumberland County to the specific questions the Transportation Committee has posed. <sup>The Commissioners</sup> ~~They~~ do believe that a financial crisis is looming for the state's public transportation and state highway and bridge systems. They believe that the steady decrease in funding available under Act 44 has directly impacted their ability to improve transportation in the County. A pressing example of this impact is the difficulties experienced in moving the Central Susquehanna Valley Thruway forward. Although funding was committed to complete design of the Northern Section, the need to identify a substantial portion of the \$500 million required to complete the project persists. We feel inaction here is not acceptable; in three decades, the prominence of this issue has not diminished, but increased in urgency. A second example is the continuing need to maintain local bridges. Design policies recurrently favor full replacement over rehabilitation or repair of existing bridges. The further inclusion of usage, context and land use in these decisions to allow wider use of rehabilitation would help the county to stretch scarce transportation dollars farther. This would also serve to relieve some of the pressure on an ebbing flow of liquid fuels funding which presses an even greater burden upon county resources in funding local and regional transportation needs. In summary, the county would ask for greater flexibility in how funding is allocated to include rehabilitation of bridges, as well.

Switching gears now, again I'm also here to speak on behalf of the North Central PA Public Transportation Taskforce whose work focuses on six counties including Snyder,

Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Union, and Columbia. This group was born two years ago, inspired by research done in Northumberland and Snyder Counties. One of several major concerns affecting this region was the lack of accessible, efficient and affordable means of public transportation. The Shared Ride Programs, for example Welfare to Work and Persons With Disabilities, provide reduced fares to consumers that qualify under these programs. However for many resident's that don't qualify, the fares are not affordable, and services don't include a set schedule where people can reliably go to most anyplace they desire within our six county region. <sup>Our</sup> The Taskforce seeks to put in place a regional transportation system that compliments the shared ride services currently provided by individual counties. This system would serve those who spoke up in the research: the teens living in very rural areas who would like the freedom to go shopping or to cultural or recreational activities, seniors continuing to pursue an independent lifestyle, employees without a license who need to continue working or they risk becoming a greater burden in our communities, the employees on a regular work schedule who could use public transportation to stretch their household budgets, or simply low income families who cannot practically afford their own transportation. The needs voiced in this research speak to a crisis in public transportation, where we provide a system to serve all residents, but burdens it with costs, regulations, and requirements that places using it just as far out of reach as the car it is meant to provide an alternative to. <sup>Part</sup> Part of the infrastructure <sup>happens</sup> happens to include obstacles ~~the current system places~~ <sup>between</sup> between providers trying to work together to meet these needs in a more accessible way. Our group feels strongly that we need to take action, and that's why we are working *regionally across six counties* with service providers, government organizations, education and healthcare providers, and community service groups to create a system where residents can better access employment, education, medical, and social services in an efficient and cost

effective manner. Recently the Taskforce charged a professional consulting group to complete a 9 month feasibility study to identify additional areas of needed services, pockets of potential ridership, desired destinations that may not be known to date, ways in which our existing structures can work together regionally, and ultimately determine if all of this can roll up to a regional public transportation system that is financially sustainable. We ask for your support in making sure that public transportation can be a meaningful, effective and lasting alternative for rural residents just as it is in the urban areas of the state. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. If you have any questions, I'll try to answer them.