

**PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE  
THURSDAY, JUNE 3, 2010 HEARING**

**TESTIMONY OF STEVEN BLISS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
ON BEHALF OF  
RENEW LEHIGH VALLEY**

Good afternoon, Chairman Markosek and Minority Chairman Geist, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Steven Bliss, and I am the Executive Director of Renew Lehigh Valley. I want to express Renew Lehigh Valley's appreciation for your convening this series of hearings statewide to address the urgent transportation issues—including funding challenges—facing Pennsylvania.

Renew Lehigh Valley is a broad-based, nonpartisan coalition committed to promoting smart growth and regional collaboration, with a strong focus on helping to foster the continued revitalization of our region's urban cores, especially the Cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton. Strategic and policy guidance for Renew Lehigh Valley are provided by a 50-member Leadership Council consisting of representatives from business, government, education, planning and transportation, and community organizations.

Promoting sound investment in public infrastructure is fundamental to Renew Lehigh Valley's mission. Among Renew Lehigh Valley's core initiatives are our Sustainable Transportation Initiative and our Regional Water Initiative. We work on infrastructure—among other issues—for the simple reason that infrastructure spending and policy drive where growth and development occur. It is Renew Lehigh Valley's view that a strong regional approach to roads, transit, pedestrian and biking facilities, as well as to water infrastructure can help ensure that the Lehigh Valley is fostering strong core communities; walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods; economic vitality and a high quality of life; and the preservation of open space and productive farmland.

A balanced, multimodal transportation system is critical to the future vitality of the Lehigh Valley. Municipalities, counties, key public agencies, businesses, community members, and

other partners across the public and private sectors need to work together to ensure a regional transportation system that provides Lehigh Valley residents and workers with a variety of options for accessing employment, housing, schools, recreational and cultural amenities, and other resources. The Lehigh Valley must create linkages between land-use and transportation so as to make optimal use of existing road infrastructure; promote energy efficiency; and foster new opportunities for transit-oriented development, including the prospect of regional passenger rail.

At the most general, the current state transportation funding crisis severely impedes the ability of regions across the Commonwealth to take a long-term approach to addressing transportation needs. More specifically, I want to emphasize the dangers of cuts to public transit in the Lehigh Valley. As you may be aware, the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) provides the Lehigh Valley with a public transit system that is widely recognized for operating at a high level of efficiency. Yet the current state funding shortfall for transportation would force LANTA to raise fares just to maintain current service. This would mean that Lehigh Valley residents who do not have access to a car (or those who choose not to drive) are placed at a greater disadvantage than ever before, which is especially troubling given the current economic and employment climate.

There are also major long-term implications for transit in the Lehigh Valley if the Commonwealth does not adequately fund transportation on a long-term basis. During 2008 and 2009, I had the privilege of serving—along with about 40 other community members—on the Advisory Committee to “Moving LANTA Forward,” the agency’s long-term strategic planning process. LANTA’s plan calls for a number of system improvements that would be in serious danger without adequate state funding for transit. These include upgrades to the LANTA’s core service routes; introducing Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service among major trunk corridors; supporting intermodal transportation hubs; and planning for the prospect of integrating commuter rail in the Lehigh Valley. All of these have the potential to improve mobility and choice among Lehigh Valley residents.

Also of great significance in LANTA’s strategic plan is a commitment to working closely with the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission and local municipalities to promote local land-use

policies that support transit. This is an important step forward for the region, as it represents a concerted effort to use transit infrastructure as a means of promoting more compact, mixed-use development that not only is environmentally sustainable but also engenders highly desirable walkable communities. Further, increasing residential and commercial densities is essential for the Lehigh Valley in terms of making the region suitable for passenger rail, an idea that enjoys significant community support. Should Pennsylvania not ensure viable, long-term funding, the effort by LANTA and its partners to link land-use and transportation will not have the resources needed to succeed, and the Lehigh Valley risks missing an opportunity to shape new regional growth in ways that promote transit-oriented development and its many economic and quality-of-life benefits.

Full transportation funding is needed to ensure that Pennsylvanians are allowed choice in mode of transportation (not restricted to single-passenger auto transportation). This is especially important for increasing access to vital resources for individuals with disabilities, senior citizens, and persons who are unable to drive due to age, income or personal circumstance.

A well funded, well maintained transportation network will improve quality of life for all Pennsylvanians, providing wide access to employment, housing and other opportunities, and improving environmental quality. As this committee recognizes, state leaders must give serious consideration to policy shifts that have the potential to generate the revenue needed to fix the transportation funding gap, such as an increase in the state gas tax, new public/private partnerships in infrastructure investment, and other means. Further, Renew Lehigh Valley believes that investments in transportation infrastructure can be optimized through a continued emphasis on the principles embodied in the “Smart Transportation” initiative launched under Transportation Secretary Biehler.

Smart Transportation—with its emphasis on ensuring timely repair and maintenance, as well as on creating stronger linkages between transportation planning and local and regional land-use decisions—has the potential to reshape how our communities approach transportation policy and funding over the long-term. Smart Transportation acknowledges that cost-effective transportation planning should focus on ensuring the long-term viability of existing infrastructure, integrating a

variety of modes into a seamless transportation network, and fostering mixed-use, high-quality communities with a strong sense of place. The set of grants made available through PennDOT's Smart Transportation program allowed core communities here in the Lehigh Valley to implement targeted projects that provide stronger linkages between the broader region and these traditional urban centers. These projects have shown great promise in terms of transportation system efficiency and economic and community development, and help illustrate the value of continued support for Smart Transportation principles.

On behalf of Renew Lehigh Valley, I want to express my appreciation for the leadership this committee has shown in calling for these hearings and gathering information from stakeholders statewide. The task before the legislature is a monumental one and will require public officials and Pennsylvanians as a whole to face some difficult choices. However, the time to act is now—the economic competitiveness of the Commonwealth and the quality of life in our communities depends on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.