

**Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

**Transportation Committee**

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**Public Hearing**

**Financial Needs to Maintain Pennsylvania's Highway, Bridge**

**&**

**Public Transportation Systems**

**June 3, 2010**



**Testimony Presented by  
Armando V. Greco  
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Good afternoon! I am Armand Greco, Executive Director of the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority, commonly referred as LANTA. LANTA provides public transportation services throughout Lehigh, Northampton, and Carbon Counties, PA. With me today are representatives of the other transit systems which provide service within the area designated as PennDOT Engineering District 5-0. Each of us will make comments relative to the transportation funding crisis the Commonwealth now faces. It is our intent to stay within the 5-minute time limit set forth by the agenda.

There is no question that the Commonwealth has a transportation funding crisis. The I-80 decision has left a nearly \$500 million hole in the funding program established by Act 44 of 2007. The funding structure established by Act 44 is excellent, but we all know that the dollars made available by the Act represented only half of the \$1.7 billion annual need identified by the Funding and Reform Commission. The most recent report issued by the PA Transportation Advisory Committee suggests the current need is more than twice the Reform Commission's estimate.

With this as background, we all recognize that there is a short-term need to fill the gap left by the I-80 decision, and to again revisit how a comprehensive solution to the long term funding challenge can be achieved.

Within the context of this statewide crisis, the LANTA story provides an important example. Yes ... there is public transportation in Pennsylvania outside the SEPTA and Port Authority service areas, and the demand for frequent and expanded service in these other areas is growing. Two key two statistics are important.

- Since 1997, ridership on the LANTA fixed route system has grown by 70%. Last fiscal year ridership topped 5.5 million trips, the highest number in LANTA's 39 year history. This year we are on pace to exceed the FY 2009 figures.
- The Lehigh Valley is at or near the top of the list of the fastest growing regions in the Commonwealth ... both in terms of population and jobs. The pace has slowed over the last two years, but there is every reason to expect that it will recharge as the current recession ends.

Within the context of this strong demand and the promise of increased resources through Act 44, LANTA completed a comprehensive strategic plan to restructure and grow the Lehigh Valley's public transportation system. A copy of the Moving LANTA Forward final report is part of the materials distributed today. The plan is aligned with

the goals of the regional comprehensive plan and LANTA's organizational vision. It is a plan for growth, which ...

- ✓ Redesigns / restructures service ... in an effort to simplify the system.
- ✓ Establishes target service levels.
- ✓ Improved connections to employers and regional commuter bus services.
- ✓ Establishes flexible suburban services feeding a network of transit hubs.
- ✓ Creates a foundation for "higher" transit modes ... bus rapid transit and potentially commuter rail.

The plan builds on LANTA's efforts to operate a cost effective system and recognizes that LANTA cannot implement the long term elements of the plan without transit supportive land use and development polices. To this end, LANTA and the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission have created a formal partnership by signing a Memorandum of Understanding designed to promote transit friendly land development practices.

The plan defines operating & capital needs as part of a three-phased program covering 12 years.

The loss of the I-80 toll funds, and its impact on other funding elements most particularly operating assistance, has a severe impact on LANTA's ability to implement the Moving LANTA Forward Plan. Distributed in your package today is an review of the immediate impacts on bus and van replacement and expansion projects, and facilities replacement needed to accommodate new equipment types, and realize potential efficiencies in our maintenance function. Operating assistance growth is also required to maintain current service levels, the absence of which would preclude the potential to expand.

Also, attached is a review of rider statistics and cost effectiveness of the LANTA system. We could present comments from individuals, but the overall statistics that show that half of the trips taken on the system are connecting people to jobs is more compelling. The Authority has fully embraced the efficiencies and effectiveness goals set forth in the Reform Commission's report, and provides a service that is market driven.

The transportation funding crisis is real. This committee recognizes this fact. LANTA is supportive of a comprehensive approach that includes both short and long term elements. Within the context of this broad statement, LANTA believes the following elements are appropriate.

- Increases in vehicle registration fees and the oil franchise tax are appropriate short-term fixes.
- Tolling of interstate highways - I-80 and others - should remain part of the plan. The Commonwealth needs to support broad language in the new federal legislation that will permit interstate tolling.
- Moving the State Police and other non-highway construction items out of the Motor License Fund is essential.
- Providing local taxing options to Counties that can be used for highway and transit funding support.

The Commonwealth's transportation infrastructure cannot continue to be underfunded if we expect to meet the needs of a robust and competitive economy that supports the needs of its residents. LANTA and Lehigh Valley has experienced this growing need. We are prepared to work with area, state and federal elected officials in an effort to resolve the crisis and the long range need.

Now let's move to the other members of the panel ...

- Mike Micko, VP for Public Transportation Services, Schuylkill Transportation System.
- Peggy Howarth, Executive Director, Monroe county Transportation Authority.
- Dennis Louwarse, Executive Director, Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority.