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Center Valley, PA

Pennsylvania House Transportation Policy Committee
Public Hearing on Transportation Funding
Testimony by Karlynn Kerney
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Chairmen and Members of the House Committees: My name is Karlynn Kerney, and I am an upcoming senior at the Pennsylvania State University Main Campus, majoring in Civil Engineering with a focus in Transportation. Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today on behalf of students who want to make an impact in the future of transportation in Pennsylvania.

I worked in the Central Office at the PA Department of Transportation as an intern for two summers, and then worked in a private engineering firm for two summers as well. Last week I started my last internship with Michael Baker. I have assisted with traffic studies and analysis, designing projects, maintenance and protection of traffic plans. The exposure from these internships has given me the experience necessary to comprehend what is at stake in this crisis. The reason I am sharing this story with you today, is to describe how students of the future are being impacted.

The Pennsylvania State University is currently a top ranked school in the field of civil engineering, and the professors, faculty, and staff in the College of Engineering strongly encourage us to excel to our fullest. Some courses I've taken do involve the economic side of transportation. I know that if there is no funding, there will be no projects, meaning there will be no jobs. I was able to attend the first hearing held last Thursday in Derry Township. The information presented opened my eyes to the current condition of our roads, bridges, and public transportation. For example, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and others who rely on public transit, will be severely impacted by service reductions and fare increases.

Of the Civil Engineering students who graduated this year at Penn State Main Campus, 94 students responded to a survey of what they were doing post-graduation. Out of those 94 students, only 31 students said they have accepted or plan to accept an existing offer for a full-time job related to their major. That is only 33% of Civil Engineer majors who reported that they found work in their major. Of the students graduating this year in Architectural Engineering, 60 students responded to the same survey. Only 33 students, or about 54%, said they have accepted or plan to accept an existing offer for a full-time job related to their major. Of the 64 students who found work in their majors, only 24 of those students will be working in Pennsylvania. Only 16% of Civil Engineers and Architects from Penn State will be working in Pennsylvania. This figure is a sad reflection on the enormous talent leaving Pennsylvania.

At Penn State Harrisburg, there were twenty-one students that received a Bachelor of Science degree in Structural Design and Construction Engineering Technology. Out of these twenty-one graduates, only seven of them, 33%, found jobs in their major.

Based on these three examples, there are two alarming facts: 1) Most Civil Engineers/Architects are not finding jobs in their majors. 2) Many who do find work are finding those jobs outside of Pennsylvania.

It also has been hard to find internships and co-op opportunities within Pennsylvania. My freshmen year, many, many companies were very willing to take freshmen into their internship and co-op programs. Senior engineers wanted young students working on projects, and did not mind training and working with them. Most employees I talked to at career fairs asked me if I was willing to relocate, meaning work outside of Pennsylvania. Of course I said yes. Gaining experience in my field was one of my main goals so I can be competitive for permanent job openings after I graduate in 2011. But staying in Pennsylvania would have been a bonus. Well, I temporarily moved to MD for the summer of 2008 to continue gaining experience after working at PennDot. I enjoyed the internship, but I feel that if I would have worked on projects that impacted where I lived and where I traveled, I would have felt more satisfied with what I had accomplished. In 2009, transportation funding continued to be tight while I was actively looking for other internships in Pennsylvania. I ended up going back to MD, but I started later than expected, and ended my summer internship earlier. I personally, have been affected by this funding crisis.

Lastly, I would also like to share an experience of one of my classmates. As an upperclassman, I like to mentor younger students in my organizations and in my major. A mentee of mine, who was a freshman last year in civil engineering, excelled highly in his course work and ended the year with a 4.0. Eager to gain exposure in the field of transportation, he looked for internships. Most companies turned him down, and unfortunately, he was unable to find an internship this summer. He stayed at Penn State to work with incoming freshmen, adding no experience his major. I believe because of the funding, internships have significantly dropped and so many students were affected, like my friend.

I'm here to emphasize, that if funding is approved, the students of the future will be greatly impacted. As stated before, with more funding in transportation, more jobs will be generated meaning more civil engineers will graduate with a level of experience and knowledge in the field already. We are eager for that exposure. We are eager to get hands on. As a new generation, we are constantly learning how to be innovative in our thinking. There are students who are now entering college who have the mindset to make an impact in this world, and stunting that growth by this crisis can be crucial to our future. We see the issues of roads conditions and congestion, and we know many people who use public transportation. We want to stay here and help Pennsylvania grow to become an economic leader.

We look at this opportunity as the glass half FULL. What can we do to make this state more livable, drivable, and significantly beautiful? Give us the opportunity, give us the resources. Give us a chance to directly impact this state, our Keystone.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.