

Pennsylvania House Transportation Committee Public Hearing

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TESTIMONY

Submitted by

Lucinda Beattie, Vice President of Transportation, Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the House Transportation Committee. My name is Lucinda Beattie and I am the Vice President of Transportation for the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership (PDP). Formed over twenty years ago, the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership (PDP) is a non-profit community development organization that develops and implements innovative programs and initiatives to enhance Downtown Pittsburgh, cultivate a growing residential population, and stimulate a diverse retail community. We promote and market Downtown Pittsburgh as the region's premier destination to do business, to call home, or to visit for the best in shopping, dining, and entertainment.

Passenger rail is often discussed from the standpoint of being a necessary congestion reduction measure that occurs when population density results in traffic congestion. From that perspective, adding service on the Pennsylvanian is frequently dismissed as unnecessary. But I am here today to talk about it from a more traditional perspective: that of connecting people and communities, in particular, connecting Downtown Pittsburgh with the communities along the Pennsylvanian's corridor and with Harrisburg and Philadelphia in the east. Transportation systems historically developed to make it possible for people to cover distances more easily than they otherwise could.

I think we all well remember the death of the steel industry in the 1970s and its impact on the city of Pittsburgh and all the communities between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, many of whom are still struggling to revitalize their town centers or urban cores. Pittsburgh lost, not only its major industry, but also its working age population, as did Johnstown, Altoona and other communities along the Pennsylvanian rail corridor whose major industries had also been connected to the steel industry.

But in Pittsburgh there has been a turnaround. In the past ten years over \$8.7 billion dollars have been invested in development in Downtown Pittsburgh, and over the same period there has been a 31% growth in the number of residents living in Downtown. Today some 95,000 students live within 10 miles of Downtown. The economy is more diverse than it was in the past with high quality jobs in finance and insurance, professional services and management of companies.

Today, there are over 113,000 jobs in Downtown, making it the second largest urban employment center in the state. Centre City Philadelphia with its over 305,000 jobs remains the largest urban employment center. But if you add the number of jobs in the Oakland neighborhood of Pittsburgh – of which there are an estimated 90,000, making Oakland the third largest urban employment center in the state – to that of Downtown's, you get an urban employment center with over 200,000 jobs. Add to this mix, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development's (ACCD) estimate in their 2016 study *Inflection Point* that with a growing economy in western Pennsylvania there will be an 80,000 person shortfall in the number of workers available to fill jobs in 2026.

How do we solve this problem? How do we connect people to the available jobs?

The answer. We add frequency of service on the Pennsylvanian and make it possible for someone in Greensburg, Latrobe, Johnstown and other communities along the line to work in jobs in the Greater Pittsburgh area. We make it possible for someone in those communities to get to Pittsburgh and back from Pittsburgh in the same day and not have to drive to do so. In the 1960s when there were 12 daily passenger rail trains to Pittsburgh, people in Greensburg and other communities would commute to school or work in Pittsburgh. That was the norm. But, as Mark Spada of Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail (WPPR) described in his testimony, transportation options within a 500 mile radius of Pittsburgh are now limited primarily to the car. Adding service on the Pennsylvanian is low hanging fruit as the rail line already exists and is being used with existing passenger rail service on it. It should be simple to add service.

Not only would additional service provide more connectivity for western Pennsylvanians, but for many of the communities along the corridor it could also aid in their revitalization. As the

Keystone Service demonstrates, with more frequent service, ridership goes up. With increased ridership, there is frequently increased investment. As Secretary Leslie Richards said at the October 2016 groundbreaking for the Mount Joy Station: “These (station) improvements will further enhance the center of Mount Joy and help boost the borough’s ongoing revitalization plans...Transit plays a crucial role in building communities, and we have seen the results from more than a decade of upgrades to the Keystone Corridor...This will provide equal access for all people, allowing persons with disabilities, senior citizens, and other people with mobility challenges to live, work, and access transportation in this community”.

Improving the Keystone Service took almost twenty years and almost \$1B of investment. First the state invested in upgrading the rail infrastructure and electrifying the line. Then, through the *Keystone Plan* which laid out a development plan for the Harrisburg to Philadelphia corridor, the state invested with other agencies in upgrading the stations. While electrifying the line is not an option, we could take a similar long-term perspective for the Pennsylvanian corridor by first adding service and then investing in the upgrades and improvements that may be necessary.

Thank you for your time and consideration.