

For Immediate Release

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Regional Mobility Partnership Issues Transportation Funding Report
Report Identifies Funding Challenges, Provides Options and Highlights Need for Action

Pittsburgh, Allegheny County – The Southwest Partnership for Mobility today released a report regarding challenges facing the region’s transportation system as a resource for state elected officials as they address the need for dedicated, annual statewide funding. The Partnership, co-chaired by PA Turnpike Commission Chair and PA Department of Transportation Secretary Leslie S. Richards, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and Port Authority of Allegheny County CEO Katharine Kelleman, also called on the legislature to act quickly to address identified needs and offered their commitment and willingness to help.

“Transportation infrastructure, including transit, is such an important part of our economy in this region and it’s one that we cannot ignore, or try to work around. Doing nothing is the most expensive option that we have right now,” said Fitzgerald. “We’re proud of our region’s growth and the opportunities here, and we are committed to addressing transit and transportation funding so we can continue that growth and ensure that everyone in our community has access to those opportunities. This report makes those arguments for the legislature and outlines options for their consideration. We look forward to working with them on this important issue.”

The Port Authority of Allegheny County, the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, and Allegheny County formed the Partnership in early 2018 to address the challenges facing the region’s transportation system. Working with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the Partnership formed a cross-sector advisory council of regional stakeholders that included transportation agencies, local elected officials, major employers, and civic leaders. The Partnership’s final report highlights challenges and opportunities identified by the Council and funding options to ensure development of projects that accommodate or accelerate economic growth in the region.

“We have very serious challenges and risks facing our current and future transportation funding resources,” said Richards. “When you look at sustaining and growing our communities, this report proves that transportation access is a critical component of that equation.”

A common theme throughout the process from all stakeholders, members of the Council and the Partnership co-chairs was one of “Connections.” Participants shared unique insights into the transportation challenges and opportunities in the Pittsburgh region. They emphasized the need to provide connections for residents and employers to ensure continued growth in southwestern Pennsylvania. While the Council focused on the Port Authority as the transit provider for the region’s core, the transit agencies throughout the region rely upon state funding to provide the services upon which its riders rely.

“If you’ve ever been on a crowded rail car or have been passed up because your bus was too full; if you live in a neighborhood that has little access to public transit or if you’ve ever been late to work or picking your child up at daycare, then you know how important our service is to this community,” said Kelleman. “But while we can make sure our buses are clean and on time, and your experience meets your expectations, we simply cannot meet our region’s growing demand for public transit service without reliable and sustainable funding.”

The Council identified the current public transit funding mechanism as a challenge that needs to be addressed in order to allow the region to continue to grow, and to provide important connections to transit riders. Current funding is a combination of federal, state and local sources. Act 44 was passed to address that issue, but subsequent federal government decisions and additional funding obligations

from Act 89 have resulted in the Turnpike Commission facing growing debt, increasing tolls, and limited funding to address its system's growing needs.

The Port Authority and transit throughout the region have come a long way in connecting counties and municipalities throughout southwestern Pennsylvania. Empowering this region to reach its potential means connecting the region's population – connecting jobs, people, community resources, and economic opportunities with a modern, comprehensive transportation network. The Port Authority started down this path with its modernization, visioning and planning efforts. The Partnership and Council used that work as a springboard to identify regional projects of significance that can facilitate needed connections, but which do not currently have resources to move forward.

One of this region's challenges is that its population has become more decentralized as have job centers. In some cases, residents are commuting or reverse commuting from Allegheny County to surrounding counties. The Council was particularly interested in paving the way for a more regionalized approach to transit so that redundant services could be eliminated, and systems could better serve residents. In addition to looking at what other regions have done to fund and modernize their systems, the Council also looked at examples of other regions which made investments in connecting multiple transit systems. Like the regional projects of significance, this vision requires investment.

"Pennsylvania employers are facing a growing workforce shortage which is at the forefront of addressing transit issues," said Commissioner Leslie Osche, Butler County. "We must make getting to work a seamless and timely process in our region and, as such, seek a partnership with the Commonwealth, employers, and local governments who will need to invest in transit or related services in our region. Enabling legislation means we can develop local or regional investment solutions."

In addition to outlining regional challenges and opportunities, the Southwest Partnership for Mobility report also provides options to relieve the burden from Act 44, requests action by the state to allow for projects of significance to move forward, or, in the alternative, asks for enabling legislation to allow county governments, or a regional entity, the ability to generate revenue locally from a menu of options. The approach allows for local jurisdictions to make decisions that are most beneficial to its residents.

"The transportation needs of the next decade will require the support and flexibility of every level of government," said Chairman Michael A. Baker, Indiana County Commissioner. "Better connecting rural areas with population centers, jobs and services will be critical to the economic development and sustainability for all of southwest Pennsylvania."

The release of the Southwest Pennsylvania report follows the release of a related study in the southeastern part of the state. While there are similarities, the Southwest Pennsylvania region and, therefore, the report include unique considerations specific to this region. The full report includes a vision for the Southwest Pennsylvania region's transportation network, background research and a look at other competitor region's approaches, explanations of the challenges facing this region, potential solutions and full appendices of related studies, documents and funding option evaluations, and works cited. It can be found online at www.PaMobilityPartnerships.com.

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