

COUNTY OF  **ALLEGHENY**
RICH FITZGERALD
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

October 7, 2015

The Honorable Leslie S. Richards, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
Keystone Building
400 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Secretary Richards:

I am writing today to thank you for giving Allegheny County the opportunity to review and comment on the *Draft 2015 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan*. The County definitely supports the plan's goals to repair and maintain the state's existing rail system, support the future needs of residents and businesses, ensure personal safety and infrastructure security, and encourage environmental sustainability, among others.

Watching trains travel along our rivers and through our communities every day, I am constantly reminded of the importance of the rail system on the region's and the state's economy. Allegheny County is proud to be a partner in maintaining and enhancing the viability of the rail system. For example, we are ensuring that the replacement of the Kenmawr Bridge in Swissvale will accommodate Norfolk Southern's double-stack trains in the future. And, staff from Allegheny County Economic Development (ACED) are working closely with CSX to facilitate construction of their new intermodal facility in McKees Rocks and Stowe.

With regards to passenger rail, the draft rail plan highlights southwestern Pennsylvania's lack of passenger rail options. Local officials are well aware that topography, rail line ownership, and rail line capacity, among other factors, are obstacles to enhancing the limited passenger rail services. The draft plan identified several commuter rail concepts that have been studied at least conceptually in the past 15 years and noted that there is strong local support for many of the concepts. We expect that the recently launched Regional Transportation Alliance will establish the region's priorities for pursuing potential passenger rail opportunities along with establishing a coalition for moving one or more projects from the vision plan to the long-term plan.

Citing improvements and costs identified in the recently released *Keystone West High Speed Rail Study*, it appears that improvements to the Keystone West passenger rail corridor are beyond the draft plan's

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2040 implementation horizon. Reiterating comments we submitted in our review of that high speed rail study, Allegheny County strongly supports an interim step. While stakeholders evaluate the appropriateness of improvements to increase the travel speed along the corridor, we ask PennDOT to enter into discussions with AMTRAK and Norfolk Southern to increase the number of daily trips on the Pennsylvanian between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg from one to three.

With only one daily roundtrip, the Pennsylvanian's annual ridership has steadily increased over the past five years. Passengers clearly value its reliability, comfort, and affordability. Pursuing the near-term enhancement of its services is very consistent with the rail plan's goals of building support for the rail system, enhancing quality of life, and increasing safety and sustainability. It is also highly consistent with several of the goals in Allegheny County's comprehensive plan including supporting our residents' mobility and accessibility and facilitating the movement of goods and people, among others.

I commend PennDOT for their efforts to invest in the state's rail system. I look forward to working with you on advancing viable and meaningful improvements to the Keystone West corridor in the near term while we take additional time to review those projects on the vision plan.

Sincerely,



Rich Fitzgerald