

COUNTY OF



ALLEGHENY

RICH FITZGERALD
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

April 17, 2015

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

Re: Pennsylvanian Amtrak Passenger Rail Expansion

Dear Acting Secretary Richards:

I am writing today to convey my strong support for increasing passenger rail service along Amtrak's Pennsylvanian route between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. This letter stems from Allegheny County's review of two important, recently released studies regarding the Amtrak Pennsylvanian operations.

The *Keystone West High Speed Rail Study* did an excellent job of describing and evaluating alternatives for increasing the operating speed of the Pennsylvanian west of Harrisburg. However, in this corridor the cost of overcoming topography and the line's existing heavy usage by its private owner may be cost prohibitive given the limited time savings it would yield. For the corridor's stakeholders, many years of discussion and analysis lay ahead before implementing any of this report's proposed improvements.

The second report, *On Track to Accessibility: Increasing Service of the Pennsylvanian*, published by the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership in 2014, offers additional insight on how to improve the corridor's passenger rail services. Rather than focusing on speed, the report finds that adding two additional trips each day on the Pennsylvanian could nearly double ridership while at the same time providing numerous benefits, such as improved air quality, safety, increased mobility, reduced wear on the roadway network, enhanced resiliency of the transportation system, and household savings. The additional trips will help to achieve several goals of *Allegheny Places*, the County's comprehensive plan, including supporting mobility of existing communities, providing efficient transportation access, encouraging multi-modal connectivity, and facilitating the movement of people and goods.

Against the odds of inconvenient travel times, long trip duration, lack of rail trip options, and stable or declining population along the Keystone West corridor, the Pennsylvanian's ridership nearly doubled between 2003 and 2013. It had its highest ridership in 2013. The service is highly utilized and provides a reliable, comfortable, affordable, and cost-effective travel option.

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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I commend PennDOT for providing the financial support to continue the Pennsylvanian's existing service. I support this initiative to make passenger rail a viable option for the citizens of Allegheny County and western Pennsylvania. I urge you to enter into discussions with Amtrak to increase the number of daily passenger trips between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important transportation matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rich Fitzgerald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rich Fitzgerald
Allegheny County Executive