



Last Stop

Transportation Funding Crisis

Eric Wolf, General Manager

Loretta Lynn sang, "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." But if she lived in Pennsylvania, she might be singing, "Everybody wants good highways, but nobody wants to pay for them."

Funding gap

When the federal government denied the tolling of Interstate 80, it left a huge gap in Pennsylvania's transportation budget.

Since then a handful of courageous legislators in Harrisburg have been trying to address the issue before the Commonwealth falls even farther behind on maintaining our transportation system.

What's stopping them? In today's toxic political world, it's tough to vote for any kind of funding increase, even something as straight-

forward as an increase in the gas tax to repair roads and bridges.

Skewed priorities

Here is the fallacy about increasing the gas tax. Many people believe that the tipping point for gasoline may have been \$3.50 per gallon. So we Americans are willing to spend \$3.50 a gallon, even though much of the money enriches the coffers of foreign interests who range from unfriendly to downright threatening to our nation.

At the same time, if an elected official dares to suggest an increase in the gas tax or other fees to fix roads and bridges (making them safer) and to improve public transportation (reducing our oil dependency), they get death threats.

We are acting as if we believe that

sending dollars to our enemies is okay but keeping pennies here at home is evil.

Where are our priorities?

I've said this many times - this is not just an economic issue. It's an issue of national security.

But I digress.

Keystone Coalition

A coalition of transportation interests across the state have come together including highway, public transportation, rail, air and notably the State Chamber of Commerce.

One of the coalition's aims is to publicly support elected officials in making a difficult vote.

Most state legislators know what they need to do. They know that the crisis is real and imminent. They just need to know they won't be hung in effigy back home for doing the right thing.



Altoona, PA

AMTRAN Wins Chamber Technology Award



AMTRAN recently received a 2010 Technology Award from the Blair County Chamber of Commerce.

People don't usually associate new technology with riding the bus. But with AMTRAN's new Smart Bus system called myStop, customers just dial 944-1200 and punch in their bus stop number to find out when their bus will arrive at their stop in real-time.

According to John Palko, AMTRAN Director of Staff and Customer Services, "myStop means that you don't have to worry about missing your bus or standing out in the rain or cold. You can find out when your bus is coming by phone or on the internet."

Customers embrace technology

"Over the first five months, the new system was averaging 750 phone calls per month," according to Eric Wolf, General Manager, "so it seemed as if our customers were beginning to embrace the technology. By September, call volume had jumped 400% to more than 3,000 calls per month."

Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) technology in each bus ties into a central computer that tracks the bus against its scheduled route. Customers get real-time bus information by phone or on the internet.

Keeping the bus on time

The system also lets the driver know when they are

running early or late, helping them to stay on time. Maureen Gilbert, Director of Transportation, stated, "The entire system runs more smoothly and more on time with this new technology in place."

ADA

The Smart Bus Project also automates onboard bus stop announcements so that people with hearing disabilities can see them on a sign and people with vision disabilities can hear them announced automatically.

Shuster grant

The Smart Bus Project was funded through a special Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) grant from Congressman Bill Shuster.

Local partners

AMTRAN Board Chairman Scott Cessna stated, "We are very proud of the Smart Bus Project and of our Chamber Technology Award. But we could not have done it without a great AMTRAN team partnering with great local technology companies."

myStop was designed by Avail Technologies in State College. Other important local partners on the project were PC Works, Morefield Communications, and ComPros, all from Blair County.

Project management was provided by Clearview Strategies of Pittsburgh.

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In This Issue ... Chamber Tech Award

AMTRAN Stories - Why public transit is important

Sandra started riding the Altoona buses with her grandmother when she was three years old, and the fare was only thirteen cents. Now she is a grandmother but still depends solely on the bus service for transportation.

Sandra has never driven a vehicle, and her husband of over forty years has been disabled since 1998 and can



no longer drive. She relies on AMTRAN to get to her doctor appointments, pick up her prescriptions, and go to the grocery store. She also depends on public transportation to give back to her community by riding to donate blood and volunteering for charities.

Sandra spoke about the transition she and her husband have been forced to make through the years. "As we grow older, our world gets smaller, and our energy lags. Tasks that were simple have become difficult."

An all-day bus pass makes it possible for Sandra to go to a few stores, take her purchases home, have lunch, and then take another bus out to finish her shopping. The bus service allows her to take the time she needs to rest and slow down while still maintaining her personal independence throughout her day.

"Buses help to keep my world from becoming too small for me to bear. I would be lost without them."

The bus service in Altoona has played a pivotal role in Carl's quality of life. A native of Altoona, Carl was born with a mental disability. AMTRAN helps him to live a more independent life.

Carl works at a local Burger King and thanks the service and the bus drivers for making sure he arrives to work safely and on time. He takes pride and finds joy in his work. "I like to help the people who come to Burger King. I do a good job at work, and I have made many friends there."

Aside from the personal benefits that Carl receives from using public transportation, he is also grateful for the relief it provides to the people invested in his day to day life. Carl lives with his mother and step-father.

"The buses help my parents. I don't have to be so



dependent on them for rides." Although he knows that his life will always be affected by his family and the people he relies on for help daily, AMTRAN gives him the chance to more independent.

"It makes me happy to know that I can do so many things by myself."

Chris's Story

"Riding the bus is important to me because, like many others in our community, I am struggling financially right now. I can't afford to keep or maintain a vehicle at this time, so driving is not an option. The bus service provided by AMTRAN is affordable for me. The bus takes me to work every day, to the stores, or wherever I need to go."

"At the moment my fiancé is pregnant and I use public transit to get from Greenwood to her obstetrician appointments across town. Being new to Altoona, I don't know many people and I have no family in the area to help me get around. Riding the AMTRAN buses helps me help myself."

Karen's Story

Karen is a thirty-five year old Altoona resident who suffers from a disability that prohibits her from getting a Pennsylvania driver's license. However, she doesn't let her disability keep her locked inside or from pursuing the promise of a future.

"I am working on obtaining my associate degree so that I can become a productive member of society," she says.

For Karen, public transportation provides her with the opportunity to actively improve her situation while also providing an invaluable service on which she can rely.

"Many people who cannot drive need a safe and reliable source of transportation to get them to and from school or work."

Karen fears the "devastating effect" that a decrease in the bus services would have on her life. Without public transportation, the pursuit of her goals and professional aspirations would literally come to a stand-still.

Robert's Story



"I have difficulty walking. I don't drive because I can't afford a car. I work part-time to supplement my social security check which is not enough for me to live on."

"The bus service is affordable and I rely on it to get to work. No bus service would mean no work for me which would result in an inability for me to support myself."

"In addition, I use the AMTRAN buses to do my grocery shopping and to go to the doctor's office. I realize that times are hard for a lot of people in our community but without the bus service, times will get much more difficult, especially for senior citizens."

"Many of us have no other alternatives for transportation, and we depend on AMTRAN's steady and constant bus routes every day. Keep AMTRAN running!"