

PENNSYLVANIA STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
BUSINESS MEETING
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
DECEMBER 18, 2024



Please note that these minutes are not intended to capture every comment but to identify critical discussion points and highlights of the STC business meetings.

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Michael Carroll convened the quarterly business meeting of the State Transportation Commission (STC) at 10:02 a.m. on December 18, 2024, in Harrisburg, PA.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present:

1. Honorable Michael B. Carroll
2. Honorable James Kingsborough

Commissioners Present on the Phone:

1. Honorable Ed Neilson
2. Honorable Kerry Benninghoff
3. Honorable Sharon Knoll
4. Honorable Karen Michael
5. Honorable Marty Flynn
6. Honorable Wayne Langerholc, Jr

Commissioners Not Present

1. Honorable Paige Willan

MINUTES:

ON A MOTION by Mr. Jimmy Kingsborough, seconded by Ms. Michael, and unanimously approved, the August 14, 2024, STC business meeting minutes were accepted.

CHAIR'S REMARKS:

Secretary Carroll thanked the commission members for their good work this year and said it was a successful year for all modes of transportation. He noted the challenge of the blizzard in the Erie region after Thanksgiving and praised the responses of PennDOT, local officials, the National Guard, and State Police. He stated that staff from every district assisted with the recovery efforts.

12-YEAR TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM:

Deputy Secretary for Planning, Ms. Kristin Mulkerin, gave an update on the 12-Year Program (TYP) adjustments. For the period of October 1, 2024, to December 6, 2024, there were 1,910 adjustments to the 2025 12-Year Program. This comprises 707 additions, 646 changes, and 557 removals, representing a \$1,164,137,980 change.

Ms. Mulkerin highlighted the I-83 South Bridge Replacement Project, project #113754. On adoption of the Program, the bridge was shown as fully funded but did not include the \$500 million grant award. The award was added, and the I-83 East Shore 3C project was combined for ease of tracking. The grant funding allowed funds to be freed up from the later years of the TYP to fund other interstate projects. Thirteen projects were advanced, increased, or added throughout the state, including projects in Philadelphia, Berks County, Lackawanna, and two in Northampton.

Secretary Carroll added that Mr. Larry Shifflet, Ms. Natasha Fackler, and others visited Washington DC, to meet with the congressional delegation. The delegation joined in a letter to the Secretary of Transportation in support of the I-83 South Bridge \$500 million grant application.

Mr. Kingsborough asked what the schedule was for the I-83 South Bridge. Ms. Mulkerin said construction would begin in early-mid 2026 and would take several years. Mr. Shifflet said a new bridge would be built, traffic would be shifted to that bridge, and the old bridge would be demolished and replaced. The schedule is approximately three to four years for each bridge.

Secretary Carroll split the approval of the TYP adjustments into two votes: The TYP program adjustments, without the Transit Flex funding to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to support the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), and the Transit Flex funding to FTA to support SEPTA separately.

ON A MOTION by Mr. Neilson and seconded by Ms. Michael, the 2025 12-Year Program Adjustments without the flex funds were approved.

Ms. Mulkerin highlighted project #60317, Federal Preventative Maintenance, costing \$191,250,000. This included \$153 million in Federal funds and local matching funds of \$38.25 million. PennDOT provided \$153 million to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to temporarily aid SEPTA's shortfall to avoid additional fare increases and service cuts. The \$153 million came from seven interstate projects that would not use those funds in 2025. Those projects remain fully funded. Flex funds are sometimes not locally matched, but the counties provided those funds.

Mr. Shifflet said that the seven projects are on the interstate network. Six had existing let dates in late 2025 or beyond. The seventh project, a small resurfacing project in York, may be delayed a quarter.

Secretary Carroll said flexing funds is not ideal, but transit is as essential to the southeast as Route 6 is in Bradford County. He has faith that the legislative partners will continue to work to reach a resolution on state transit funding

Senator Langerholc said that he will vote No on the flex, as indicated in other statements. He said that taking funds from the rest of the state is a dangerous precedent and that SEPTA needs to take a more holistic look at its approach. He said he recognizes the need for mass transit, but the flex is premature considering SEPTA's cash reserve. He said he was concerned about residents seeing projects affected to bail out SEPTA with no plan in place for long-term stability.

Representative Ed Neilson said that the southeast is an economic engine, and that SEPTA was just the first to fall off the cliff. No matter what transit agency it is, their job as legislators is to ensure they do not fail. He said that flexing has been done before and noted that when it was done under Governor Rendell, none of those projects went away. He said that if transit in the southeast fails, 309,000 workers go to Center City Philadelphia to work, and there are only 52,000 parking spots. A million riders a day use SEPTA transport. He said that he hopes this can be resolved by June because this is only the beginning, and that transit agencies across the country are in trouble. SEPTA is back to 85% of ridership.

Senator Marty Flynn noted that southeastern Pennsylvania is a huge economic driver, generating 40% of the state's revenue. He said that the legislature was unable to get a funding deal done and that he would support the governor's effort.

Secretary Carroll said that he was pleased by the decision of the five counties to provide local match. Fares have already increased, and steps will continue to combat SEPTA's problems. He noted that Pittsburgh Regional Transit will be the next to face those challenges, and others will follow. Flexing funds isn't an ideal solution, and it wasn't ideal in the past, but there is hope that there will be a solution for the needs of all modes in the future.

Representative Kerry Benninghoff raised concern that the governor's abrupt flexing without much dialogue with the caucuses will make budget conversations more difficult. He said that diverting funds may set a bad precedent, comparing it to the State Police funding situation. Some members have expressed frustration that fare increases seem to be the last resort when users should be helping to subsidize the service. He expressed concerns that this may set up an urban vs rural situation in budget discussions.

Secretary Carroll said that each funding bill has a road and bridge component and a transit component, which brings together urban and rural. He said he remains optimistic that they can come together to solve both roads and bridges and transit. He agreed that the five southeast counties drive the state's economy, which supports the work done in rural areas. Secretary Carroll added the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce noted the importance of SEPTA.

ON A MOTION by Mr. Neilson and seconded by Mr. Flynn, the 2025 12-Year Program flex funds were approved with a 6-2 roll call vote.

Yes: Carroll, Neilson, Knoll, Kingsborough, Michael, Flynn

No: Benninghoff, Langerholc

2024 RFAP and RTAP Programs

Ms. Angela Watson provided an overview of the 2024 Rail Freight Assistance Program (RFAP) and the Rail Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP) projects.

Ms. Watson said that this request includes 30 projects at \$55 million, or approximately \$80 million of investment with local match. Most projects are track/rail rehabilitation projects, with some bridge rehabilitation and a few new service rail spurs.

Secretary Carroll said that Pennsylvania has one of the most aggressive rail freight assistance programs, with a very good rail system of both class 1 and short lines, PennDOT is also expanding passenger rail across the state.

ON A MOTION by Mr. Kingsborough and seconded by Ms. Knoll, the 2024 RTAP and RFAP project awards were approved.

REPORTS

Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

Ms. Jody Holton, Transportation Advisory Committee Chair, gave a brief update from the TAC.

The TAC is currently looking at study topics for 2025. The PA Changing Demographics and Impact on Workforce Needs previously had a second phase to make recommendations with the governor's Aging Our Way PA plan, but this phase was removed due to PennDOT taking the lead on the assigned Tactics

Ms. Holton added that the E-Commerce study and Transportation Performance Report will be presented to the STC at the February meeting.

Ms. Holton noted that the TAC previously did a Public Transportation Demand in a Post-Pandemic Environment study, which came with recommendations. SEPTA and many rural partners have undertaken those recommendations.

Executive Secretary

Executive Deputy Secretary, Mr. Larry Shifflet gave a brief update.

Mr. Shifflet noted that the federal government is still operating under a continuing resolution, set to expire on December 20, 2024. Federal highway funding is not generally affected by short government shutdowns but can be impacted if a shutdown is long term.

Administrative/Budget

Deputy Secretary for Administration, Mr. Corey Pellington, highlighted the Office of Administration report.

Mr. Pellington stated that the Mifflin County Maintenance Office project will be put out for bid.

He said summer seasonal positions for engineering internships are open. Engineering internships are now separate from the technical and scientific internship positions.

Mr. Pellington explained that permanent winter positions are at 97% filled. Temporary winter operator positions are at 24%. Non-operator filled vacancies are at 46%. Recruitment efforts will continue but are in good shape.

Driver and Vehicle Services

Mr. Steve Madrak, on behalf of Deputy Secretary for Driver and Vehicle Services (DVS), Ms. Kara Templeton, gave an update.

Mr. Madrak said that there are seven new registration plates available, with the PA Sportsman plate being the most popular.

Mr. Madrak said that PennDOT continues to prepare for the implementation of the Electric Vehicle Road User Fee. He also noted that call center numbers continue to improve as workers gain more experience and training.

Mr. Madrak said that they opened a Driver License Center in Exeter, Berks County, the previous day with the grand opening the following day.

Highway and Bridge Program

Mr. Jonathan Eboli, on behalf of Deputy Secretary Ms. Christine Norris, highlighted several Highway and Bridge Program reports.

Mr. Eboli said that bridge quality has been trending positive, with decreasing poor-quality bridges and increasing good quality bridges between 2008 and 2024, citing increased funding. The 2025-2035 forecast shows an increase in poor bridges, but the Department remain committed to preservation and replacement.

In pavement quality between 2010-2023. The number of poor-quality miles has risen, while, the amount of excellent quality miles has remained consistent. The forecast shows poor mileage continuing to increase, and excellent mileage decreasing, due to funding constraints, material prices, and inflation.

The five-year average of fatalities will increase in 2024, due to 2019's record low no longer being included. In 2023, there were over 110,000 reportable crashes with over 1,200 fatalities. PennDOT continues to prioritize seatbelt and work zone safety in all messaging.

Mr. Eboli said that PennDOT is prepared for winter. He noted that there have already been challenging storm events, specifically in Erie, where the post-Thanksgiving storm laid 4-8 feet in some areas. He added resources from every district were sent to Erie to support them.

Gasoline and crude oil trended slightly downward in the third quarter of 2024, while asphalt was up by 1.5%.

Mr. Eboli said they were on track to end 2024 with a \$2.8 billion letting total. To date, 519 projects have been bid, worth \$2.56 billion. Another 45 projects are expected to be let, for \$165 million. Estimations have significantly improved this year, due to easing of the rate of inflation and lessened supply chain issues. Low bids have been coming in approximately 1% below estimate.

He stated 95% of construction projects completed in the third quarter were on time, above the goal of 80%. In the past four quarters, 162 of 527 projects exceeded the 3% bid overrun, resulting in \$74 million in extra cost. Three projects accounted for the majority of the cost, and the statewide overrun was under 5%.

Secretary Carroll said that Pennsylvania led the nation in repairing of poor-condition bridges, due to the good work of the Highway Administration. He also mentioned that county and municipal partners have done a great job at replacing county and municipal bridges, noting an exceptional Union County grant application. He thanked the multimodal department for their assistance in obtaining these federal grant funds.

Multimodal Transportation

Ms. Angela Watson, on behalf of Deputy Secretary for Multimodal Transportation, Ms. Meredith Biggica, gave an update.

Ms. Watson said that the report stands but added that PennDOT was able to obligate the Corridor ID grant for Scranton passenger rail service which will fund the Service Development Plan, which is a \$5.4 million plan.

Secretary Carroll said that Scranton is the second applicant to reach stage two behind Texas, and hopes Reading makes it to stage two as well. He also noted the \$143 million federal grant for the enhanced passenger rail from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh.

Office of Planning

Deputy Secretary for Planning, Ms. Kristin Mulkerin, gave an update from the Office of Planning.

Ms. Mulkerin said they successfully submitted the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, which was approved on September 27, 2024, and became active on October 1, 2024. No corrective actions were necessary, but three commendations and five recommendations were received, which will be addressed in an action plan.

Three additional grant applications were submitted since the last meeting, and four applications are still pending. PennDOT and SEPTA both received a Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) award. Since the previous report there was a significant amount of awards, primarily from Safe Streets for All.

The annual Pennsylvania Highway Statistics, PUB600, was published and is available online. System mileage and daily vehicle miles traveled increased, and PennDOT mileage and daily vehicle miles traveled on the PennDOT system also increased. She also noted that the urban and rural breakdowns may change in the next printing, due to the urban boundary smoothing in progress based on the Census.

WORKING SESSION:

12-Year Program (TYP) Outreach Input

Mr. Dan Keane, 12-Year Program Section Manager, discussed the upcoming Public Outreach efforts for the 2027 12-Year Program.

Mr. Keane said the TYP is unique to Pennsylvania and serves as a mid-range planning tool. The TYP is updated every two years, which is presented to the STC for adoption. The feedback received is used to update future TYPs, as well as the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and other programs.

The approval of the Transportation Performance Report (TPR) will start the TYP update process, beginning with the TYP Public Comment Period, running from March 3 through April 30, 2025. The public may give input through the Survey and Open Public Forum (OPF).

Each cycle, the TYP public outreach process and reach has improved. The 2013 process introduced the virtual public meeting and first online survey, and each cycle has improved the survey, OPF, and advertising. The 2025 TYP included an extended survey, pop-up events, and increased material translations, including a live ASL interpreter at the OPF.

Secretary Carroll asked for clarification on pop-up events. Mr. Keane explained that they would find a location to set up a booth and solicit input, such as the Farm Show. This provided 5,000 touchpoints with the community at four events in 2023.

Mr. Keane said the 2027 TYP update will focus on tracking and following up on mapped issues from the survey. This is an emphasis on transparency, to convey to the public how their input is being addressed. A tool is in development for tracking these issues and coordinating with the districts and other local partners.

The goals for the 2025 outreach are to increase participation quality, emphasize feedback response, increase participant diversity, and improve the OPF experience.

The survey will remain available until April 30, 2025. The survey is open early to attendees of the job fairs. There will be pop-up events with a focus on universities, as the previous outreach tripled the youth participation rate, and included giving a presentation in a classroom at Millersville.

Mr. Benninghoff asked why pop-up events are held, and why the focus is on the younger generation when most of the contact he receives regarding transportation issues is from middle-aged to senior populations. Mr. Keane said that the pop-up events are so they can have a face in the community, let them know what we do, as well as solicit their input on the survey. Younger generations are more tech-savvy and tend to have a strong focus on the future.

Mr. Shifflet added that the youth was one of the age groups where participation was lowest. Mr. Benninghoff said that it may be possible to include talking to the students about safety. Mr. Keane also noted that students are also the most frequent users of multimodal transportation.

Mr. Arnold asked if the Driver License Centers had been leveraged in the last cycle. Mr. Keane said the link was on the text scroll on the screens at the Driver License Centers, as well as a banner and flyers at the Riverfront Office Center.

Mr. Keane said they would advertise through print and digital media, as well as the PA511 app, PA Bulletin, and newsletters. They will also coordinate with the tribal nations, stakeholder groups, and previous survey participants. An online toolkit will be available on the website, containing flyers and other materials for Planning Partners to use.

Mr. Kingsborough said that the Bureau of Aviation likely has a database of airport owners and staff that could be contacted.

COMMISSIONERS REPORT:

None

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

OTHER BUSINESS:

None.

NEXT MEETING:

The next STC quarterly meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, February 26, 2025.**

ADJOURNMENT:

ON A MOTION by Mr. Kingsborough and seconded by Mr. Nielson, the STC quarterly meeting was adjourned at 11:17 a.m.