

## Op-Ed: Addressing region's transportation needs a necessity

July 7, 2011

By Ryan Costello, Chester County Commissioner

Chester County has been nationally recognized as one of the best places to live, work, raise a family and enjoy your golden years.

Many factors contribute to the quality of life we all enjoy. These factors include good schools, first rate employers, plenty of high quality jobs, a healthy environment and responsible government, to name a few. .

These are also reasons why we have seen our population soar, as people flock to enjoy our way of life and take advantage of all the County has to offer. An unfortunate side effect of this growth however, is rapidly increasing congestion on our roadways and a demand for parking at our train stations that can no longer be met with our current infrastructure.

None of us like sitting in endless traffic jams or getting to the train station only to discover there is nowhere to park. We waste gas, money and time in gridlock as our environment quietly suffers right along with us as we sit in frustration. The increased traffic is not only dealing a serious blow to our quality of life, but it is taking an enormous toll on our roads and bridges.

We cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the inevitable and ignore the fact that our aging infrastructure is in desperate need of repair and enhancements. If we don't begin to make serious investments, it will no longer just be an inconvenience but a serious safety concern for motorists.

We also cannot wait for more money from the federal government. Congress has yet to approve a new highway funding bill, and many are speculating that when one is passed it will likely include significantly less money for the Commonwealth.

In Harrisburg, Gov. Tom Corbett to his credit has established a transportation funding commission. He has tasked them with providing recommendations to help narrow the Commonwealth's \$3.5 billion funding shortfall for road and bridge maintenance identified by a bipartisan commission report issued last year. The Governor's funding commission will conclude its work and issue its recommendations by August 1.

There will assuredly be a spirited debate over the various proposals from the commission and subsequent legislation — as there should be. The fact is, while we all can agree on the problem, finding consensus on the solution is far more difficult. The clock, however, has nearly run out. Failure by the Governor and legislature to act this fall could lead to road and bridge closures and reductions in transit service throughout the Commonwealth in the years to come.



Chester County Commissioner  
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The Chester County Commissioners have worked diligently to make sure our county bridges and roads remain safe and that buses are available to take workers to their jobs, ailing citizens to their medical appointments and shoppers to stores. Smart investment of the limited transportation dollars the county receives has been a top priority.

In Chester County, we still have bridges in need of structural repairs and the maintenance can be extremely costly. Engineering and construction on a single bridge can often cost several million dollars. For years the county has wisely set aside money to keep up with these repairs but if federal and state funding continues to wane, those reserves will quickly be depleted.

The county also has public transportation needs. The commissioners have been working with SEPTA and Amtrak officials to refurbish our county's train stations, including the historic Coatesville Station, which was constructed in 1865 and is the oldest existing station along the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line. The Coatesville Station is seen as one cog in the revitalization of the city. In addition, increased access to train service should keep cars off the road.

In a recent positive piece of transportation related news, the Transportation Management Association of Chester County announced that the Southern Chester County Organization on Transportation (SCCOOT), Coatesville Link and Beelines buses will continue to service county residents through guaranteed funding from various sources.

TMACC reported funding for the bus routes have been received from the federal government, Lincoln University, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and the Chester County Commissioners.

As funding continues to dwindle and needs for essential programs increase, we all must look for new and creative ways to work together to solve our transportation problems. Legislation currently pending in the state legislature to allow Public Private Partnerships is a step in the right direction. It would be another tool in our tool box.

Identifying adequate transportation funding to meet our regional and national infrastructure needs remains a challenging public policy issue on both the federal and state levels. To be successful, we all must work together on the local level to find cost-effective solutions through collaboration between government, non-profits, the business community and our residents. That collaboration and innovative thinking is how we will maintain the quality of life here in Chester County that makes it such a great place to live, work and raise a family.

*Ryan Costello is a member of the Chester County Board of Commissioners.*

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