

Pennsylvania passes transport funding measure

Written by Douglas John Bowen
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The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has passed a \$2.3 billion transportation package that raises the state gas tax and provides funding for rail operations in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and on Amtrak's Keystone Corridor linking Philadelphia and Harrisburg, the state capital.

Gov. Tom Corbett, who backed the measure, was slated to sign the measure into law Monday, Nov. 25, 2013.

A revamped formula results in a net increase in the state gasoline tax of 9.5 cents per gallon starting Jan. 1, 2014. Another 9.7 cents is added in 2015, and at least 8 cents more is forecast for 2017.

Though the major portion of the funding package, \$1.65 billion, is for highway projects, particularly structurally deficient bridges, SEPTA will receive \$340 million per year, avoiding severe service cuts the agency projected for Philadelphia rail, light rail, and bus services.

SEPTA General Manager Joseph M. Casey identified one of SEPTA's top capital funding needs was the rehabilitation of rail bridges on the Media/Elwyn Regional Rail line. Current conditions had made the closure of those bridges a likelihood absent capital funding.

A spokesman for the Port Authority of Allegheny County told local media the agency had not received revenue estimates for handling Pittsburgh rail and bus services, but did expect the move to eliminate any threat of service cutbacks.

The bill also includes funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects and street improvements, such as safer access routes to and from schools.

source: www.railwayage.com