

**Comments at Pennsylvania State Transportation Commission Public Hearing
Wednesday, September 2, 2009 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Regarding the 2011 Update of the Commonwealth's 12 Year Transportation Program**

I am and have been a resident of Glenside and Wyncote in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County all of my life. I am here to give voice to the concerns of many of my neighbors. Please hear us. We need your help. The reactivation of the R8 commuter rail service between Fox Chase and Newtown will provide relief to the thousands of commuters that use the R1, R2, R3 and R5 north of center city Philadelphia by giving back local stations to many rail riders living in Eastern Montgomery and Bucks Counties. Presently, the rail riders from the R8 areas must drive to and park at the overcrowded R2, R3 or R5 stations. Additionally, Philadelphia County will benefit from the reverse commute corridor to Newtown.

SEPTA conducted a new rider survey on May 19th and 20th of this year. 52% of the riders boarding at the Jenkintown-Wyncote Station by-passed their local SEPTA rail station. Of the 48% of boarders at J-W who actually live in Jenkintown or Wyncote, two out of every three walked to the station or were dropped off. In other words, more than 80% of the cars parked every day at J-W belong to rail riders that for one reason or another chose to not park and ride at their local SEPTA rail station! This is a big problem for our neighborhoods and for our region. The current situation of a shut down R8 line coupled with limited train service and inadequate parking at smaller stations forces riders to drive to larger stations. This is an abuse of the purposes for which public transit funds are intended—namely the construction of facilities that strengthen the use of public transit rather than increasing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) throughout the region.

In addition to the increased traffic, fuel waste, and quality of life issues caused by the current situation, the new March 2009 Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) report on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions states the obvious. Per capita GHG emissions are significantly lower in the inner suburbs than in the outer suburbs due to greater use of automobiles in the outer suburbs. Sustainable solutions, to the inevitable economic and environmental collapse caused by suburban sprawl and the “happy motoring” mentality, all include a concept called “automobile at rest” or reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by the public. We as Americans must learn to access public transportation as close to our residences as possible, and reduce the use of our automobiles. SEPTA can and must make that transition possible by improving and increasing rail service to the far suburbs, not building large parking garages at a few transportation centers.

Many of the good people of Jenkintown and Cheltenham Township have chosen to buy homes close to the city and an excellent train station because they correctly understand that rail systems are the future of regional transportation. Many of us walk or bicycle to our train station. However, many others, including some of our SEPTA and regional planners, seem to be clinging to the failed policies of a society based almost entirely on the automobile.

Without a reinstated R8 and the additional service and parking that it will bring, we are faced with more VMT, wasted fuel and pollution. The present situation lacks good long-term thinking because it is based on fifty year old policies developed when automobiles and highways were considered the future of regional transportation. The present situation rewards the wasteful and punishes the conservative. It subsidizes the foolish and taxes the wise. It supports the unsustainable and devalues the efficient, all because it favors the use of automobiles over regional rail. The Pennsylvania State Transportation Commission must not ignore the facts of physical science that dictate a future with less driving and a much more extensive and modernized rail system that serves the public in many communities large and small. The future begins now.

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