

## Funding our Regional Transportation Program:

*Why is it so complicated? Why does it take so long?*

Money – there never seems to be enough.

- ❖ The total cost of our transportation needs always greatly exceeds the funds we expect to receive.
- ❖ The region has to set priorities, making tough choices and compromises.

Pennsylvania has special concerns.

- ❖ Pennsylvania has more miles of state highways to maintain than New York, New Jersey and all of New England combined.
- ❖ Because of our hills and valleys, we have an unusually high number of bridges to maintain. Our region's bridges average age is 49 years.
- ❖ On the interstate highways in Pennsylvania, 16% of the traffic is trucks. Portions of the Harrisburg region's mostly heavily traveled roads near 40% truck traffic.

Money – where does it come from?

- ❖ Federal and state taxes on the sale of fuels provide most of the transportation money for our region. About 20% comes from property tax and general fund appropriations.
- ❖ We actually pay less for a gallon of gas now (adjusting for inflation) than we did in 1920 and during the price peaks in the early 1980s!
- ❖ State fees on vehicle licenses also provide revenue.
- ❖ The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission operates on a separate budget. Its revenues include tolls, used to maintain the turnpike system.

Money – it comes in specific categories, each with its own rules for qualifying.

- ❖ Public transportation (buses, rail, paratransit van services, etc.) receives "Title III" funding, broken into separate programs to support maintenance, operations, and capital improvements.
- ❖ Highways, bridges, and other surface transportation projects receive "Title I" funding, in specific programs for highways, bridges, intermodal facilities, and Congestion Management and Air Quality (CMAQ) projects.
- ❖ Transportation Enhancements – such as bicycle & pedestrian paths, restoration of rail stations – are currently funded by 10% of the Surface Transportation Program monies.

Phases of project development

- ❖ On the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), projects are programmed year by year.
- ❖ The first phase is engineering, including environmental evaluation as well as design.
- ❖ Engineering is followed by purchase of right-of-way and moving utility lines, if necessary.
- ❖ The last phase is construction, including implementation of programs.

Carry-over from one program to the next

- ❖ Many projects appear on the TIP only for their initial phases.
- ❖ A large part of the next TIP can be consumed just to finish incomplete projects started earlier.
- ❖ Only programmed projects assigned obligation authority can begin. Since obligation authority is always a portion of the total budget, projects may be programmed on several TIPs before it is ever assigned authority and can begin engineering.

## Flexibility within the program

- ❖ As a project progresses, cost increases may occur or sometimes the project isn't ready for construction as soon as expected.
- ❖ Therefore, as necessary, the TIP and/or Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) can be amended between regular updates. The project sponsor (usually PennDOT or the municipality) proposes to move funding from one qualifying project to another.
- ❖ It is important not to tie up funds if a project is not ready as soon as it was initially programmed.

---

## Basic funding priorities

- ❖ Responding to federal and state guidance, HATS programs 80% of its funds to maintain the existing infrastructure.
- ❖ HATS also tries to follow the "finish what we started" principle, carrying projects to completion after initial stages have been completed.

---

## Competition for funding

- ❖ Many high-visibility projects are very costly. Complete funding of any one could consume all the funds available.
- ❖ Many needs cannot be met. Do we postpone an expensive maintenance project by doing a quick temporary repair? Do we delay one project in order to be able to do another?
- ❖ Priorities are based upon several technical criteria, including safety, economic vitality and environmental quality, as well as urgency of need and availability of the necessary category of funds.
- ❖ Although there's little room for new projects, we must keep our ears open for critical needs.
- ❖ Innovative funding, which finds new sources of revenue, will become increasingly important. This could help advance big projects and could free up money from our regular sources for other projects.
- ❖ Priority project needs will receive a fair share of the money available to the region, but negotiation and compromise must take place. Many projects benefit the whole region, and over time the counties decide to take turns funding major regional projects.

---

## Who is responsible for making these tough decisions on the RTP & TIP?

- ❖ These programs are adopted by the HATS Coordinating Committee, whose members are the City of Harrisburg, Cumberland, Dauphin, and Perry Counties, PennDOT, & Capital Area Transit.
- ❖ Program details are developed and maintained by HATS, working closely with the municipalities, PennDOT & CAT, by way of our Technical Committee and special task forces.

---

## What roles do the Congress & State legislature play?

- ❖ Federal legislation establishes the basic requirements for our transportation planning program.
- ❖ This legislation may include 'earmark' funding for specific projects. HATS works with our legislators, encouraging them to earmark projects that are partially funded on our TIP and to avoid partial funding for projects we cannot afford to complete.
- ❖ Legislators can help us maintain existing programs and develop new sources of funding. The Congress provides the appropriations to fund the transportation program. Likewise, the state legislature provides the appropriations to commit state funds.

---

## For more information...