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2025 MBA State Transit Position & Policy

Workforce is Tightly Intertwined with Public Transit

PROBLEM: The inability to find workers is a top concern for members of the Manufacturer & Business Association (MBA) since 2020 and even earlier. In June 2025 people understand the need for public transit in urban centers. Workers need reliable transportation to and from the workplace, as much as they need childcare, education, training, and healthcare. But look ahead to June 2035, just ten years away. MBA believes reliable and affordable public transit is needed all over the Commonwealth and knows it is tightly intertwined with the workforce. Here are four reasons why:

First - Declining Workforce Age Population

Pennsylvania has incredibly challenging demographics - meaning the source of taxes is shrinking – while the elderly population is increasing along with their costs for long-term care etc. In 2020 there were 3.1 workers paying taxes to support one retired person. In 2030 there will be 2.4 workers to support one retired person.

Second - Personal Vehicle Expense

There is a growing lack of affordable personal vehicles. The average cost of new vehicles ranges from gas powered at \$48,614 to Hybrid at \$39,040; and Electric at \$56,371. It is a huge expense for some people considering the median household income in Pennsylvania was \$79,820 in 2023. Add tariffs and prices increase further. The Center for Automotive Research estimated the average tariff cost per vehicle will be \$4,239 and \$8,722 for imported.

Third - Our future workforce.

The younger generation is less interested in driving. A growing group of young people have no interest in driving. Remember when teens could not wait for their sixteenth birthday? The percentage of 19-year-olds with a driver's license dropped from 87.3% in 1983 to 68.7% in 2022, according to the Federal Highway Administration. They will need to have other transit options.

Fourth - MBA accidentally discovered a fourth reason for more public transit tied to the workforce.

The formerly incarcerated are faced with challenging barriers to driver's licenses and cars. We investigated hiring the formerly incarcerated for our manufacturing members and found they have no way to get to and from the workplace. The barriers for this group to obtain driver's licenses and vehicles are extremely challenging.

There is no exact number of formerly incarcerated people living in Pennsylvania, but in 2022 alone, about 219,000 people were released from prisons and jails in Pennsylvania. Imagine the impact of solving the transit problem for this group of potential workers.

SOLUTION: If Pennsylvania wants to grow and employers want workers in June 2035 then every possible worker will be needed in the pipeline. Now big transit agencies serve mostly urban areas. Smaller county transit agencies provide some public transit. Rural areas are a challenge. We need to expand our view of transit and experiment with new ways to move people where they need to go.

Pennsylvania needs twenty-first century solutions.

*In the early twentieth century, western Pennsylvania had one of the most extensive and interconnected streetcar networks in the country. Streetcars served as the primary public mode of transit before widespread car ownership. Now, in the twenty-first century a diverse set of tools is needed. Transit must be flexible and provide more than a fixed route, point-to-point service.

- A professor at Carnegie Mellon University conducted a successful pilot in Greene County that provided on-demand service.
- Another possibility is adding on-demand service to existing bus lines to reach further into suburban and rural areas where service may be extremely limited.
- The future may bring businesses like Waymo and Uber who are deploying fully automated, driverless personal vehicles. They can be coordinated with public transit.

Underpinning all of this is the need for transit funding.

Inventive minds can come to the table and acknowledge the brutal facts of public transit in 2025 and figure a way to move positively to 2035. The Southeastern PA Transit Authority and Pittsburgh Regional Transit respectively face a \$213 million budget deficit and a \$100 million budget deficit. Lawmakers may approve of the transit funding needed this year but it's important for all to acknowledge this is unsustainable.

A plan that includes a sustainable revenue stream to support urban, suburban, and rural transit is needed. What does that look like? Pieces of the solution may include.

- Privatization
- Public-private partnerships
- Increased fares
- Smaller buses, and
- Less overhead for workers of transit agencies.

The bottom line

What we are doing now is not working and it won't work in 2035 when every last, available worker will need a way to get to and from the workplace.

The Manufacturer & Business Association (MBA), founded in 1905, has over 3,000 members representing around 120,000 employees in 57 counties. The MBA is dedicated to helping employers face challenges by delivering services that lower the cost of doing business, ease the burden of compliance and increase productivity for its members. The MBA is recognized as a trusted resource for employers across Pennsylvania, northeastern Ohio, and southwestern New York. www.mbausa.org