

Port Authority a Vital Part of the Local Economy

By Paul P. Skoutelas, P.E.
CEO, Port Authority of Allegheny County

Port Authority of Allegheny County's network of transportation services provides some 240,000 trips every weekday for residents of Allegheny County and portions of five surrounding counties. A 25-mile light rail transit system and 18.4 miles of exclusive busways are the backbone of a diverse system that also includes the Monongahela Incline and operations over the HOV lane of I-279 North and three dedicated bus lanes in the City of Pittsburgh.

The business of public transportation, however, is also the business of our local economy. Port Authority capital construction and service create and support jobs for local companies, encourage and support economic development and provide a vital link between businesses and their employees and customers.

Port Authority services do so much more than simply move people. We connect them to life. That connection is a vital one in the complex picture of our local economy, because it affects the ability of employees and consumers to play their respective roles in our daily commerce.

In addition, our capital program of almost \$1 billion over the last decade has not only made possible more efficient transit services but has created or supported jobs for hundreds of local companies while fostering and complementing development that makes our community more vibrant.

Studies have shown the economic effects of investment in public transportation infrastructure go beyond improving mobility for all Americans. The American Public Transportation Association reports that every \$10 million capital investment in public transportation sparks \$30 million in economic returns through job creation or sup-

port, business sales and savings in transportation costs and productivity. Similarly, every \$1 billion invested in infrastructure supports approximately 47,500 jobs.

Dollars from such capital investments flow to hundreds of industries, from specialized rail and bus construction firms and vehicle manufacturers to transportation planning firms and software suppliers, thereby promoting commerce vital to our economic growth.

Under these formulas, Port Authority's capital construction program of approximately \$1 billion over the last decade has created or supported 47,500 jobs and sparked more than \$3 billion in economic returns locally — significantly impacting and sustaining our region's economy. The planned North Shore Connector, a \$381 million project that will extend the T light rail transit system to both the growing North Shore and to the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, will continue this positive effect.

In short, public transportation investments significantly impact our national and local economies by offering people the freedom to do either of two fundamental things — to earn money or to spend money.

Even after they are completed, Port Authority's capital investments have continued to be a factor in local economic development.

A study of Port Authority's Martin Luther King, Jr. East Busway found that 54 new developments with an assessed value of \$302 million occurred along or near the facility in the first 13 years after it opened in 1983.

Similarly, planning for the West Busway that opened in 2000 included an agreement with the Borough of Carnegie that made pos-

sible the construction of its new municipal complex, including retail space, adjacent to Carnegie Station. That project also has fostered the retail development of a five-acre parcel along University Boulevard in Moon Township adjacent to Port Authority's University Boulevard Park and Ride Lot.

The importance they placed on public transit links helped Mellon Bank and PNC Bank decide to construct new facilities adjacent to the T in recent years. The \$112 million Mellon Client Service Center was constructed adjacent to the Steel Plaza Station, while PNC's \$110 million Firstside Center was constructed adjacent to Port Authority's First Avenue Station.

"In addition to investing in and encouraging economic development in the downtown Pittsburgh area, ease of access for our employees was a key factor in selecting a location for this important facility," PNC Bank president Sy Holzer said.

The North Shore Connector, which will extend from a relocated Gateway Center Station under Stanwix Street and the Allegheny River to Pittsburgh's North Shore and include a connection to the convention center, will also support existing and planned development while making possible future extensions to the west, north and east.

The project will provide convenient connections to persons traveling to or from the Carnegie Science Center, the Community College of Allegheny County, Heinz Field, PNC Park, the Heinz History Center, the Strip District and planned North Shore facilities that include a new amphitheater and buildings being constructed by Del Monte and Equitable Resources, among others.

Port Authority's critical role in transporting workers to and from their jobs is demonstrated by the fact more than half of all people traveling to Downtown Pittsburgh on an average weekday use public transit. Those who do not use public transit also benefit because our region's historically high level of transit usage continues to reduce pollution and congestion on local highways.

Port Authority has also worked hard to do its part in providing the transportation link that makes it possible for local residents to re-enter the workforce.

Since the formation of strong partnerships with dozens of public and private organizations as part of the Allegheny County Welfare To Work Transportation Task Force, Port Authority has secured \$25 million in federal, local and private grants to fund bus routes that are critical components of a county-wide effort to promote the re-entry of welfare recipients into the workforce. An integral part of the process of obtaining that financing was Port Authority's lead role in engaging the Allegheny County business community and support services in the projects, identifying transportation barriers, investigating sustainable solutions and facilitating communication between partners.

In addition to successfully competing for Federal Department of Transportation funds, Port Authority also worked to secure funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, the Allegheny County Housing Authority and the Sanders Task Force and Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, which oversee funding for local workforce development, economic development and housing initiatives.