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Momentum Continues in Transit Regionalization

Cumberland County, PA – Cumberland County has an unprecedented opportunity to dramatically improve transit service for its commuters while saving hundreds of thousands of dollars for its taxpayers.

The overwhelming benefits of PennDOT's transit plan should make this a straightforward process. But as the County's Board of Commissioners grapple with a request for 2017 funding from its current bus service provider Capital Area Transit (CAT), it faces obstacles from CAT's Board of Directors. Recent developments, however, may be pointing to a clearer path forward.

This opportunity comes through PennDOT's efforts to promote transit regionalization. By getting transit authorities to consolidate administrative functions, resulting economies of scale produce savings that permit PennDOT to waive 5 years of local match funding. An integrated regional transportation system also allows for the improvement and expansion of commuter services.

While the proposal has received broad support throughout the region, Lebanon and Dauphin, at this time, have opted out of PennDOT's original proposal. Instead they are looking at smaller scale options going forward. And some current CAT Board members appear to be more concerned with maintaining the status quo than with reaping the benefits of consolidation.

PennDOT's initial South Central Pennsylvania Transit Regionalization Study – called Phase II -identified nearly \$2 million in savings for Cumberland County over 10 years, with comparable savings for other counties. In spite of this, some CAT funding partners, along with CAT management and the CAT Board, balked at the idea. Instead, they decided to pursue smaller scale consolidations or shared service arrangements within the existing splintered regional transit structure.

On October 26, 2016, PennDOT released a supplemental report covering Cumberland, Dauphin and Lebanon Counties, and the City of Harrisburg, as part of its Phase II Study. The study identified many benefits to even these smaller scale consolidations. In the latest PennDOT report, a consolidation of Cumberland County and Harrisburg transit services with Central PA Transit Authority (CPTA, dba rabbitransit, the County's provider of shared ride services) would produce more than enough savings in operational costs to waive local match requirements for 5 years. The study showed as well that a merger between Dauphin and Lebanon County could come close enough to achieving sufficient savings so that PennDOT would waive their local match.

Even as consolidation, and the end of CAT as currently configured, seems more inevitable, what has to be done to ensure uninterrupted service in the meantime? This is where the question of funding comes in. Last June, Cumberland County Commissioners predicated its funding for the second half of 2016 on

CAT's supporting regionalization. The preference would be to do so as a group, per PennDOT's Phase II plan. Failing that, Cumberland Commissioners insisted that funding partners who wanted to pursue consolidation outside of CAT be permitted to do so without being deprived of state and federal transportation funds controlled by CAT under the Municipal Authorities Act. A target date for consolidation or withdrawal of July 1, 2017 was set by the Cumberland Commissioners. Understanding that time is needed to implement new transit systems, funding for 2017 was made conditional on continued progress on these two issues.

This past October 28, CAT Board Chairman Eric Bugaile inquired of the Cumberland County Commissioners if they intended to provide local match funding for CAT in 2017. The response from the County was that our position had not changed. At a recent meeting with regional transit stakeholders, the County made clear that it would provide 2017 funding for CAT on a strictly transitional basis. This would be to give all CAT funding partners time to develop a transition plan while ensuring commuter services are not disrupted. A follow up meeting is planned for mid-December to define the terms and conditions for withdrawal from CAT, including the obligations of all parties involved. Part of that discussion will be to set a date for the next phase of consolidation. Once those elements are in place, Cumberland County's decision on funding CAT after December 31, 2016, will follow.

For more information on Cumberland County's regionalization effort and progress updates visit www.ccpa.net/4333/Fixed-Route-Transit.

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