

Testimony to the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee's
Public Hearing on Urban Modernization

Good morning. My name is Michael Boyer and I am Manager of Long-Range Planning & Economic Coordination at the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC). DVRPC is the federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the nine-county Greater Philadelphia region; encompassing Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties in Pennsylvania and Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Mercer counties in New Jersey. Our mission is to plan for the orderly growth and development of the bi-state region and build consensus on improving transportation, promoting smart growth, protecting the environment, and enhancing the economy. We are governed by a Board composed of representatives from each of our county governments, as well as the state departments of transportation, and Governor Appointees from both states. One of our core tasks is to prioritize local transportation projects to be funded with federal transportation dollars.

The DVRPC Board recently adopted a new long-range plan, called *Connections – The Regional Plan for a Sustainable Future*, that articulates a vision for the year 2035. The Plan was developed over several years with the region's elected officials, stakeholders and the public. The Plan is predicated upon creating a more sustainable future – one that ensures we meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Plan sets a number of goals to ensure a more sustainable future and outlines what investments and policy steps that the region will need to make over the life of the Plan to achieve the vision. Each of our counties has signed a resolution and has pledged to work toward implementing the Plan. My testimony today will focus on the big picture, regional scale policies and strategies that DVRPC is promoting to invest in the region's urban areas and established centers.

Over the past 75 years, land has been developed at a rate that is five times greater than the region's population growth. This has had a momentous impact not only on our development pattern, but our environment, our regional economy, and how we travel. Since 1980 there has been a 38% increase in the number of automobiles on the road, a 69% increase in the number of miles people in the region are travelling, and a disproportionate increase in congestion. The sprawling development pattern has not only significantly reduced the amount of open space in the region but has negatively impacted our air and water quality; contributed to additional stormwater run-off and flooding; required additional highway, water, and sewer capacity; and negatively impacted the quality of life as we spend more and more time traveling and stuck in traffic.

Another significant impact of a sprawl-based development pattern is the abandonment and disinvestment in our established towns and suburbs. The human impact is especially notable as these areas are prone to higher levels of poverty and as employment centers continue to spread further out, the residents in our older towns and suburbs find it difficult to find jobs and reach their workplace. This disinvestment in older neighborhoods and communities was showcased in the Brookings Institution *Back to*

Prosperity report, which quantified the impact of sprawling land consumption and declining neighborhoods on the state's economic competitiveness.

DVRPC is working with others to combat sprawl and revitalize our older towns. The *Connections* plan seeks to create a sustainable future by focusing on four interconnected core principles:

- Managing Growth and Protecting Resources
- Creating Livable Communities
- Building an Energy-Efficient Economy, and
- Modernizing the Transportation System.

Reinvesting in and revitalizing our established centers not only helps create livable communities but also better manages growth by more effectively utilizing our already-built environment. By encouraging development in and around established centers, we do not need to heavily invest in expensive new roads and transit facilities or build new water and sewer systems. We can also position our region's economy to be more competitive in a future that will likely be challenged by rising energy prices and federal climate change regulations. This region's denser, established, older areas are walkable, support transit, and are much more energy-efficient compared to sprawl-based development.

Our older urban centers have enviable infrastructure but we need to invest in rebuilding it and providing additional resources to serve people already living there and attract new residents. Community green infrastructure is one of the key investments we can make in our urban areas. Planting and stewardship of shade trees, green streets, green roofs, green schoolyards, community gardens and trails have multiple benefits. They reduce the amount of impervious surface which reduces stormwater run-off and improves water quality; help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce the surrounding air temperature; provide recreational opportunities; and help beautify communities.

The regional economic development strategy outlined in *Connections* hinges on two components: investing in the region's key economic sectors such as medicine and educational institutions, and building an energy-efficient economy that not only enhances green sector enterprises but also invests in people by training them for green collar jobs. Green collar jobs will prepare unemployed and underemployed people for jobs like installing insulation and solar panels; which not only creates employment but makes the region more energy-efficient.

We also need to address the divergence between employment centers and high poverty populations by increasing the amount of affordable housing near suburban employment centers and increasing entry-level job opportunities in our urban areas as well as improving the transportation linkages between where people live and work. Investment in the education system and job-training endeavors are the most critical requirements to improve the economic prospects of current residents and attract new residents to urban areas.

The transportation system is a critical component of the region's urban areas. Many of the urban centers around the region embody elements of transit-oriented development. Transit-oriented development (TOD) is compact, mixed use development within an easy walk of a transit station. Its pedestrian-oriented design encourages residents and workers to drive their cars less and ride mass transit more. These "transit villages" are usually moderate to high density, matching the existing scale of development, and can be new construction or redevelopment. Mixed uses include residential, commercial, and office, or some combination. The region is poised to expand development around transit hubs and the Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID) legislation was passed to help this type of development. However, too many potential projects are not able to move forward due to a Not-In-My-Back-Yard mentality of local residents. We continue to work to show the benefits of TOD development to residents and municipalities throughout the region.

The condition of our transportation infrastructure is a concern. The majority of the highway network is over fifty years old and the rail system is over one-hundred years old and both require large investments to rebuild. Within the Pennsylvania portion of the region, over half of the bridges are rated as deficient and over 20% of the roadway miles are also rated as deficient. When our aging infrastructure fails, such as when I-95 was shut down for several days in 2008 due to cracks in the concrete support structure, there is a major impact on travel in and through the region. We need to reinvest in this network to maintain the region's competitive balance.

A transportation system needs assessment conducted with PennDOT and based on asset management systems anticipates that \$77 billion is required over the next 25 years to achieve and maintain a state of good repair for our roads and transit systems. However, the region can only anticipate about \$40.6 billion in available revenues over that same time period. The region has allocated almost three-quarters of this \$40.6 billion in anticipated transportation funding to projects that will rebuild and maintain the existing system. The priority has been placed on rebuilding the existing transportation system with almost three-quarters of anticipated funding going toward this task. Even with this substantial infusion of over \$30.2 billion, we still are not able to address all of the deficient bridges and roadway pavement.

The *Connections* plan also includes a set of transformative regional transportation projects that have been identified as crucial to the region's future growth. A set of evaluation criteria were developed to insure that these projects supported plan goals, specifically investment in the region's existing urban centers. The selected projects include several extensions of the region's transit network to serve urban centers throughout the region. Projects include a new rail line on Delaware Avenue in Philadelphia, restoration of rail service between Lansdale and Quakertown, and extensions of several SEPTA regional rail lines. New highway projects focus on providing missing connections, such as the I-95 and Pennsylvania Turnpike interchange, or providing access to the region's older centers such as the Lafayette Street Connector project which will provide a direct link between Norristown and the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

Our traditional transportation funding mechanism is not able to meet the identified need. As gas tax revenues continue to decline due to more fuel efficient vehicles and the price of concrete and steel continue to rise due to world competition for these resources; the funding gap will continue to grow. China is spending 9% and India is spending 4.6% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on their transportation system. The United States is only reinvesting 2.4 % of its GDP. DVRPC has analyzed a set of funding options, ranging from tolling to public-private partnerships to various user fees and taxes, as a means to raise additional transportation revenue. It is never a popular idea to raise taxes or impose additional costs; particularly in the current economic climate. However, the need is great, the options are limited, and the price of failure is considerable.

DVRPC recognizes the importance of our urban centers and has predicated the future growth of the region around the revitalization of these centers. The *Connections* plan identifies over 100 centers throughout the region, ranging in size from large metro areas to small rural villages, and directs future development to these areas. The Plan also includes a series of key strategies to reinvest in these areas and DVRPC is working with elected leaders, the business community, advocacy groups and the public to implement them.

The state is a critical partner in this venture. The Keystone Principles were adopted by the Governor's Economic Development Cabinet in 2005 as a coordinated interagency approach to foster sustainable economic development and conservation of resources by investing in the state's communities.

Key principles include:

- Redevelop First
- Provide Efficient Infrastructure
- Concentrate Development
- Expand Housing Opportunities
- Enhance Recreational and Heritage Resources
- Increase Job Opportunities
- Foster Sustainable Business
- Restore and Enhance the Environment
- Plan Regionally; Implement Locally
- Be Fair

These principles are consistent with the policies of the region's *Connections* plan and DVRPC looks forward to continuing our partnership with the state and other regional stakeholders to modernize our urban areas and target investments that will help these areas continue to be assets. Thank you for the opportunity to share a regional perspective and the *Connections* plan with you today.