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Transit Oriented Development...Where Transportation and Land Use Connect

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Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on
Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials on
"Expanding Passenger Rail Service"

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Testimony By:
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Good morning, Chairman Altmire and distinguished members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. My name is Robert Ardolino. I am the President and CEO of Urban Innovations, based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Urban Innovations is a nationally recognized firm that specializes in Transit-Oriented Development, also known as TOD, and Public-Private Partnerships, also known as P-3's. Our firm is currently working on rail projects in California, Arizona and Pennsylvania.

Today, I would like to not only speak of the importance of expanding passenger rail in the United States and service in western Pennsylvania, but to point out that not only will enhanced rail service offer an environmentally friendly option, aid in reducing traffic congestion and improve air quality, communities around such rail service benefit tremendously by carefully planned land-use and economic development along rail corridors - both passenger and freight. Such developments are "win-win" situations for everyone.

For decades, the automobile has been the force behind real estate development in America. As a result, open space and green fields have been consumed by an over expanding suburbia of large yards, wide roads and massive parking lots. During this same period, mass transit has been de-emphasized and, unlike many parts of the world, passenger rail service has all but disappeared.

Now our nation and Western Pennsylvania has been forced to re-evaluate its development policies as a result of rising energy costs, deteriorating downtowns and over crowded freeways.

Due to these troubling conditions, states are developing programs to rectify these problems. The Federal Railroad Administration, in conjunction with the Federal Transit Administration, has developed joint policy statements for the use of mainline railroad right-of-ways for light-rail commuter train operations.

Because the oversight of light-rail operations is designated to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), while intercity freight and passenger rail operations oversight are designated to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), a joint agency accommodation is required.

Just as the freight railroad industry is rapidly growing, so are passenger operators. There are now 19 commuter railroads subject to FRA oversight, ranging from large ones, such as the Long Island Railroad, Metro-North Railroad, New Jersey Transit, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority - to name a few.

However, Southwestern Pennsylvania lacks strong commuter rail service. Public authorities own all of the commuter railroads. Some of these operate on their own tracks and provide operating rights to freight railroads and Amtrak; others are tenants on track owned by freight railroads or Amtrak; and some have shared arrangements. Amtrak is a contract operator of services for several of the aforementioned commuter railroads, while other commuter railroads contract with freight railroads or private companies to operate their services.

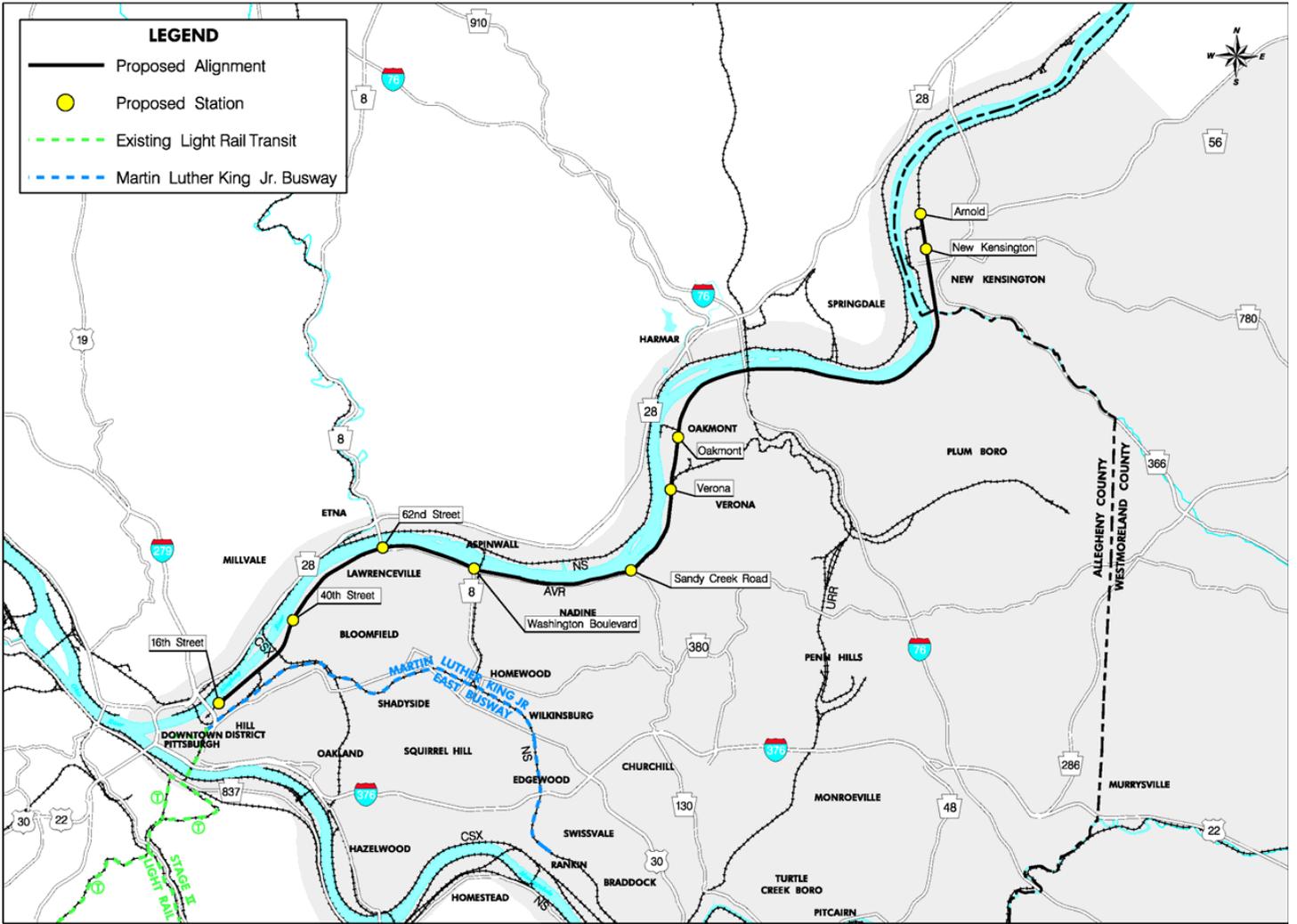
The time has come in Southwestern Pennsylvania to implement commuter rail. Urban Innovations, along with key stakeholders, have developed a plan to provide commuter rail service from the Tarentum Bridge in Westmoreland County to the Convention Center in the downtown section of Pittsburgh known as, ‘The Strip District’ with full cooperation of the owners of the freight corridor known as the Allegheny Valley Railroad (AVRR).

Our project is supported by our Congressman, Jason Altmire and many regional leaders throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania, including our Secretary of Transportation, Mr. Alan Biehler.

In the coming months, Urban Innovations will compile eight years of studies and reports along with Allegheny County, Westmoreland County and the City of Pittsburgh, to unveil an implementation plan that will consist of a Public-Private Partnership which, in conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA), will allow for the development of a twenty-two mile commuter rail that will potentially connect to a formerly proposed Light Rail Transit Station at Pittsburgh’s Convention Center, with intermodal connections to the bus terminal and the North Shore Connector.

This project ultimately will enable the rider to connect from the Tarentum Bridge in Westmoreland County to the South Hills Village Station in Allegheny County. (Please refer to Figure 1.1.)

Figure 1.1



The economic benefits and land use opportunities that will surround this project are being developed. Urban Innovations has identified five key elements to assure the success of this project. They are:

1. Marketing
2. Financial
3. Implementation
4. Operations
5. Maintenance

We in Pennsylvania are in the national spotlight with the G-20 Summit on the horizon and Pittsburgh recently being recognized as the most livable city in America. The time has come and we have a tremendous opportunity to enhance and revitalize our area through our rail systems. This can only be accomplished through cooperation, dedication, and persistence...and we will truly live up to our name - "City of Champions".

I would like to thank the Committee for giving me this opportunity to speak today.