Statement By Patrick McMahon, President

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 85

Representative Altmire, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), the largest labor organization representing public transportation, paratransit, over-the-road, and school bus workers in the United States and Canada, with more than 185,000 members in over 270 locals throughout 46 states and nine provinces. My name is Patrick McMahon, President/Business Agent of ATU Local 85, representing the transit workers here in Allegheny County. I also serve as President of the ATU Pennsylvania Joint Conference Board, representing thousands of workers in cities across the commonwealth.

Passenger Rail Plays a Critical Role

Without question, passenger rail can play a critical role in our efforts to take more cars off the road, improve our air quality, and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. The energy and environmental benefits of transit are significant. Expanding passenger train options between and into U.S. urban centers would substantially reduce highway congestion, fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), a single person, commuting alone by car, who switches a 20-mile round trip commute to existing public transportation, can reduce his or her annual CO2 emissions by 4,800 pounds per year, equal to a 10% reduction in all greenhouse gases produced by a typical two-adult, two-car household. As we have seen over the past several months, the price of gas is once again on the rise and public transportation riders will obviously be enjoying a significant economic savings. A person can achieve an average annual savings of more than $8,000 per year by taking public transportation instead of driving.

However, we have learned from our members across the U.S. and Canada that there is no "one-size fits all" solution to transportation mobility issues. Transportation planners, elected officials, transit dependent individuals, transit labor, and leaders from throughout any particular community must be consulted early and often before any recommendations move forward in what must be a local decision. Many issues come into play when considering rail plans: What is the projected ridership? What will be the impact on current bus service? Are there other alternatives? And of course, what is the estimated cost of such a rail plan?

The answers to these questions of course depend upon the type of rail system that is designated for construction. Heavy rail (subway) systems have been very successful in places such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia , San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Commuter rail (long distance service) has been in place in New York, New Jersey,

Chicago and other areas for many years, while cities such as Seattle have recently found success with this type of system.

However, in recent years, light rail transit (above ground, slower moving, relatively short distance, typically with grade crossings) has been the mode of choice during a time period when cost is a major factor and so many communities across the U.S. are in line for federal transit dollars. Salt Lake City, UT, Portland, Oregon and Charlotte, NC are three shining examples of recent light rail success stories in the past two decades. Light rail has dramatically changed the way people travel in these cities, making the communities more "livable." And at a time when we have all seen our home values plummet, light rail has been shown to significantly increase the value of real estate built nearby the transit system.

Western Pennsylvania Transit Issues

So just what is the right choice for Southwestern Pennsylvania?

In Western Pennsylvania, the Port Authority of Allegheny County is by far the region's largest public transportation system. Our system consists of light rail, bus service and two incline planes. Incline planes are very unusual and service the Mt. Washington area of the City. I am certain that if you have ever watched one of the World Champion Steelers football games or the Stanley Cup champion Penguins hockey games, the national media has treated you to the spectacular view of our City and the Pittsburgh inclines traveling up and down Mt. Washington.

Because of the topography in western Pennsylvania, these modes of transportation are all necessary. As I have previously pointed out, all local providers will have different needs and one type of service will obviously not fit all. Clearly, where there are flatlands and no rivers, a system consisting exclusively of heavy rails may be easier to construct and therefore be the system of choice. But in western Pennsylvania, we need the three modes which we currently have, and we especially need an expansion of a well-designed light rail system, as well as additional bus service to augment that light rail system.

Our current light rail commuter system has more than 30 miles of track and work is nearly completed on an additional 1.2 mile spurline to service the North Shore area of Pittsburgh. The North Shore is the home of the Pittsburgh Pirates and Pittsburgh Steelers and the site of the soon-to-be-open Pittsburgh Rivers Casino. The primary area now being serviced by our light rail system is the South Hills area of Allegheny County. Interestingly enough, probably our heaviest ridership exists on the light rail system. The reason is obvious. The light rail system operates on its own right-of-way, and while the average speed of a light rail system may be less than 20 mph, it is far quicker and efficient than any automobile traveling the same distances into the City during the daily commuting hours. In our community, there can be little question that the need for the expansion of the light rail system to certain areas is more than acute.

From the City center traveling east and northeast, the main thoroughfares are the Parkway East and the Route 28 corridor. Anyone living in these areas can tell you without contradiction that when commuting on the Parkway East and Route 28, it is an agony without parallel. These areas are the most densely populated areas of Allegheny County. The only alternate routes for the Parkway East are Fifth and Forbes Avenues. For the Route 28 corridor, there is no alternative! If you travel out Fifth and/or Forbes Avenues, you will find tens of thousands of students at Robert Morris College, Duquesne University, the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie-Mellon University, Carlow College and Chatham College, as well as the School for the Blind. In addition, the Oakland area serves as the headquarters for world class medical services and technology provided by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Anyone familiar with our area knows that the Oakland area is home to at least seven major hospitals within two miles of each other. It is the hub for medical treatment, not only for those living in western Pennsylvania, but also for others throughout our nation.

Further east lies the densely populated areas of Shadyside and the East End. Along the northern edge of the Allegheny River we find the browned-out towns of Millvale, Sharpsburg and others. All of those areas, north and east of Pittsburgh, are served exclusively by only one corridor, and that is the Route 28 corridor, which, by all accounts, is a traveler's worst nightmare. This roadway has not only been plagued by more volume in vehicle traffic than it can possibly handle, but landslides and repairs to Route 28 have become the norm rather than the exception.

In addition to these areas, the other rapidly growing area is the South Side of Pittsburgh where the once mighty J&L Steel Mill stood and provided the energy for a vibrant community. On any given night, the streets of the South Side are jammed with people going to theaters, restaurants and shops.

Anyone from western Pennsylvania is keenly aware that the streets and roads of these areas are constantly crowded and in desperate need of a efficient light rail system that will service, enhance and expand the economic development and vitality of our entire region.

There is no question that a light rail system is necessary to continue our economic development and energize a viable metropolitan area. While some have suggested that a heavy rail system may be of some benefit, I believe our experience in that area has been just the opposite. At one time we had a heavy rail system that serviced both the western communities through the McKees Rocks, Coraopolis and Aliquippa area, as well as one servicing the McKeesport area, both of which failed simply because heavy rail is inadequate to get into those populated areas that need the most service. I believe a light rail system built either above or under ground or on its own right-of-way is the only way to keep our region alive and thriving.

As anyone from western Pennsylvania knows, the center City of Pittsburgh is in desperate need of revitalization and commercial traffic. We have lost department store after department store, restaurants, shops and other facilities simply because it is too

difficult to get in and out of the City of Pittsburgh. Bringing tens of thousands of students and residents from these areas into the City through easy and efficient light trail transportation is the very shot in the arm which the City of Pittsburgh desperately needs.

In order to service these areas, I advocate that any new light rail system be strategically integrated with our current system. Currently, we have several downtown Pittsburgh facilities to which any new development could be connected. In particular, the new station at Gateway Center, the station at U.S. Steel Tower, and/or our spineline which stretches to the beginning of the East Busway would make an excellent jumping off point to extend the system out toward Oakland and the East End through the Fifth/Forbes Avenues corridor. As I envision this system, our current Millvale ramp would be an ideal area in which the system could cross the Allegheny River and run northeast along the Allegheny. Along the northeast side of the Allegheny, there are several railroad beds which are either abandoned or underused that can serve as the conduit for the light rail system. These rail beds travel along the Allegheny River and are ideally suited to service the Route 28 corridor. Extending our light rail system through the Route 28 corridor and augmenting that service by providing park-n-ride lots and bus services throughout the various communities that dot this area will provide service not only to the residents of Allegheny County, but will also allow people from Armstrong, Butler and Westmoreland Counties to access our City and the North Shore destinations currently being developed by our new light rail to the North Shore.

In addition, the line that would be running to Oakland should have a spur that would cross the Monongahela River to Pittsburgh's South Side and connect to the existing South Side Station and thereby link up the entire light rail system. This integrated combination will essentially tie the central City business district and the North Shore with the region's most densely populated areas and stimulate the revitalization of downtown Pittsburgh and the development of the North Shore.

As previously stated, because of our topography, light rail systems are not necessarily efficient for all of our areas. Our current bus system has dedicated busways that serve portions of the East, North Hills and West Hills areas. Over the years, there has been much talk about having a light rail system run to the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport. At one point in time, I would have believed that to be a most important development for our light rail system. However, because of the issues that exist at the Pittsburgh Airport with air traffic being at an all time low, the Airport no longer serving as a hub to any major carrier, it is my opinion that the dedicated busway which currently services the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport area is sufficient for our current needs. In addition, while a light rail system running through the center of densely populated areas will definitely be the driving force in providing efficient transportation to our area, bus service will be necessary to connect to the light rail system. In western Pennsylvania, we are surrounded by hills and obstacles which prohibit the expansion of light rail into certain areas. Therefore, expanded bus service for the entire Allegheny County, that will connect with the light rail system, is an essential part of the entire picture.

Through your efforts and with the financial help which only government can provide, we can meet the transportation challenge of western Pennsylvania and keep our area as one of the world's most livable places.

Operating Assistance is Needed

Congressman, no matter what mode is ultimately chosen by our community, I would be remiss if I did not mention a critical issue facing the transit industry as a whole, and especially here in Allegheny County. In all my years involved here at the Port Authority, I have never witnessed such extraordinary circumstances as we are seeing today.

Record high gas prices in 2008 caused millions of people to try public transportation, and it is now apparent that the price of oil is once again on the rise despite the fact that many transit systems continue to report capacity issues. Ridership is at a fifty-year high. Yet, ironically, at a time when Americans are leaving their cars at home like never before, public transportation systems are being forced to implement painful service cuts and fare increases because of shortages in state and local revenues.

We strongly believe that the federal surface transportation reauthorization bill needs to not only increase funding for public transit capital projects but also include funding for operating assistance.

Fare Increases, Service Cuts

All across the nation, transit systems are reluctantly implementing some of the steepest fare increases in recent history. And as if the fare increases are not enough, the service cuts may actually be worse. Generally, when routes get cut, transit systems tend to look towards those with low ridership -- early morning, late night, and weekend service. People who work non-traditional hours, typically minorities who have no other means of transportation, are disproportionately affected. The single mom who now gets her kids up at 4:30 in the morning to catch two buses in time to get her children to daycare and then herself to work cannot be expected to wait an additional hour for that transfer bus to arrive, standing in the freezing cold with two kids in tow. But that is exactly what is happening out there. Our members nationwide have seen it firsthand.

Operating Assistance is Needed

ATU supports the inclusion of H.R. 2746 as part of the reauthorization package. This bill would provide for increased flexibility in the use of federal transit funds by allowing transit systems of all sizes to use a percentage of their formula funds for operations. Under current law, only transit systems located in urbanized areas under 200,000 in

population may use their funds for operating purposes. All other areas, including Pittsburgh, may use their funds only for capital projects.

This bill would eliminate the "cliff" that is reached when the population reaches 200,000 by allowing systems in all areas to use at least a portion of their funds for operations – the larger the population, the smaller the percentage that would be able to be used for operating. Here in Alleghany County, a maximum of 30% of transit formula funds could be used for operating assistance.

Significantly, the bill would encourage state and local governments to invest in transit through a unique incentive program. The legislation provides for the conditional use of federal formula funds for operating purposes based on whether non-federal sources of revenue for a particular transit system increase from one fiscal year to the next. For example, if the Port Authority receives a five percent increase in state/local investment compared to the previous year, it would be eligible to use up to five percent of its federal formula funds for operations (in addition to the 30% discussed above). If this provision had been in place in 2004, perhaps the Pennsylvania State Legislature would not have taken several years to come up with a statewide transit bailout.

In summary, this bill would provide transit systems with **local control** of their federal transit funds, allowing them to preserve critical service and hold down fares during tough economic times so that working people may be offered quality, affordable public transportation.

Congressman, thank you for the opportunity to highlight this critical issue in this forum. As discussed, whether we ultimately choose expanded rail service (light rail, heavy rail or commuter rail) or efficient bus rapid transit, it will be of no consequence if there is no funding available to operate that shiny new bus or train.

It makes no sense whatsoever to spend capital money building a system and then have no money to operate it. Would anyone build a brand new home if they had insufficient money to pay for the gas, electric, sewage and water bills?

I am pleased to answer any questions.