



The Pennsylvania State University

Testimony before the

**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on
Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials**

On "Expanding Passenger Rail Service"

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High Speed Rail Written Testimony
U. S. House of Representatives
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Good morning, Madame Chair, ranking member Shuster, and the other members of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials. My name is Daniel Sieminski and I am the Associate Vice President for Finance and Business at the Pennsylvania State University. I also have with me Dr. Teresa Davis, who is Penn State's Director of Transportation Services.

It is an honor for me to be here to testify on behalf of the Pennsylvania State University in support of the expansion of passenger rail service in Pennsylvania, particularly to State College in Centre County. The Pennsylvania State University is very encouraged about the prospect of high speed rail service coming to the central part of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

We see many potential benefits of such a high speed rail system to include greater access and convenience to the region and an alternative and economical means to move people quickly and efficiently. Recognizing that State College is the home of the Pennsylvania State University's University Park campus, we believe it is strategically important to the Commonwealth, as well as the nation, to include State College in the Pennsylvania Rail Network.

We also can not discount the advantages of high-speed rail to our environment. One of the University's strategic goals is environmental stewardship. The University's vision for environmental stewardship is aimed at conducting the University's business in a manner that demonstrates commitment to and movement toward sustainability practices. One of the goals is to establish environmentally responsible transportation practices. High-speed rail as a transportation alternative meets that goal.

When considering State College and the surrounding communities from afar, one might ask, "What is so important about making State College part of the Pennsylvania high speed rail network?" We believe the following information provides the answer to that question and offers insights regarding what the future may hold.

There is no doubt that a traditional college education will continue to be of great importance to society and that centers for excellence in research will continue to be highly valued well into the future. What is in doubt, however, is how effective we can be in providing a transportation system that serves the needs of the diverse group of individuals wishing to take advantage of the benefits that Penn State has to offer.

The notion of high-speed passenger rail service to State College, Pennsylvania is not a new one. The first paragraph of a 1985 report entitled, *Pennsylvania High Speed Rail Feasibility Study*, (Attachment A), reads:

“A high-speed rail passenger system across Pennsylvania could offer rapid, all-weather travel between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh but also create tens of thousands of jobs, pump billions of dollars into the state economy, and spark countless opportunities for real estate development.”

A follow-up report published almost 20 years ago in 1990 and entitled, *Pennsylvania High Speed Intercity Rail Passenger Commission Final Report* (Attachment B) further emphasized the importance of high speed rail service between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia through Harrisburg. Both reports included trains being routed through State College, suggesting a connection through Central Pennsylvania would be beneficial.

Although we have not attached a report entitled, *Pennsylvania Statewide Passenger Rail Needs Assessment*, which was prepared by the Pennsylvania State Transportation Advisory Committee in December 2001, we do believe the report should be noted. The Committee conducted regional meetings in each of the seven regions defined in the Commonwealth. State College was referenced in three of these meetings regarding passenger rail service. <ftp://ftp.dot.state.pa.us/public/pdf/executivereport.pdf>

Going back to 1985, State College has seen great improvements in transportation with the addition of four-lane highways to Route 322 between Harrisburg and Potters Mills, extensive upgrades to Route 22 between Pittsburgh and State College, and the construction of Interstate 99 between the Pennsylvania Turnpike and Interstate 80. Each one of these improvements has improved access and convenience, and contributed to safer travel.

The University Park Airport has enjoyed continued investment in facilities and services, <http://www.statecollegeairport.org/>. In the period 1985-2007 University Park Airport experienced a 208% increase in annual passenger enplanements, increasing from 46,709 to 144,160. This is a result of improving facilities and various improvements in air service. With this volume, University Park Airport, in 2007, became the sixth busiest scheduled service airport in Pennsylvania.

The Centre Area Transportation Authority (CATA) <http://www.catabus.com/achistory.htm> provides the third largest bus service in the commonwealth moving over 6.8 million riders last year. Only Pittsburgh and Philadelphia have larger systems. Although strictly a service provided within the State College region, we believe this ranking helps demonstrate the importance of public transportation to those living in State College.

The Pennsylvania State University has focused on providing transportation options over the past ten years. In 1999, the University changed the campus bus system to a no-fare system to encourage use of transit on campus and discourage the single occupant vehicle. In a partnership with CATA, the University implemented a Rideshare program that now boasts over 850 participants and a discounted mass transit bus pass program currently used by over 750 employees. Additionally, we worked with CATA to enhance the regional vanpool program resulting in over sixteen vanpools moving employees

from all directions into State College. Last year, a web-based rideshare program was added to help students share transportation to and from the University.

Two years ago, in response to requests by both employees and students, the University partnered with Fullington Bus Company to provide a weekend express bus service to New York City for students, employees and the community. This service moved over 6,300 people last year reducing single occupant vehicle congestion on the Commonwealth roadways. This year, due to requests, we will be providing a trial program for a weekend express bus to Baltimore and Washington D.C..

In cooperation with the Hershey Medical Center we run two shuttle routes per weekday to transport personnel conducting University business between State College and Hershey. The participation of our University and community members in these transportation alternatives reflects the willingness of people to use alternative modes of transportation when available. Therefore, it is unfortunate that passenger rail service has not yet been added to the list of transportation improvements to the State College region.

While State College continues to see improvements in highway systems, airport capacity, and bus service, the closest high-speed railroad passenger service is in Harrisburg which is more than 90 miles away. In many ways, that 90 mile separation creates a barrier for many people traveling to or from State College. Although this connection has been discussed in the past, high-speed rail, even for a portion of the trip, has not been seriously considered as a transportation alternative.

Throughout the Commonwealth, Penn State's enrollment totaled 92,613 during the Fall 2008 semester, making Penn State one of the largest universities in the nation.

<http://www.budget.psu.edu/FactBook/StudentDynamic/PANonPASummary.aspx?YearCode=2008Enr>

While not all of these students are enrolled at University Park, one must wonder what a University Park student would say, if high-speed rail was one of the transportation options.

If it's one of Penn State's 44,112 students at University Park, he or she might say, "High-speed rail is an affordable and efficient alternative for my travel between home and University Park for holidays and special weekends."

If it's one of Penn State's 14,545 out-of-state students at University Park, he or she might decide, "High-speed rail is the quickest way possible because I don't have time to waste sitting in airports or in traffic riding a long distance bus."

If it's one of Penn State's 3,617 international students at University Park, they might conclude, "High-speed rail provides dependable and reliable transportation to and from any number of major international airports."

Penn State is also recognized as one of the major research universities in the nation. In 2006, Penn State was ranked 13th nationally with Research and Development Expenditures totaling

\$644,182,000. <http://www.budget.psu.edu/FactBook/Research2007/Reseexpe.asp> In fiscal year 2007-08, these expenditures grew to \$717,244,000.

Penn State Conferences and Institutes <http://www.outreach.psu.edu/conferences/> boasts a successful 25-year tradition of offering attendees from around the world the highest level of education and training. By attending any of Penn State's highly respected conferences, one can expect continued educational excellence, state-of-the-art facilities, and superior service.

- Nearly 50,000 people attend our conferences and programs each year.
- These conferences are a direct link to the research and services of Penn State's colleges and faculty.
- More than 300 conferences and programs are organized by the Department of Conferences and Institutes annually.

It is worth noting events hosted by State College such as the National Governor's Association annual meeting in July 2000 and the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts, which brings at least 100,000 people to State College each year in July.

Penn State offers summer camps and year-round programs in sports, arts, sciences, adventure, nature, leadership, and career exploration <http://www.outreach.psu.edu/youth/> at nearly all of the Penn State locations. Every year more than 220,000 youth from across the country have memorable Penn State experiences with Penn State faculty, staff, and graduate students who care about helping youth excel.

No discussion about visitors to Penn State can ignore the excitement of Nittany Lion Football. Beaver Stadium, the home of Penn State Football, boasts a current capacity of 107,000. <http://www.gopsusports.com/facilities/beaver-stadium.html> At least six weekends a year, State College becomes the "3rd largest city" in Pennsylvania when Nittany Lion fans gather for a football weekend and to watch their team play a Big Ten opponent. Beaver Stadium is noted for being the second largest football stadium in the country and is often filled to capacity.

Penn State Football was a major spectator sport long before Penn State became a member of the Big Ten in 1990. The University's membership in the Big Ten further demonstrates the importance of high-speed rail service to State College, as one looks beyond the borders of Pennsylvania and potential links to the high-speed rail service expansion in the mid-west.

The economic benefit of students, research, conferences and youth camps, and even Penn State Football is summarized in a 2008 economic impact analysis performed by Tripp Umbach. <http://econimpact.psu.edu/> The report states,

"Penn State contributes more to the state's economy annually than any other industry. In 2008, the University generated \$8.5 billion in direct and indirect economic impact and an additional \$8.7 billion through business services, research commercialization, and the activities of alumni, for a total of more than \$17 billion."

Attachment C, entitled “Penn State: Giving Back”, provides a summary of the University’s economic impact in the Commonwealth. Relative to high-speed rail, one of the economic benefits mentioned states,

“In 2008, out-of-state visitors to Penn State generated nearly \$777 million in the Pennsylvania economy.”

When we think of State College we know it is much more than the Pennsylvania State University. It is a vibrant community with a stable economy. Located in the center of Centre County, it is part of the Centre Region Council of Governments <http://www.crcog.net/>, which in addition to the Borough of State College includes the townships of College, Ferguson, Halfmoon, Harris, and Patton.

Two of the many fine organizations existing in State College include:

- 1) The Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County is the largest and most comprehensive chamber in the county. It is the premier resource for anyone interested in living, working or doing business in the heart of Pennsylvania. <http://www.cbicc.org/> Its goal is to promote healthy business growth while maintaining the high quality of life in Centre County.
- 2) The Central Pennsylvania Convention & Visitors Bureau (CPCVB) is a nonprofit, membership-based organization committed to the fundamental principal that convention and visitor business can be attracted to an area more effectively through "coordinated group action" www.centralpacvb.org The Convention and Visitors Bureau is the County's single, most important destination marketing organization, projecting an image for the area into various targeted markets.

We wish to include, as part of the record, letters from the Centre Region Council of Governments, the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County, the Central Pennsylvania Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Centre Area Transportation Authority. These letters are included in Attachment D.

In closing, I would, once again, like to thank the Committee for allowing me to testify in support of bringing high-speed passenger rail service to State College, Pennsylvania. Borrowing a quote from the 1990 Pennsylvania High Speed Intercity Rail Passenger Commission Final Report, the report stated:

“High-speed rail would be a catalyst for economic growth – growth that would help the state overcome years of declining investments, jobs, and population, and growth that would help reduce unemployment to a more desirable level, and provide substantial tax income for the Commonwealth.”

We believe including State College, Pennsylvania as part of the high-speed passenger rail network is strategically important to the Commonwealth for the reasons I have brought to you today.

At this time, I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.