



## **PREPARED TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE SENATE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE**

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Good afternoon. Chairman Miller, Leader Costa, and honorable members of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee – I thank you for inviting us to this informational hearing.

My name is Dr. Mark Rubino. I am an obstetrician-gynecologist; the president of AHN Forbes Hospital in Monroeville and AHN Allegheny Valley Hospital in Natrona Heights; and the chair-elect of the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania.

As the president of Forbes Hospital and AVH, I can speak first-hand about the importance of public transit for employees and especially our patients. For the last two decades, the various bus routes that have served Forbes Hospital have been threatened by route changes, service reductions, and budget issues. Eventually, in 2012, we lost our stop.

For years, we advocated to get that stop back. And finally, in 2020, Forbes was added as a stop on the P68 Braddock Hill Flyer Route, which is the route that still serves our hospital today. We are also served by a separate weekend route. And under the proposed PRT realignment, we would remain a stop on one of the redesigned routes, which we appreciate. That stop is essential for so many in our community, especially women and children, because the Forbes campus has a labor and delivery unit, an OBGYN clinic, and pediatric services.

We are fortunate at Forbes Hospital – as transit systems face financial challenges, not every hospital, especially those in suburban and rural areas, is accessible through public transportation. As I mentioned, I am also the president of AVH in Natrona Heights – where we no longer have a stop. That impacts our patients and team members.

Unfortunately, a lack of reliable transportation options can severely limit access to health care, as well as employment opportunities. This is true across our region, of course, and not just in Monroeville and Natrona Heights.

According to a recent Pittsburgh study<sup>1</sup>:

- Over 20 percent of hospital workers rely on public transportation to get to work.
- Black hospital workers are four times as likely as White workers to use public transportation to get to work.
- And those who use public transportation are also more likely to be among our service, clerical, dietary, environmental, and technical hospital workers. While these aren't direct caregiver roles, without them, our health care system could not operate.

As the paper notes, the work that hospital employees do is essential to the health and safety of our communities. We must ensure that hospital workers have access to safe, affordable, and reliable public transit.

Our patients deserve the same. Public transit plays a crucial role in facilitating access to health care, especially for economically vulnerable populations and riders with disabilities. Lack of transportation is a social barrier that can lead to missed appointments, delayed care, and suboptimal treatment of chronic health conditions. When patients miss appointments, their health can suffer, or they can end up requiring urgent care because small health issues became bigger ones without anyone noticing.

According to the American Journal of Public Health<sup>2</sup>, every year, millions of Americans delay medical care because they do not have access to transportation.

Those living below the poverty threshold, Medicaid recipients, and people with physical or functional limitations were more likely to not have reliable transportation to health care appointments. As a result, transportation barriers to health care have a disproportionate impact on individuals who are poor and who have chronic conditions.

Importantly, one in five U.S. adults without access to a vehicle or public transit goes without needed medical care in a given year. However, individuals who lacked access to a vehicle, *but reported reliable neighborhood access to public transportation services*, were much less likely to skip needed care.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond taking patients to and from their medical appointments, investment in transit can improve health outcomes in other ways – by improving access to healthy food, vital social services, employment, human connection, and opportunities for physical activity.<sup>4</sup> Transit also reduces urban air pollution and automobile accidents.

For these reasons, and many others, a robust, dependable and affordable public transportation system is an essential element of the overall health care ecosystem.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee and discuss this important issue for our community.

<sup>1</sup> “RESEARCH BRIEF: Public Transit Helps Essential Hospital Workers Get to Work,” April 2020; Pittsburgh Wage Study; University of Pittsburgh; <https://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/39791/1/Transportation-Brief.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> “Transportation Barriers to Health Care in the United States: Findings From the National Health Interview Survey, 1997–2017,” June 2020; <http://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7204444/>

<sup>3</sup> “Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Policy Brief: More than One in Five Adults with Limited Public Transit Access Forgo Health Care Because of Transportation Barriers,” April 2023; <https://www.rwjf.org/en/insights/our-research/2023/04/more-than-one-in-five-adults-with-limited-public-transit-access-forgo-healthcare-because-of-transportation-barriers.html>

<sup>4</sup> “Public Transportation In The US: A Driver Of Health And Equity,” Health Affairs; July 2021; <https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/briefs/public-transportation-us-driver-health-and-equity>