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**PAT Chairman Repeats Bogus Arguments for Tunnel**

It's an insult to the intelligence of the taxpayers of the region and country. That's the politest description possible for the Port Authority Chairman's logic distorting and fact ignoring July 12, 2006 editorial written in support of the tunnel under the Allegheny River project.

In all his platitudinous folderol about the benefits of the tunnel, the Chairman elected not to mention the cost of the project. He also carefully avoids mentioning that the convention center connecting leg has been dropped and yet the project cost has risen from \$363 million in 2003 to \$435 million in the latest estimate. And since the convention center leg is no longer in the mix, that means the cost of the tunnel portion has probably gone up by over \$100 million and the first shovel full of dirt has not been moved. Where it will go from here is anyone's guess. But if other tunnel projects are a guide, costs will go much higher. Who will get stuck with those? No one at the Port Authority says because that would be admitting that they are contemplating that costs will rise while they are claiming that costs will not rise.

His claims made for the benefits of the tunnel T-extension are simply preposterous. Let's look at his claims. It will: (1) improve our energy efficiency, (2) reduce congestion and produce cleaner air, (3) be the first step to building rail to the airport, and (4) help the new restaurants on the North Shore attract customers. This from the Chairman of an organization whose operations are among the most expensive in the nation, whose claims about future usage of its facilities have proven woefully wrong and whose currently approved budget contains a planned \$31 million deficit.

By the way, whatever happened to the original claims that the tunnel would improve North Shore parking access to Downtown, enhance accessibility to sports venues and facilitate development on the North Shore?

But to the Chairman's first two claims: How will energy efficiency and cleaner air result from the project? Presumably, that claim is based on fairly large numbers of people using the tunnel as opposed to cars or buses. But who are the people who will use the tunnel? Since the tunnel is an extension of the existing system that provides service to the South Hills, ridership through the tunnel will depend in large measure on an increase in people from the South Hills using the system to get to the North Shore on a daily basis. It does nothing to help commuters coming in on the Parkway West, the Parkway East, Route 65, Route 28 or the Parkway North. Moreover, the numbers of people who will ever live or work on the North Shore will never rise to a level that would justify the cost of this project. And where could they go—to Downtown or the South Hills? Any other destination will require driving or transferring to a bus.

But just importantly, a fourth of the federal dollars are funds that have been reallocated by the Southwest Planning Commission must come from other regional projects—funds that are supposed to be used to for congestion mitigation on the region’s roadways. Those projects will not be built if the tunnel is dug. Result: the reduced fuel consumption and lower pollution that could have been achieved by congestion mitigation on the highways will not happen. Of course, the Port Authority would never consider the energy and pollution costs of diverting the money to the tunnel.

What about the claim that the North Shore Connector will be the first step to the airport? Three points: There are no plans in place to extend light rail to the airport. It’s simply a red herring that has been thought up after the fact to justify the project. There is nothing in the Port Authority’s application to the Federal Transit Administration that suggests any plans to go to the airport. Secondly, why would a light rail line to the airport first go to the North Shore? From there it has to get to and across the Ohio River at enormous expense. Why would the line not use the existing Mon River crossing and go down the South Shore of the Ohio? Third, how can the Port Authority claim with a straight face that the North Shore Connector is the first step to the airport when they are partners in the plans to get a high speed magnetic levitation train (MAGLEV) constructed to the airport?

Finally, since when is it the taxpayers’ responsibility to heavily subsidize travel to restaurants? Weren’t the new stadiums supposed to generate a flood of customers for the new eating and drinking establishments? These stadiums have already cost taxpayers hundreds of millions. When is enough subsidy enough? And what about the impact on other restaurants in the region that have to compete with these heavily subsidized establishments?

The reality is that the cost-benefit ratio of the project that was extraordinarily low three years ago has become totally preposterous. Bear in mind that in the Port Authority’s initial application they projected 10,000 more daily boardings by 2030. After the application was denied, they reapplied and, magically, the daily boardings projection had increased to 16,000. No explanation as to how a 60 percent increase could be achieved. Amazingly, Federal Transit Administration never questioned the big jump that allowed the project to get a marginal pass on the cost benefit formula. Now the convention center line is gone with its ridership, costs have soared and yet the FTA and the OMB have agreed to provide additional federal dollars.

Will Congress fall into line and approve funds for this mockery of public policy decision making?

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