



# THE HISTORY OF TRANSIT IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY



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## 50 YEARS ON THE MOVE

### PORT AUTHORITY OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY

#### THE JOURNEY BEGINS.

The history of public transit in Allegheny County is a story of vision and imagination, tradition and innovation, tunnels and bridges. But most of all, it's been a constant drive - powered by everything from horses to steam to diesel to electric - to serve a population that's always on the move. All against a background of ever-changing demographics, economics, politics and culture.

Port Authority has been connecting riders to their destinations since 1964. But to really understand public transportation in Allegheny County, you have to go back more than 100 years before that, to when mass transit was an experiment run by private enterprise.

#### PROGRESS AT THE SPEED OF A HORSE.

Pittsburgh in the mid-1800s wouldn't be confused with the Wild West, but if you wanted to get from Downtown Pittsburgh to Lawrenceville without walking, chances are you'd grab a ride in what was basically an urban stagecoach. Horses were hitched to rail cars until the late 1880s, when they were phased out in favor of cable cars and electric streetcars. The first successful trolley line ran between Downtown and Hazelwood in 1890. By 1910, just a year before the first bus hit the streets of the city, Pittsburgh Railways Company was moving nearly 600,000 riders a day over 100 trolley routes using 606 miles of track.

But all those passengers and all those miles didn't add up to financial success for Pittsburgh Railways, whose fares couldn't keep up with rising costs over the next few decades.

#### THE POST-WAR BOOM...A BUST FOR TRANSIT.

And that was before the post-World War II economic boom, which put lots of cars on new highways leading to new suburbs. That meant fewer people taking streetcars. And that meant less money for transit.

During the 1950s in addition to Pittsburgh Railways' vehicles, 16 independent lines operated Downtown and 21 others served the suburbs. And about half of those transit companies were either losing money or just breaking even.

#### BORN OF NECESSITY, RAISED IN TURBULENT TIMES.

If you visited Downtown Pittsburgh in the early 1960s, you'd think that the area's transit system was healthy and vibrant. After all, the city had the biggest streetcar system in the whole county. But ridership was slowly, steadily falling, as were Pittsburgh Railways' profits.

Faced with a fragmented transit system that was going downhill, in 1956 the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and other civic groups got together to replace it with a single county-wide public transportation system. The result, on paper at least, was Port Authority of Allegheny County.

Port Authority of Allegheny County was created by legislation enacted by the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 1956, giving it responsibility for planning and developing port facilities to serve the Pittsburgh area. In 1959, The Act of 1956 was amended to permit Port Authority to acquire privately owned transit facilities and to own and operate a public system of mass transit.

Port Authority's official debut as a functioning authority came on March 1, 1964. It immediately set about consolidating 33 independent transportation companies - including bus companies, Pittsburgh Railways and the Monongahela Incline - into one system, and started putting dozens of new, air-conditioned buses on the streets.

In 1965, the Authority's first full year of operation, ridership increased by almost 10 million as new routes sprang up and existing routes pushed out to the suburbs, extending Port Authority coverage to 730 square miles of Allegheny County and parts of adjoining counties.

In spite of a steady decline in Pittsburgh's population and a continued increase in automobile traffic over the following decade, Port Authority actually was able to increase ridership, thanks in part to the opening of the South Busway in 1977.

#### BREAKING NEW GROUND.

Thanks largely to spiraling gasoline prices that made it more expensive to drive all those cars, Port Authority ridership peaked at 112 million in 1980. But it wasn't long before rising fares, a skyrocketing unemployment rate, a dwindling county population, and rising operating costs began to make the job of attracting riders more and more challenging.



But that didn't stop Port Authority from working to enhance service and expand its reach. In 1980 ground was broken for the Stage I Light Rail Transit Program, which would bring modern light rail travel to Pittsburgh along the old South Hills trolley routes, along with the city's first subway.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. East Busway opened in 1983 and quickly became a vital corridor for the East End and eastern Allegheny County. It cut the trip from Wilksburg to Downtown Pittsburgh from 45 minutes to 15. The mid-to-late 1980s saw the opening of the Downtown subway, with its Wood Street, Gateway Center and Steel Plaza stations, and the T line between Washington Junction and South Hills Village, all of which quickly drove up ridership.

**25 YEARS. THE MIDWAY POINT.**

Port Authority celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1989, having traveled 900 million miles with more than 2.4 billion riders since its humble beginnings.

In 1990, a group of business, labor, civic, environmental, academic and religious leaders, along with transit riders, formed the non-profit Southwestern Pennsylvania Transit Coalition to help increase awareness of the importance of public transportation to the area's economy, gain the support of elected officials, and advocate for transit funding. Thanks in part to the efforts of the

coalition, the state legislature's 1992 budget included, for the first time, dedicated funding for public transit.

HOV lanes opened between the northbound and southbound lanes of the Parkway North in 1989 for vehicles with two or more occupants, carpool vans and buses. Bus ridership increased by nearly 35 percent on the routes using the HOV lanes. To help enhance the mobility of people with disabilities, Port Authority ordered 150 new buses equipped with wheelchair lifts in 1990.

The Authority added 150 new buses in 1994. Half the fleet was now equipped with wheelchair lifts, and the number of wheelchair-accessible routes increased to 72.

**A DECADE OF CHALLENGES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS.**

A 28-day work stoppage in the spring of 1992, the longest in Port Authority history, sent a ripple effect throughout the county. On one hand, it illustrated just the importance of public transportation, with traffic congestion immediately spiking as commuters traded their bus passes for car keys.

While commuters were lured back with a week of free rides once the buses and the T started rolling again, ridership still dropped as the population - and employers - continued to disperse not only to the suburbs but to neighboring counties, and heavy industry continued to disappear from long-established transit corridors. But Port Authority kept moving forward, looking to the future.

In 1994, ground was broken for the West Busway and Wabash Tunnel. In 1996, the popular 28X Airport Flyer route began operations between Oakland, Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh International Airport using 24-passenger mini-buses.

**RIDERSHIP STARTS PICKING UP.**

In 1997, Port Authority introduced a plan to become the nation's premier transit agency by adopting a customer-focused, market-driven approach; developing partnerships and increasing community support; strengthening its financial position; expanding its capital investment program; improving employee morale and labor-management relations; and building on its reputation as an effective organization.

Port Authority continued its effort to improve public transportation in Allegheny County. In 2001, the transfer program with transit authorities in Westmoreland and Beaver counties was expanded, and in 2002 a new park and ride lot opened in Ambridge, Beaver County - the first outside Allegheny County.



The first of several efforts to make service bicycle-friendly was launched in 1999, allowing bikes on the Mon Incline and light rail vehicles. Bike racks were added to 75 buses in 2001, and hundreds more followed over the next few years. As the Millennium approached, all the projects, all the planning, all the adapting to the changing nature of their customers was beginning to pay off.

By 2000, ridership was growing, reaching 76.6 million - the highest in nine years. As part of a continuing effort to cut the average age of the fleet, 25 new articulated buses, 160 low-floor buses and 40 coaches were put on the streets.

#### **LIGHT RAIL AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL.**

Port Authority kept working to expand and improve its infrastructure. The 5-mile West Busway was opened in 2000. The next year, First Avenue Station opened, making it the first new Downtown T station in 13 years. In 2003, the 6.8-mile East Busway grew by 2.3 miles.

The State II Light Rail Transit project took off in 2004, with the rebuilding of the 5.2-mile Overbrook Line, the addition of 28 new light rail vehicles (LRVs), and the re-manufacture of more than half of the current LRV fleet. Then came the opening of the Wabash Tunnel, connecting West Carson Street to Route 51.

The modernization of the fleet continued in the spring of 2003 with delivery of the first of 250 new buses. By 2004, the Authority had phased in 525 new buses over five years, reducing the average age of the fleet to less than six years. The first hybrid electric buses in the fleet were placed into service in the spring of 2005.

The seven-story, 2,200-space parking garage at South Hills Village, the first of its kind in Port Authority's park and ride system, opened to commuters in 2005.

And four years after work began on the project, the 1.2-mile North Shore Connector was carrying passengers on the T under the Allegheny River from Downtown to PNC Park, Heinz Field, the Carnegie Science Center and other destinations of the North Shore. It's an example of the power of public transit to not just move people from here to there, but help push the development of an entire district.

## **THE RIDE HAS JUST BEGUN.**

From horse-drawn carriages to electric trolley cars and hybrid buses, the job of moving the people of Allegheny County has been the story of not just reacting to shifting population and economic patterns, but playing a major role in the development of an entire region. For 50 years, Port Authority hasn't just been about mass transit, it's been about forward thinking.

And that's what will carry Port Authority well into the future.