

ROBERT W. O'DONNELL
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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

For Immediate Release

October 29, 1981

Contact: Jon Macks at (717) 783-1593

O'DONNELL BLASTS ILLEGAL SEPTA SERVICE CUTS

State Representative Robert W. O'Donnell (D-198th) has demanded that SEPTA restore recently reduced service on the Chestnut Hill West Line and the Manayunk-Ridge line because of SEPTA's failure to comply with public hearing mandates.

O'Donnell received a notice on October 11th which informed him that SEPTA had reduced by approximately 30 percent the number of trains operated on the Chestnut Hill West and Manayunk-Ivy Ridge lines. After learning of the service cuts, O'Donnell contacted SEPTA's Manager of Government Relations, who confirmed that the only public hearing held in Philadelphia on these cuts was in the SEPTA board room on July 29th.

O'Donnell has charged, in a letter to SEPTA, that these service cuts were illegal because of SEPTA's failure to comply with a section of the SEPTA reorganization act of 1980, which requires SEPTA to hold public hearings in the neighborhoods affected before implementing any service cuts.

"SEPTA's actions were arrogant and in total disregard of the reorganization act", O'Donnell said. "The House and Senate passed my amendment to the reorganization act in July 1980 requiring neighborhood public hearings. SEPTA's action goes

against the very purpose I had in introducing the amendment, the purpose being to give those most affected by the cuts an opportunity to be heard."

"In addition, I believe that this section of the act is important because it requires SEPTA officials to go to the neighborhood of the cuts; hopefully, they would then have a better understanding of the effect the cuts would have on area residents."

O'Donnell said that SEPTA's failure to comply with the act have made the service cuts legally inoperative. He has demanded that SEPTA restore full service on the affected lines "unless and until the law is complied with."

O'Donnell and other members of the Philadelphia delegation are investigating whether SEPTA has failed to comply with the act in cutting service in other areas of the city.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

March 16, 1982

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: ROB DUNHAM, 843-1700

O'DONNELL OPPOSES RAIL ABANDONMENT

State Representative Robert W. O'Donnell, D-Germantown, today opposed SEPTA's proposed abandonment of its thirteen commuter rail lines, including the local Chestnut Hill East and Chestnut Hill West routes.

In public testimony at SEPTA's Tuesday night hearing on rail abandonment, O'Donnell said the elimination of local train service "will cause immediate and direct harm" to Northwest Philadelphia, "and will be a major blow to the entire region."

Loss of service on the Chestnut Hill West line alone would affect more than 5,000 riders daily, O'Donnell said.

Representative O'Donnell charged that rail abandonment will cut access for hundreds of families "to their jobs, their schools, and to many of the City's commercial, cultural, and recreational facilities." Abandonment, O'Donnell cautioned, will have a "devastating impact on the economy and quality of life in our region. When the trains stop, all activity throughout the region will slow, and the loss will be suffered not only by the abandoned commuters, but by all of our citizens."

"We are within less than a year of a possible long-term solution to the commuter crisis," O'Donnell added. "The permanent withdrawal of Conrail from commuter rail operations at the end of 1982 and the creation of the Amtrak commuter subsidiary provide hope for 1983 and the years beyond. We must not allow Conrail's management -- or lack of it -- to destroy our railroads and deny us this option."

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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March 17, 1982

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: ROB DUNHAM, 843-1700

O'DONNELL CHALLENGES SEPTA ON SENIORS

State Representative Robert W. O'Donnell, Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, today challenged the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) to provide the senior citizen rail transportation benefits authorized by state law.

"In two separate acts, the legislature has provided for free rides for senior citizens on commuter rail lines," O'Donnell said. "SEPTA has failed to take advantage of this program."

The Pennsylvania Urban Mass Transportation Law, amended by Act 101 in 1980, and the Intercity Common Carrier Surface Transportation Assistance Act (Act 183, 1980), provide for "grants from the State Lottery Fund to transportation companies... (for) free service on local common carrier mass transportation systems to persons 65 years or older when such passage is on fixed route public transportation services during nonpeak riding hours and on holidays and weekends." Both acts define "fixed route public transportation services" to include commuter rail systems.

"SEPTA's thirteen commuter rail lines would be eligible for the free fare program," O'Donnell said. Three of those lines, the Chestnut Hill East, Chestnut Hill West, and Norristown local, service O'Donnell's district, which stretches from Germantown and East Falls through parts of Roxborough, Mt. Airy, and Chestnut Hill.

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SENIOR FREE FARES

ADD ONE

O'Donnell called SEPTA's failure to apply for these subsidies "part and parcel of the entire commuter rail crisis. While funding for free trips will not solve all the problems with our trains, it certainly would help. Clearly SEPTA's failure to seek available funds has contributed to this crisis."

O'Donnell said the free fare program "would increase SEPTA's revenues and ridership at a time when they are in need of both."

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: ROB DUNHAM, 843-1700

April 4, 1982

SEPTA TO OFFER FREE FARES FOR SENIORS

State Representative Robert W. O'Donnell, D-Germantown, today announced that SEPTA will implement a free off-peak fare for senior citizens on its thirteen commuter rail lines, including the Chestnut Hill East and Chestnut Hill West routes.

O'Donnell said the Regional Rail Free Fare Program first authorized by the state legislature in 1980, "will be extremely useful, both to senior citizens and to SEPTA's rail division. More senior citizens will use the trains, and SEPTA will gain in revenues and ridership at a time when they are in need of both.

"SEPTA could receive an estimated \$1.1 million a year in state lottery subsidies once the program is implemented," O'Donnell said, "and senior citizens will save more than \$800,000 in commuter rail tickets. Everybody wins with this program."

Representative O'Donnell challenged SEPTA on March 17 to apply for the Regional Rail Free Fare Program, claling SEPTA's failure to seek such funding "part and parcel of the commuter rail crisis." SEPTA officials now claim they stood to lose state subsidies had they adopted the free senior citizen fare last year.

"I have serious doubts about the accuracy of that claim," O'Donnell said. "While it is now a moot point, it would have been nice to have had that in writing so we could have sought a legislative remedy a year ago."

SEPTA hopes to hold public hearings on the free fares in May or June as part of public hearings on its operating budget. These hearings are a preliminary step in enacting the program, O'Donnell added.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 13, 1982

CONTACT: ROB DUNHAM, 843-1700

O'DONNELL OPPOSES ELIMINATING TROLLEYS

State Representative Robert W. O'Donnell, D-Germantown, today criticized a SEPTA planning report for considering the elimination of its seven surface trolley lines, including the route 23 and 53 trolleys.

O'Donnell, whose father and grandfather were trolley drivers, called the suggestion that SEPTA replace its trolleys with bus service "extremely short-sighted. Dropping the trolleys is not in the best interests of SEPTA, the city, or our community."

O'Donnell said that "trolleys have more than a thirty year life-span, don't pollute, and are an integral part of our neighborhood. They contribute greatly to the personality of the northwest.

"I remember when I was a kid riding the 23 trolley with my grandfather at the controls. You couldn't grow up in Germantown without riding on his trolley," O'Donnell added.

Representative O'Donnell blamed the decrease in trolley ridership on "continual fare increases and SEPTA's failure to provide necessary maintenance." The 23 trolley, the longest trolley route in the world, carries 30,000 riders daily, O'Donnell said. The route 53, which is being served by buses while the Wayne Avenue bridge is repaired, has a 3,200 daily ridership.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG
August 29, 1983

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: ROB DUNHAM, 843-1700

O'DONNELL OPPOSES SEPTA RAIL FARE PLAN

State Representative Robert W. O'Donnell (D-Germantown) today attacked a SEPTA commuter rail fare plan that would sharply increase off-peak fares for Philadelphia riders.

At a public hearing on the proposed new fare structure, O'Donnell called the SEPTA plan, which would eliminate off-peak fares and establish a system-wide \$2 rail ticket, "harsh" and said it treated city riders "inequitably."

O'Donnell testified against the fare proposal saying the flat fare concept "will increase the cost of off-peak ridership on the Chestnut Hill-East and West lines and in the city as a whole by 50¢ a trip. Passengers who ride from terminal zone stations will face fare hikes of 50%, from \$1.00 to \$1.50. Other stations on the Chestnut Hill routes will suffer hikes of 33%, from \$1.50 to \$2.00."

O'Donnell charged that the proposed redefinition of "terminal zone" stations, scheduled to take effect July 7, 1984, would increase all fares between these stations and Center City by another 33%, to the proposed \$2 fare. The effected stations would be Fishers, Germantown, and Wister stations on the Chestnut Hill-East line, and Queen Lane and Cheltenham Avenue stations on the Chestnut Hill-West line. "For off-peak riders, the ticket price would be double the current fare," O'Donnell said.

O'Donnell also strongly criticized SEPTA's proposal to institute a cash fare on top of the already existing penalty fare. "This tariff proposes that all

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O'DONNELL OPPOSES RAIL FARES
ADD ONE

passengers who pay cash, whether a ticket office is open or not, suffer a 25¢ ticket surcharge. This means that riders who catch the train at stations that have no ticket office, and riders who catch the train during periods in which their ticket office is closed, will pay 12.5% more for their tickets than other passengers," O'Donnell explained.

"To force a rider to pay more simply because SEPTA does not offer him or her ticket purchasing services is clearly unfair," he said.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

January 24, 1984

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: ROB DUNHAM, 843-1700

O'DONNELL INTRODUCES BILL TO PROTECT DISCOUNT FARES

State Representative Robert W. O'Donnell (D-East Falls) today introduced a bill that would enable SEPTA to continue its peak-hour bus and trolley discount fares for senior citizens.

O'Donnell's bill would provide subsidies from the State Lottery Fund to reimburse SEPTA for the cost of its 35¢ rush-hour fare for elderly riders.

SEPTA's reduced fare policy had been jeopardized last fall when officials of the Green administration notified the transit agency that the City would not pay SEPTA the \$1.6 million cost of its discounts last year or an estimated \$1.8 million to subsidize the fares this year. City Council later provided \$800,000 from the city budget to extend the discount fares until June.

O'Donnell called the peak-hour discounts "an important service to Philadelphia's senior citizens that the State should provide if the City can't. Our senior citizens who need to travel during rush-hours to go to the doctor or to do volunteer work shouldn't be forced to absorb a sudden 100% increase in bus and trolley fares. By paying for this program out of state lottery funds, we can prevent fare hikes for the elderly while freeing up local tax monies for other purposes."

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

December 6, 1984

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: ROB DUNHAM, 843-1700

O'DONNELL FIGHTS TRAIN CUTS

State Representative Robert W. O'Donnell (D-East Falls), the House Majority Whip, strongly opposed the elimination of the Norristown and Ivy Ridge locals in public hearings today at SEPTA's center city headquarters.

O'Donnell called the proposed abandonment of the Norristown line "devastating to East Falls" and charged that SEPTA's testimony on the financial losses suffered by the line was "exaggerated and erroneous."

O'Donnell said "the Norristown local is the only commuter rail service available to residents of East Falls. The loss of this service will cause immediate and direct harm to hundreds of my constituents, and will be a major blow to the entire region.

"In the last year alone, the East Falls community has suffered the loss of our two shoppers special routes, and endured the elimination of direct R-bus service to Roxborough when that route was curtailed at the Wissahickon loop. We now face the loss of direct service on the Route 32 to the banks and shopping facilities at Ivy Ridge and Andorra, as well as the elimination of our only train.

"East Falls will become totally isolated from the institutions on which this community depends if the Norristown line is abandoned," O'Donnell said.

The East Falls legislator explained that SEPTA "has artificially deflated the figures on how many fares they will lose if they shut down this train in order to artificially inflate the amount saved by closing this line. But the

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idea of imposing a profitability test to determine whether a public transit route should be continued is a peculiar idea indeed. We subsidize public transportation because its impact on our economy and the quality of life in our region transcends the red ink on SEPTA's ledger sheets."

O'Donnell said the timing of the proposed abandonment represents "terrible transportation management. In the next year, construction will begin on the Schuylkill Expressway. PennDOT has proposed expanding the parking facilities at train stations along this route to decrease highway use and offset the increased congestion we all know is coming.

"But if there is no Norristown local, no Ivy Ridge local, no R6, then there will be no alternative to the gnarled traffic on the Expressway. All activity in the region will slow, and the loss will be suffered not only by the abandoned commuters, but by all of our citizens," O'Donnell concluded.

SEPTA hearing examiner Ross Crumlish said "This testimony gives me pause. I will consider it very carefully when I make my recommendation to SEPTA."

O'Donnell said the hearing examiner's reaction "means that there's still hope and that we've still got a chance to save our trains."