

Shared Ride Advisory Committee (SRAC) — Meeting #1 Highlights

Overview and Mission

The Shared Ride Advisory Committee (SRAC) held its inaugural meeting to formulate actionable advice for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). The committee's core mission is to modernize the state's **Shared Ride Program**—a public, demand-driven, door-to-door transit service available across all 67 Pennsylvania counties—and ensure its long-term financial sustainability.

The committee is guided by five core principles: **Equity, Sustainability, Efficiency, Coordination, and Accountability.**

The Funding Crisis & Operational Challenges

The committee emphasized that the program's current financial status quo is unsustainable:

- **Growing Deficits:** Operating expenses have severely outpaced revenues due to longer trips, less trip-sharing, post-COVID cost increases, and heightened passenger assistance needs. The program-wide deficit grew from **\$19 million** in FYE 2015 to **\$73 million** in FYE 2024.
- **Subsidy Caps:** The Lottery Fund Shared Ride subsidy is capped at \$75 million annually, a threshold already exceeded for the current fiscal year.
- **The Fare Dilemma:** Simply cutting services or raising fares will trigger a "death spiral"—driving down ridership, making services unaffordable for vulnerable demographics, and prompting funding programs to withdraw from providing fare subsidies.
- **Local Match Struggles:** Counties and municipalities face no local match requirement for Shared Ride, but struggle to meet the required 15% match for Fixed Route services, creating resistance to any expanded local funding mandates.

Key Discussion Themes & Structural Barriers

- **Operational Limitations:** Operators often restrict cross-county or cross-state travel (e.g., Lancaster County to Hershey), forcing local agencies to buy private transportation to fill gaps.
- **Regulatory Red Tape:** The Shared Ride application is currently 12 pages long due to fragmented, overlapping rules from various siloed funding programs (Lottery, MATP, etc.).

- **Driver & Vehicle Alternatives:** Utilizing smaller vans instead of traditional cutaway vehicles offers cost savings and allows the use of non-CDL drivers, though it presents wheelchair-maneuvering challenges.
- **Evolving Demographics:** While primarily serving seniors and individuals with disabilities, operators are seeing a need from younger riders who cannot afford vehicle ownership.

Proposed Solutions & Future Focus Areas

Moving forward, the committee categorized its priorities into immediate success metrics and "parking lot" items for future legislative/policy alignment:

- **Success Framework:** Defining a clear, unified definition of "Shared Ride," streamlining paperwork across funding sources, establishing a larger statutory/policy framework, and reviewing operational data profiles.
- **Partnerships:** Exploring non-profit funding models (like *rabbitcares*) and investigating tax-credit structures like the Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP).
- **Dismissed/Delayed Concepts:** Using casino revenues was noted as unviable without legislative intervention. Autonomous vehicle technology and standard ride-share apps (e.g., Lyft) were rejected as near-term fixes, as they lack the critical "door-through-door" physical assistance required by high-needs riders.

Next Steps: Any final framework recommended by the SRAC will ultimately require legislative action to be implemented. The committee will convene five more times to finalize recommendations, with the next meeting scheduled for **July 22, 2026**.