



COUNTY OF ERIE

OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Kathy Dahlkemper
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

MEDIA RELEASE

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County Executive Statement on EMTA Charter Dispute

Erie, PA – Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper addressed members of County Council this evening and delivered the following remarks:

“In late September 2014 I received a letter from EMTA informing my office that the EMTA Charter is to expire on September 14, 2016. My administration contacted Mayor Sinnott’s office for a meeting to discuss the EMTA Charter. Unfortunately, it took the Mayor’s office over 3 months to agree to a time for this meeting and we finally met on January 15, 2015. At this meeting I proposed a Charter that was more reflective of the regional vision the Destination Erie plan laid out for Erie County transit.

To the Mayor I proposed the adoption of a charter with a 3-3-3 allocation of executive board appointments. Three seats on the EMTA Board given to the other municipalities – the City of Corry, the Township Association and the Borough Association. The City of Erie would keep three appointments and the County government would keep three appointments. The Mayor quickly rejected my proposal and informed me that he was only interested in upholding the status quo by renewing the Charter as is for another 50 years. Shortly after this meeting I spoke with then Council Chairman, Fiore Leone. As the Charter would need to be passed by both Councils, we agreed that County Council would work to negotiate an agreement with City Council.

We all have experienced great frustration trying to negotiate a compromise with the City of Erie. We here all want what is best for the entire Erie County region. I, as well as many of you, have had numerous conversations with PennDot representatives and have worked to try and resolve the EMTA Charter issue.

At this point there is much at stake. There are jobs – 280 employees of EMTA, the 275,000 riders a month who depend on the transit system to take them to work, school, the doctors and many other places in Erie County. There is the \$36 million construction project at stake – money that likely will be spent elsewhere in PA if there is not a resolution to the Charter issue. Finally, there is the regional view of mass transit that is in jeopardy.

With all of these things at stake, I do not believe this is the time for us to walk away from EMTA. Walking away is not a solution that has the best interests of Erie County in mind and doesn't add value for the residents we all represent.

I think it is important to remember that unless a rider is a visitor to our region, everyone who rides EMTA is from the county and 100% of the bus routes are in the county. So this is not a city versus county issue.

This also should not be an issue about control. An authority should be autonomous from the direct control of elected officials. The appointments to the authority will still be made by elected officials but the board should make their decisions independently. I appoint intelligent, skilled citizens who I believe are capable of making good decisions. I know you do, also.

With all this said, I do not believe it is in the best interest of the citizens of Erie County to have a regional authority controlled by one of our 38 municipalities. I believe they will be best served if the authority has representation from all municipalities. To date I have not seen a proposal that does this.

I would like to put forward to County Council and to the City of Erie a proposal that does just that – a proposal that has three representatives from the City of Erie, one from the City of Corry, one from the Township Association, one from the Borough Association and three from Erie County government. I also propose that the county pay the local match. I have listened to Council and agree with Dr. Foust's proposal that County government pay the entire match. This deviates from my previous position last fall but having thought about this at great length, I see its merit. All citizens are County citizens and none should be double taxed for transit services.

I believe County Council has put forward some very good proposals regarding the creation of an advisory council and the length of the charter. I would like to see a charter that does not extend beyond 20 years and prefer one that is capped closer to 15 years. With the rapid changes happening in technology and our world in general, future leaders evaluating the passage of a new charter need to have the opportunity to respond to those changes.

I am asking Council to reconsider the resolution to walk away from EMTA. I do not believe this is in the best interests of the people we are here to serve. Instead, I am asking you to consider my proposal or comparable draft language that we can work on together to put forward. After that, I am hopeful that the City of Erie will take up our proposal and negotiate.

I know we all want what is best for Erie County. Thank you for considering what I have put forward tonight. I look forward to resolving this issue soon so we all can get back to the main issue – serving the residents of our region.”

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