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Auditor General DePasquale Urges Port Authority to Improve Route Management to Better Serve Hundreds of Thousands of Commuters

PITTSBURGH – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today released his latest performance audit of the Port Authority of Allegheny County that suggests the state’s second-largest mass transit system could improve route management to better serve its 180,000 daily bus riders.

DePasquale noted that the new audit found the Port Authority did resolve contracting and procurement concerns that had been identified in a 2014 audit.

“I commend Port Authority leadership for addressing the issues found in my last audit,” DePasquale said. “I’m encouraged that the agency continues to make progress in keeping its fiscal house in order.”

DePasquale said one of the keys to getting commuters to use mass transit is to ensure services are reliable and operate on-time.

“Making sure transit services are available where and when they’re needed helps to support job creation and workforce development in a region that’s changing, and changing fast,” DePasquale said. “Transit services help to provide opportunities to those who might otherwise be unable to accept a job outside of their own community.

“Our audit found that buses do not operate on schedule nearly one-third of the time – and that’s using a measurement with several minutes of leeway already built in,” he added. “Five or six minutes may not seem like a long wait, but those minutes can feel like an eternity when you’re standing in the elements and trying to get to work on time.”

The audit, which covered Jan. 1, 2016 through Dec. 31, 2017, found the Port Authority’s 67 percent on-time rate for its 97 bus routes lagged behind those of other metropolitan systems such as Minneapolis, at 84 percent, and Baltimore, at 74 percent.

DePasquale noted that the Port Authority’s on-time rate has risen in recent years, but said there’s room for more improvement.

“My review found that the Port Authority relied too heavily on simply altering its bus schedule to try to improve on-time performance, which was not effective,” DePasquale added. “For the nearly 180,000 people in this region who ride a bus each weekday, this is a very important issue.”

In response, the Port Authority said it is developing a comprehensive operations analysis and has created a new cross-functional team to work on improving overall on-time performance.

DePasquale said the audit also identified shortcomings in the Port Authority’s service request evaluation process, which is intended to give the public a voice in changes to bus and light rail routes. The audit said the process appears to be “overly complex and time consuming with the results having little to no impact” on operations.

“During the audit period, the Port Authority received more than 800 service requests that staff then spent many months analyzing and prioritizing,” DePasquale said. “However, of the 76 requests that made it into the approval pipeline, only two became reality due to budget constraints.”

In response, the Port Authority said that it is already working to enhance its service request procedures, noting that it is a fairly new process.

The audit also reviewed the Port Authority’s hiring process, and noted that the agency failed to document the process in formal policies and procedures and had inadequate documentation for certain applicant driver and criminal history offenses.

In one case, a transit operator was hired despite having four past license suspensions for moving violations that should have disqualified them from employment. That operator is no longer with the Port Authority and the agency retrained its staff on review processes.

Read the Port Authority of Allegheny County performance audit report online at www.PaAuditor.gov.

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