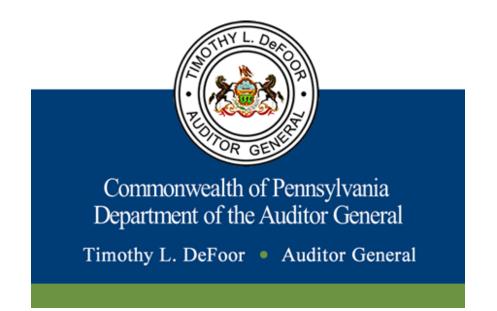
# ATTESTATION ENGAGEMENT

Borough of Benson Somerset County, Pennsylvania 55-402 Liquid Fuels Tax Fund For the Period January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2023

June 2025





Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General Harrisburg, PA 17120-0018 Facebook: Pennsylvania Auditor General Twitter: @PAAuditorGen www.PaAuditor.gov

TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR AUDITOR GENERAL

# Independent Auditor's Report

The Honorable Michael Carroll Secretary Department of Transportation Harrisburg, PA 17120

We examined the accompanying Forms MS-965 With Adjustments for the Liquid Fuels Tax Fund of the Borough of Benson, Somerset County, for the period January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2023. The municipality's management is responsible for presenting the Forms MS-965 in accordance with the criteria described in the Background section of this report and the Department of Transportation's *Publication 9*. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on the Forms MS-965 With Adjustments based on our examination.

Our examination was conducted in accordance with attestation standards established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the standards applicable to attestation engagements contained in *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Those standards require that we plan and perform the examination to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the Forms MS-965 are presented in accordance with the criteria described above, in all material respects. An examination involves performing procedures to obtain evidence about the Forms MS-965. The nature, timing and extent of the procedures selected depend on our judgement, including an assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the Forms MS-965, whether due to fraud or error. We believe that the evidence we obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a reasonable basis for our qualified opinion.

We are required to be independent and to meet our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with ethical requirements relating to the engagement.

As discussed in Finding No. 1, our examination disclosed that the borough expended \$4,086.22 during 2022 from the Liquid Fuels Tax Fund for culvert cleaning. The borough president's brother preformed work as an independent contractor, which is a related party transaction.

# Independent Auditor's Report (Continued)

In our opinion, except for the matter discussed in the preceding paragraph, the Forms MS-965 With Adjustments present, in all material respects, the information required by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation for the Liquid Fuels Tax Fund of the Borough of Benson, Somerset County, for the period January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2023, in accordance with the criteria described in the Background section of this report and the Department of Transportation's *Publication 9*.

In accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*, we are required to report all deficiencies that are considered to be significant deficiencies or material weaknesses in internal control; fraud and noncompliance with provisions of laws or regulations that have a material effect on the Forms MS-965; and any other instances that warrant the attention of those charged with governance; noncompliance with provisions of contracts or grant agreements, and abuse that has a material effect on the Forms MS-965. We are also required to obtain and report the views of responsible officials concerning the findings, conclusions, and recommendations, as well as any planned corrective actions. We performed our examination to express an opinion on whether the Forms MS-965 are presented in accordance with the criteria described above and not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on internal control over reporting on the Forms MS-965 or on compliance and other matters; accordingly, we express no such opinions.

A *deficiency in internal control* exists when the design or operation of a control does not allow management or employees, in the normal course of performing their assigned functions, to prevent, or detect and correct, misstatements on a timely basis. A *material weakness* is a deficiency, or combination of deficiencies, in internal control such that there is a reasonable possibility that a material misstatement of the Forms MS-965 will not be prevented, or detected and corrected, on a timely basis. A *significant deficiency* is a deficiency, or a combination of deficiencies, in internal control that is less severe than a material weakness, yet important enough to merit attention by those charged with governance.

Our consideration of internal control over reporting on the Forms MS-965 was for the limited purpose of expressing an opinion on whether the Forms MS-965 are presented in accordance with the criteria described above and would not necessarily identify all deficiencies in internal control that might be material weaknesses or significant deficiencies. Given these limitations, during our engagement we did not identify any deficiencies in internal control that we consider to be material weaknesses. However, material weaknesses may exist that have not been identified.

As part of obtaining reasonable assurance about whether the Forms MS-965 are free from material misstatement, we performed tests of Borough of Benson, Somerset County's compliance with certain provisions of laws, regulations, contracts, and grant agreements, noncompliance with which could have a direct and material effect on the determination of amounts on the Forms MS-965. However, providing an opinion on compliance with those provisions was not an objective of our engagement, and accordingly, we do not express such an opinion. The results of our tests disclosed the following instance of noncompliance that is required to be reported under *Government Auditing Standards*:

• Related Party Transactions.

#### Independent Auditor's Report (Continued)

We also noted a matter that, while not required to be included in this report by *Government Auditing Standards*, has been included in the finding below:

• Late Receipt Of Allocations - Recurring.

The purpose of this report is to determine whether the municipality's Liquid Fuels Tax Fund money is spent in accordance with the laws and regulations identified in the Background section of this report and the Department of Transportation's *Publication 9*. This report is not suitable for any other purpose.

We appreciate the courtesy extended by the Borough of Benson, Somerset County, to us during the course of our examination. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Bureau of County Audits at 717-787-1363.

Timothy L. Detoor

Timothy L. DeFoor Auditor General May 16, 2025

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#### Background

The Liquid Fuels Tax Municipal Allocation Law, Act 655 of 1956, as amended, see also 72 P.S. § 2615.5, et sec., provides municipalities other than counties (i.e., townships, boroughs, cities, towns, home rule, and optional plan governments) with an annual allocation of liquid fuels taxes from the state's Motor License Fund to be used for the maintenance and repair of streets, roads, and bridges for which the municipality is responsible. The allocation of local road mileage to the total local road mileage in the state; and (2) 50 percent on the proportion of a municipality's population to the total population in the state.

Title 75 Pa.C.S. § 9511 of the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code provides municipalities with annual maintenance payments to be received from the Motor License Fund for functionally local highways that were transferred to a municipality from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Each municipality must deposit the allocation of Liquid Fuels Tax funds and annual maintenance payments that it receives into a special fund called either the Municipal Liquid Fuels Tax Fund or State Fund. A municipality may not deposit any other monies into this fund except when the municipality does not have enough money in the special fund to meet the payments called for by its current annual budget for road and bridge purposes. In such a case, the municipality may borrow money or transfer money from its General Fund to its Liquid Fuels Tax Fund.

The Department of Transportation has been given the regulatory authority for the administration of these funds. Department of Transportation's *Publication 9* includes the policies and procedures for the administration of Act 655, as amended, and the Liquid Fuels Tax Fund money. However, if there is a difference between *Publication 9* and any legislation, the legislation shall govern.

To qualify for the annual allocation of Liquid Fuels Tax funds, *Publication 9* indicates that each municipality shall:

- 1. Submit annual reports (MS-965, Actual Use Report, MS-965P, Project and Miscellaneous Receipts, and MS-965S, Record of Checks).
- 2. Make deposits and payments or expenditures in compliance with Act 655 of 1956, as amended. Failure to do so may result in not receiving allocations from PennDOT until all discrepancies are resolved. *Publication 9*, Section 2.6, includes information about investing Liquid Fuels Tax monies, using loan or bond proceeds, and types of receipts into the Liquid Fuels Tax Fund.

# Background (Continued)

- 3. Submit the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) Report of Elected and Appointed Officials by January 31<sup>st</sup> and the Survey of Financial Condition By March 15<sup>th</sup>.
- 4. Ensure resolution of all Contractor Responsibility Program (CRP) holds and blocks imposed by the Department of Revenue and the Department of Labor and Industry.
- 5. Ensure resolution of all reimbursements required as a result of audits performed by the Department of the Auditor General or monitoring reviews performed by the Department of Transportation's Financial Consultants.

# Criteria

The criteria for the Form MS-965 With Adjustment are described below.

Section 1 of Form MS-965 With Adjustments provides a summary of Liquid Fuels Tax Fund expenditures by category. Categories requiring explanation include:

• Major equipment purchases are purchases of road machinery and road equipment with varying yearly costs in excess of the amounts indicated below:

2020	2021	2022	2023
\$11,300.00	\$11,500.00	\$11,800.00	\$12,200.00

• Minor equipment purchases are purchases of road machinery and road equipment with varying yearly costs that are less than or equal to the amounts indicated below:

2020	2021	2022	2023
\$11,300.00	\$11,500.00	\$11,800.00	\$12,200.00

• Agility projects are exchanges of services with the Department of Transportation.

# Background (Continued)

Section 2 of Form MS-965 With Adjustments provides information on the fund balance. Categories requiring explanation include:

- The state allocation is available from the Department of Transportation in March of each year. The amount the municipality receives is based half on its population and half on its road mileage.
- Municipalities that transferred roads from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to the municipality through the Highway Transfer Program receive annual turnback allocations in March of each year from the Department of Transportation. Turnback allocations are based on the mileage of the roads transferred.
- Expenditures include the total transferred from Section 1.

Section 3 of Form MS-965 With Adjustments determines if the municipality expended Liquid Fuels Tax Fund money in excess of the permissible amount for equipment and the balance that the municipality may carry forward for the purchase of equipment to the subsequent year.

Department of Transportation *Publication 9* requires that the amount expended for equipment purchases in a given year not exceed the sum of the equipment balance carried forward from the previous year and 20 percent of the current year's Liquid Fuels Tax Fund allocation and, if applicable, 20 percent of the turnback allocation plus other Department of Transportation approved adjustments.

If the municipality spent in excess of the amount listed on Line 4, the excess must be reimbursed to the Liquid Fuels Tax Fund.

The equipment balance to be carried forward for the subsequent year is the lesser of the amount on Line 6 or the ending fund balance on Line 6 of Section 2, but not less than zero.

#### Background (Continued)

#### Basis of Presentation

The financial activities of the municipality are accounted for in separate funds. The Liquid Fuels Tax Fund is used to account for state aid revenues from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation used primarily for building and improving local roads and bridges. The Form MS-965 has been prepared in accordance with reporting requirements prescribed by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation as a result of the Fuels Tax Act 655, dated 1956 and as amended, which does not constitute a complete presentation of the entity's assets, liabilities, expenses, and fund balance. Accordingly, the presentation of Form MS-965 With Adjustments is restricted to the Liquid Fuels Tax Fund, which represents a segment of the entity.

#### Basis Of Accounting

The accompanying Forms MS-965 With Adjustments is prepared in accordance with reporting requirements prescribed by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. Under this method, revenues are recognized when received and expenditures are recorded when paid.

#### General Fixed Assets

General fixed assets are recognized as expenditures at the time of purchase. No depreciation has been provided on the heavy equipment used to maintain and repair roads and bridges.

# BOROUGH OF BENSON SOMERSET COUNTY LIQUID FUELS TAX FUND 2022 FORM MS-965 – SECTION 1 WITH ADJUSTMENTS

Expenditure Summary	Reported		Adjustments		Adjusted Amount		
Minor equipment purchases	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	
Computer/Computer related training		-		-		-	
Major equipment purchases		-		-		-	
Agility projects		-		-		-	
Cleaning streets and gutters		-		-		-	
Winter maintenance services		265.78		-		265.78	
Traffic control devices		-		-		-	
Street lighting		-		-		-	
Storm sewers and drains		7,185.02		-		7,185.02	
Repairs of tools and machinery		137.49		-		137.49	
Maintenance and repair of							
roads and bridges		22,401.00		-		22,401.00	
Highway construction and							
rebuilding projects		-		-		-	
Miscellaneous		-		_		-	
Total (To Section 2, Line 5)	\$	29,989.29	\$	_	\$	29,989.29	

# BOROUGH OF BENSON SOMERSET COUNTY LIQUID FUELS TAX FUND 2022 FORM MS-965 – SECTION 2 WITH ADJUSTMENTS

Fund Balance	Reported	AdjusteReportedAdjustmentsAmound	
1. Balance, January 1, 2022	\$ 47,889.	73 \$ -	\$ 47,889.73
Receipts: 2. State allocation	7,173.	75 -	7,173.75
<ul><li>2a. Turnback allocation</li><li>2b. Interest on investments</li><li>2c. Miscellaneous</li></ul>	- 155.: -		155.38
3. Total receipts	7,329.	13 -	7,329.13
4. Total funds available	55,218.	86 -	55,218.86
5. Expenditures (Section 1)	29,989.	29 -	29,989.29
6. Balance, December 31, 2022	\$ 25,229.	57_\$	\$ 25,229.57

# BOROUGH OF BENSON SOMERSET COUNTY LIQUID FUELS TAX FUND 2022 FORM MS-965 – SECTION 3 WITH ADJUSTMENTS

Reported		Adjustments		Adjusted Amount		
\$	10,031.15	\$	-	\$	10,031.15	
	1,434.75		-		1,434.75	
	11,465.90		-		11,465.90	
			_			
	11,465.90		-		11,465.90	
\$	11,465.90	\$	_	\$	11,465.90	
		\$ 10,031.15 1,434.75 	\$ 10,031.15 \$ 1,434.75 - 11,465.90 - 11,465.90	\$ 10,031.15 \$ - 1,434.75 - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	\$ 10,031.15 \$ - \$ 1,434.75 - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	

# BOROUGH OF BENSON SOMERSET COUNTY LIQUID FUELS TAX FUND 2023 FORM MS-965 – SECTION 1 WITH ADJUSTMENTS

Expenditure Summary	Reported Adjustments		stments	Adjusted Amount		
Minor equipment purchases	\$	-	\$	_	\$	-
Computer/Computer related training		-		-		-
Major equipment purchases		-		-		-
Agility projects		-		-		-
Cleaning streets and gutters		-		-		-
Winter maintenance services		-		-		-
Traffic control devices		-		-		-
Street lighting		-		-		-
Storm sewers and drains		-		-		-
Repairs of tools and machinery		-		-		-
Maintenance and repair of						
roads and bridges		-		-		-
Highway construction and						
rebuilding projects		-		-		-
Miscellaneous				-		
Total (To Section 2, Line 5)	\$	_	\$	-	\$	-

# BOROUGH OF BENSON SOMERSET COUNTY LIQUID FUELS TAX FUND 2023 FORM MS-965 – SECTION 2 WITH ADJUSTMENTS

Fund Balance	]	Reported	Adjustments		Adjusted ustments Amount	
1. Balance, January 1, 2023	\$ 25,229.57		\$ -		\$	25,229.57
Receipts: 2. State allocation 2a. Turnback allocation		14,669.49 -		-		14,669.49 -
<ul><li>2b. Interest on investments</li><li>2c. Miscellaneous</li></ul>		203.53		-		203.53
3. Total receipts		14,873.02		-		14,873.02
4. Total funds available		40,102.59		-		40,102.59
5. Expenditures (Section 1)				-		
6. Balance, December 31, 2023	\$	40,102.59	\$	-	\$	40,102.59

# BOROUGH OF BENSON SOMERSET COUNTY LIQUID FUELS TAX FUND 2023 FORM MS-965 – SECTION 3 WITH ADJUSTMENTS

Reported		Adjustments		Adjusted Amount	
\$	11,465.90	\$	-	\$	11,465.90
	2,933.90		-		2,933.90
			_		
	14,399.80		-		14,399.80
			_		
	14,399.80				14,399.80
\$	14,399.80	\$	_	\$	14,399.80
		\$ 11,465.90 2,933.90 - 14,399.80 - 14,399.80	\$ 11,465.90 \$ 2,933.90 - 14,399.80 - 14,399.80	\$ 11,465.90 \$ - 2,933.90 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	\$ 11,465.90 \$ - \$ 2,933.90 - - - - 14,399.80 - - 14,399.80 -

# Finding No. 1 - Related Party Transactions

Our examination disclosed that the borough expended \$4,086.22 during 2022 from the Liquid Fuels Tax Fund for culvert cleaning. The borough council president's brother preformed the work as an independent contractor. Due to the lack of documentation in the minutes of the borough council meeting that the president of council officially abstained from voting and officially stated that he was related to the independent contractor, this contract appears to violate The Public Official and Employee Ethics Act. Therefore, it should not have been entered into by the borough.

The Public Official and Employee Ethics Act ("Ethics Act"), 65 P.S. 1103(f), states, in part:

No public official or public employee or his spouse or child or any business in which the person or his spouse or child is associated shall enter into any contract valued at \$500 or more with the governmental body with which the public official or public employee is associated or any subcontract valued at \$500 or more with any person who has been awarded a contract with the governmental body with which the public official or public employee is associated, unless the contract has been awarded through an open and public process, including prior public notice and subsequent public disclosure of all proposals considered and contracts awarded. In such a case, the public official or public employee shall not have any supervisory or overall responsibility for the implementation or administration of the contract.

We were unable to determine the cause of this condition.

Because this contract violates the Ethics Act, the borough could be required by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to reimburse \$4,086.22 to its Liquid Fuels Tax Fund.

Copies of this finding will be forwarded to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and the State Ethics Commission for their review and whatever action they may deem appropriate.

#### Recommendations

We recommend that the borough reimburse \$4,086.22 to its Liquid Fuels Tax Fund upon official notification by the Department of Transportation.

We further recommend that the borough comply with the Ethics Act.

# Finding No. 1 - Related Party Transactions (Continued)

# Management's Response

The borough officials offered no formal response at this time.

# Auditor's Conclusion

During our next examination, we will determine if the municipality complied with our recommendations.

# Finding No. 2 - Late Receipt Of Allocations - Recurring

We cited the municipality for late receipt of allocations in our prior three examinations, the most recent period of January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2021. Our current examination disclosed that the 2022 and 2023 Liquid Fuels Tax Fund allocations of \$7,173.75 and \$7,395.04, respectively, which should have been distributed from the Department of Transportation to the municipality during the first week of March of each year, were not received until November 30, 2022, and December 29, 2023, respectively, because the municipality failed to comply with the Department of Transportation's *Publication 9*, Chapter Two, Section 2.4, which states:

To qualify for the annual liquid fuels tax allocation, a municipality shall:

- Submit annual reports (MS-965, Actual Use Report, MS-965P, Project and Miscellaneous Receipts, and MS-965S, Record of Checks).
- Make deposits and payments or expenditures in compliance with the Act 655. Failure to do so may result in not receiving allocations from PENNDOT until all discrepancies are resolved.
- Submit the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) Report of Elected and Appointed Officials by January 31<sup>st</sup> and the Survey of Financial Condition by March 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Ensure resolution of all Contractor Responsibility Program (CRP) holds and blocks imposed by the Department of Revenue and the Department of Labor and Industry.
- Ensure resolution of all reimbursements required as a result of audits performed by the Department of the Auditor General or monitoring reviews performed by the Department of Transportation's Financial Consultants.

This condition occurred because the municipality failed to file their 2022 Form MS-965 until November 2, 2022 and their 2023 Form MS-965 until November 29, 2023.

Because of the late receipt of allocations, the municipality did not have use of the 2022 allocation for nearly nine months and the 2023 allocation nearly ten months. Furthermore, had the allocations been received timely, money may have been available for investment purposes, potentially earning interest income which could have been used for road maintenance and repairs.

#### Finding No. 2 - Late Receipt Of Allocations - Recurring (Continued)

#### Recommendation

We again recommend that in the future, the municipality comply with the Department of Transportation's *Publication 9* to ensure that the allocations are received during the first week in March as outlined above.

#### Management's Response

The secretary/treasurer stated:

The PennDOT municipal services representative filled out paperwork late and there was a discrepancy on their behalf.

#### Auditor's Conclusion

This is a recurring finding. We strongly recommend that the municipality comply with our recommendation. During our next examination, we will determine if the municipality complied with our recommendation.

# BOROUGH OF BENSON SOMERSET COUNTY LIQUID FUELS TAX FUND SUMMARY OF ONSITE CLOSEOUT MEETING FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY 1, 2022 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023

An onsite closeout meeting was held January 24, 2025. Those participating were:

# BOROUGH OF BENSON

Ms. Lisa S. Rohde, Secretary/Treasurer

# DEPARTMENT OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

Ms. Penelope Fjellanger, Auditor

This report was initially distributed to:

#### **The Honorable Michael Carroll**

Secretary Department of Transportation

#### **Borough of Benson**

Somerset County 118 Main Street P. O. Box 386 Hollsopple, PA 15935-0386

#### The Honorable Harold Burkett

President of Council

#### The Honorable Michael Samone

Vice-President of Council

# Ms. Lisa S. Rohde

Secretary/Treasurer

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at <u>www.PaAuditor.gov</u>. Media questions about the report can be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 229 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120; via email to: <u>news@PaAuditor.gov</u>.