



Testimony in Support of SB 315

Caitlin Johnson Cleveland resident, organizer for Clevelanders for Public Transit/Ohio Organizing Collaborative

I am reluctantly testifying in support of SB 315. Adding 8.8 million dollars in new state funding for public transit is desperately needed, but unfortunately, is not nearly enough.

In Cleveland we have the state's biggest and most robust transit system. But since 2006 - GCRTA has cut more than 30 percent of bus service due to devastatingly low levels of state funding. Ohio is towards the bottom of all the states in the nation when it comes to spending on public transit. We spend just 63 cents a resident on public transit – compared to about \$50 dollars per resident in Michigan. Public transportation is a good investment. According to the Ohio Department of Transportation, for every one dollar invested in transit – four additional dollars go back into the economy.

Public transportation is not just another social service. It's vital for a functioning economy. In Cleveland, more than two-thirds of RTA riders use it to get to work. Meanwhile, the Cleveland Federal Reserve Bank recent published a study showing that jobs are moving further and further out of the city – making it very difficult for workers to get to them in a timely matter. This is an economic development issue.

My organization helped form a group called Clevelanders for Public Transit which has more than 100 active members, a list of 2000 people and more than 800 followers on Facebook. When we have conversations in the community, we hear again and again that people are facing barriers to get to work and getting to school. Ohio's failure to invest in public transportation is holding us back. This is one of the reasons we are recovering from the recession more slowly than other states. This is one of the reasons why the Economic Innovation Center recently named Cleveland, Toledo and Cincinnati three of the top ten most distressed cities in the nation.

This is also an issue in rural areas. My work has taken me to the Ohio Valley where I have seen many people trapped in poverty due to a lack of mobility, SB 315 makes new investments in rural areas – and this is positive. But the \$2 million left to be divided between all transit systems is not enough to stop the bleeding in Cleveland.

Right now, on the eve of the RNC, Greater Cleveland RTA is working on a proposal to cut service by 4 percent and raise fares. Meanwhile, ODOT supplied RTA with 12 brand new trolleys just in time for the delegates' arrival. The state seems to be able to find the money for the RNC, but not for the Clevelanders struggling to make a better life for themselves and their families. I urge this body to pass this increase in funding for public transit – but also to go further. Cleveland and Ohio's other transit authorities need to be adequately funded. I'd encourage this committee to find a way to add more funding for transit throughout the state. ODOT recommends that the state spend \$120 million on transit to meet current needs. This bill is an improvement – but doesn't get us close to that.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Johnson