

**Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber Testimony (Written)
Interested Party – Transportation Budget (HB 26)
House Finance Committee: February 15, 2017**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Cera and Members of the House Finance Committee - thank you for the opportunity to testify today as an interested party for HB 26, the FY18-19 Transportation Budget.

The Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber represents the interests of more than 3,500 Ohio businesses and organizations. As a bold voice for business, the Chamber has identified transportation as one of its key focus areas. The transportation work of the Chamber is laser focused on ensuring our region builds and sustains a multi-modal regional transportation network that connects people to jobs and supports a talent rich workforce. Because of the outsized impact transportation has on our members, we are building a coalition of business leaders to focus on transportation advocacy. It is important to ensure that transportation investments unlock economic development opportunities across southwest Ohio.

For example, the Chamber has consistently led the advocacy for the repair of the Brent Spence Bridge, which connects Ohio and Kentucky via I-71 and I-75 over the Ohio River. The Brent Spence Bridge is a chokepoint as it has been labelled functionally obsolete carrying twice the number of vehicles a day that it was built for. Additionally, the Chamber has worked with regional partners and ODOT to advocate for the replacement of the Western Hills Viaduct, which carries over 55,000 vehicles a day to our region's two major job centers – uptown and downtown.

Regarding HB 26 as it is currently drafted we have several comments:

First, we strongly support the inclusion of an additional \$10M to be invested in public transportation across the state of Ohio. This increase in funding –coming on the heels of ODOT's transit needs study— is an important first step and will provide transit authorities like the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) the opportunity to access much needed additional resources. Across our region, only 22.5% of all jobs are accessible by a 90 minute commute, and 75,000 health care and manufacturing jobs are not accessible at all by transit.

One of SORTA's largest needs is replacing aging and outdated vehicles. At the beginning of this year, SORTA had 63 buses past their 12-year useful life. Every year beyond this threshold means increased operating and maintenance costs. A 15-year-old bus costs 133% more to maintain than a 10-year-old bus. As of January, Metro had 40 buses that are 15 years old or older, resulting in more than \$500,000 in additional annual operating expense. This additional \$10M can help unlock federal resources to more rapidly replace the outdated fleet that currently transports people throughout our region.

Additionally, the Chamber plays an active role in the Hamilton County Transportation Improvement District (TID), and we are encouraged by the inclusion of \$3.5M to support the efforts TIDs across the state, and we are supportive of the amendment to increase those funds to \$4.5M. In Hamilton County our TID focused on tackling the complex Western Hills Viaduct bridge replacement project. While we were recently successfully awarded \$10M in funding through TRAC, the Viaduct is a \$300+ million project, and accessing these TID funds will be critical as our region develops a funding plan.

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In all of our transportation work, we recognize the importance that innovation and technology plays in the future of how we move people and goods throughout the state. Our Chamber has served as a convener of experts from business, education, and the civic community whose focus is ensuring that our region joins Columbus and others as a “smart city.” Additionally, our partners at the Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments have made technology and the future of transportation a signature issue for them – adding staff and resources to prepare our region for the advent of autonomous vehicles, an app-based transportation network, and the sharing economy. As you review programs to pilot innovations in transportation, we look forward to working with you to identify opportunities in Southwest Ohio to deploy new technology and bring our state to the fore of innovation in transportation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the proposed transportation budget. As the year goes on, we are eager to work with this committee as well as Chairman Green’s Transportation Committee to discuss other important opportunities to make help connect Ohioans to jobs and ensure that our businesses have the infrastructure they need to attract and retain talent.

Jason Kershner, VP of Government Affairs
Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber
513-579-3120
jkershner@cincinnati-chamber.com

Pete Metz, Transportation Policy & Coalition Manager
Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber
513-579-3167
pmetz@cincinnati-chamber.com