

**Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber Testimony: Sub HB 26 (Transportation Budget)
House Finance Committee: February 22, 2017 - Jason Kershner, VP of Government Affairs**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera and Members of the House Finance Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify today as an interested party for Sub HB 26, the 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. 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 Sub HB 26 – we testified last week expressing support for the 33% increase in transit funding as well as the transportation innovation investments. And we thank you for keeping those provisions in the substitute bill. After reviewing the substitute bill, we have a few additional comments.

Sub HB 26 includes language that compels ODOT to use Planning and Research Funding to complete a study of the Eastern Bypass idea. The study would seek to review the previous analysis and recommendations concerning the Brent Spence Bridge and related traffic management improvements and to propose alternatives, including an Eastern Bypass solution.

The Chamber does not believe that studying the \$5 billion Eastern Bypass idea as an alternative to the Brent Spence Bridge project is an efficient use of state dollars. This idea would pave nearly 80 miles of new highway from northern Kentucky across the Ohio River, through Ohio and construct at least one new bridge. Kentucky has already spent \$2 million to study the idea with the results due by September of this year. There is no need for Ohio to spend additional dollars, especially not before we know the results of Kentucky's study. The Eastern Bypass idea does not solve the Brent Spence Bridge problem. 56% of the 2 million people who live in the region and 74% of the 1 million jobs in the region are within 5 miles of the I-75 corridor. The proposal in Sub HB 26 is a distraction to the region's most pressing infrastructure project, the rehabilitation of the Brent Spence Bridge.

In an environment where transportation dollars are scarce, Ohio should direct these funds to proven projects with a strong ROI. For example, the Chamber would suggest reallocating the dollars intended for this study to increase the grant funding pool for local Transportation Improvement Districts (TIDs). Since 2010, TID's have received \$21 million in dedicated funds that have gone towards projects with a total cost of \$688 million. That is more than a 30 to 1 ratio of leverage.

Thank you for your consideration and I am happy to take any questions that you have.