



**State Representative Jim Butler**

**41<sup>st</sup> House District**

**House Bill 256** – Sponsor Testimony before the House Transportation & Public Safety Committee; Wednesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

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Chairman Green, Vice Chair Greenspan, Ranking Member Sheehy, and Members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee, thank you for this opportunity to offer sponsor testimony for House Bill 256 along with my joint sponsor, Representative Paul Zeltwanger.

Ohio needs a new, multi-dimensional, fully integrated transportation and infrastructure plan. Despite significant economic setbacks and a major decline in relative population over the last decade, our state is still the seventh most populated state in the country, with that population largely concentrated in the southwestern corner of the state, and in the northeastern corner as well. Because of these population concentrations, I believe that Ohio is uniquely positioned to become one of only a few states in the country to be home to two major hub airports, and only one of several that have a major air hub at all. Planning, designing, building and opening these hub airports is the ultimate goal proposed in House Bill 256. Representative Zeltwanger and I are aware that this is indeed a lofty goal, but the type of real, urgent progress our state needs won't happen if we only tweak the status quo.

When I speak of hub airports, think Dallas/Fort Worth, Atlanta, Boston, or Chicago O'Hare. Everyone knows the advantages of flying out of major hubs as opposed to smaller airports: direct flights worldwide, no layovers, and many more flights from which to choose. These advantages save both business and private travelers alike time, money, and oftentimes both. It is not a coincidence that many major businesses that have left Ohio in recent years have relocated near major hubs. Amazon recently announced its intentions to build a second North American headquarters; do we really think there's even 1 chance in 50,000 that they'll locate such a massive operation in Ohio given the state of our current travel infrastructure? Big businesses locate their headquarters near major hubs because they facilitate quick and efficient travel all over the country and the world.

Not only will having two major hubs in Ohio be a huge advantage for attracting and retaining businesses, but the construction of these airports will be a boon for contractors, laborers, and the skilled trades. Such massive construction projects will employ thousands, probably even tens of thousands, of Ohioans for the better part of two decades.

House Bill 256 creates the Major Air Hub Council to oversee the construction of these hubs, as well as the other components of this integrated transportation strategy, which include transportation centers near major metropolitan areas, and a high-speed rail system that connects the transportation centers to the hub airports. Please refer to PowerPoint slides that we submitted to the Chair for help visualizing the concept.

The bill also creates the Northern Ohio Airport Authority and the Southern Ohio Airport Authority. After construction of the airports is complete, the Major Air Hub Council will transfer operational duties over to these new Airport Authorities. Financing the construction of these major hubs can be accomplished in several ways, the most crucial way being contracting with major airlines seeking new hubs. With contracts and gate leases in place, the Council can obtain bonds to finance the construction. Hopefully, this revenue stream will be enhanced with new federal infrastructure dollars.

The plan contained in House Bill 256 is comprehensive, and ambitious to be certain. When my joint sponsor and I introduced the bill earlier this spring, many in the press and public rolled their eyes and openly mocked the plan. My question to them is: why? Show us any other proposal that could have as positive of an effect on Ohio's economy as this one could. Just because an idea is new and bold and runs counter to current parochial interests does not mean it bears no consideration. If, throughout the committee process, we discover improvements that can be made, or even a completely different approach that will dramatically improve our state, we are eager to work on that approach together.

We need a plan to move our state in a different direction. Ohio has gone from twenty-three federal representatives down to sixteen. Our state has lost people because our state has lost employers. As I stated earlier, our state has lost employers partially because of Ohio's woefully inadequate transportation infrastructure. I want to see this bill enacted, obviously, as its sponsor. However, even if it is not enacted, my joint sponsor and I sincerely hope that it generates serious discussion regarding the types of steps that need to be taken to improve transportation infrastructure in Ohio, thereby improving the lives of Ohioans.

I want to emphasize that House Bill 256 presents almost zero risk to taxpayers, only the minor investment of creating the Major Air Hub Council itself. If the Council is successful in securing agreements with major airlines, and two \$10 billion airports are constructed, which would make Ohio exponentially more economically competitive, that initial minor investment will have been very worthwhile.

Chairman Green, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I am happy to answer the committee's questions at this time, or to yield while Rep. Zeltwanger offers his testimony. Thank you.