

Ohio House Finance Committee

House Bill 62 Testimony

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Honorable Members of the Ohio House Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about Ohio's transportation funding needs and what we believe should be done to provide a comprehensive solution to what some are calling the Ohio's transportation financial cliff.

My name is W. Curtis Stitt and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA). OPTA is a public transportation industry association representing transit agencies providing transportation services throughout Ohio. OPTA membership also includes several private businesses employing Ohio residents and providing products and services to the transportation industry throughout the state. On behalf of its public and private sector members, OPTA advocates for strong comprehensive transportation policies and funding for the state of Ohio and local communities.

OPTA appreciates the important and difficult work ahead of this committee. With the formation of his Advisory Committee on Transportation Infrastructure, Governor DeWine created an opportunity to take a hard look at the transportation needs of the state of Ohio. That Committee concluded "while the committee was split . . . the only funding mechanism that generated broad consensus was an increase in the motor fuel user fee."

Let me be perfectly clear, OPTA supports the Committee's recommendation for an increase in the motor fuel user fee and has actively engaged with others, most notably Fix Our Roads Ohio, to advocate for that increase.

I want to be equally clear, however, that OPTA believes that addressing Ohio's transportation funding needs requires changing outdated funding paradigm that takes a siloed approach to funding. What is needed is a broader approach that considers highways and other modes including dedicated public transit funding.

Though the Governor's Committee on Transportation Infrastructure was created to focus on highways, it noted among its conclusions that "the committee agreed that mass transit plays an important role in society and economic development." That assessment is correct as public transit impacts economic development in local communities and the state. A comprehensive transportation system with robust public transit is an important element of retaining and attracting business and jobs. Mobility accessibility is a common theme among companies looking to expand and/or relocate. Chambers of Commerce list accessible transportation as one of the top needs of their members. Transit organizations throughout the state consistently receive service requests from businesses each year.

Additionally, changing the funding paradigm is required by the changing transportation paradigm. The future of mobility is connected infrastructure and data. Vehicles, roads and

people are beginning to communicate, creating efficiencies we can hardly conceive of today. Without a funding formula that realizes the connectivity of the future, we would be selling the state and its future residents and businesses short. Any future funding models must include these components if our transportation infrastructure is to be sustainable, encourage future economic development, embrace the innovation economy and increase quality of life. Public transit is a critical component of the connected transportation system of the future.

With all of that as the backdrop, there is a need recognize the state of transit funding in Ohio. Since 2002, the General Revenue Fund allocation for public transit has been cut by 85%. As a result, Ohio, which ranks 13th nationally in transit ridership, is ranked 38th in per capita and 41st in overall transit funding. Current levels of state funding will make it difficult, if not impossible, for Ohio's systems to meet future mobility and infrastructure demands.

According to an Ohio Department of Transportation Statewide Transit Needs Study completed five years ago, an annual investment in public transit of \$37 million in capital funding and \$83 million in operating funding was warranted at that time. The report further concluded that by 2025 those numbers will increase to \$55 million (capital) and \$130 million (operating) to meet the unmet demand so transit agencies in Ohio can continue to support the state's economic growth targets.

Again, citing the Governor's Committee on Transportation Infrastructure "We do have a lot of requests and needs for public transportation and mass transit, and they are going to have to have some funding sources. There could be an exchange of dollars, where if the state gets in certain dollars that don't have that restriction, they can use their (motor fuel user fee) money for roads and bridges and free up other money for mobility and mass transit." OPTA supports that approach as it contemplates funding highways and transit through a common budget proposal.

OPTA will continue to work with members of the House to craft a measure that supports increasing the motor fuels user fee while incorporating a mechanism for improved transit funding.

Considering the above, now, more than ever, the time is right for Ohio to produce a comprehensive plan to meet the state's transportation needs. Such a plan should consider all modes – including public transportation. A comprehensive approach will provide a greater economic benefit for the state and its residents and well position Ohio for the future.

I welcome your questions.