



**Transportation Budget Testimony (HB62)
House Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony | Jason Warner, Greater Ohio Policy Center
February 21, 2019**

Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee, I want to thank you for providing me this opportunity to speak to you today about House Bill 62, the state transportation budget and transportation generally in Ohio.

My name is Jason Warner and I am the Manager of Government Affairs at the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC). GOPC is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that is valued for its data-driven research. Our mission is to champion revitalization in Ohio to create economically competitive communities.

Investments and improvements to our state's transportation system have been a priority for GOPC since our founding. Today, we are recognized by policymakers and agency administrators as being a pragmatic voice for reform to Ohio's transportation funding priorities. Our work on innovating transportation has, over the years, resulted in improvements to Ohio's transportation budget and renewed investment in public transportation systems – lifelines that connect workers to jobs and vulnerable populations to needed services.

As this committee is acutely aware, Ohio is a diverse state, requiring a range of transportation options. You have heard considerable testimony about the need to invest in our transportation infrastructure, and there is not much that I can add to what has already been said. Instead, I want to draw the attention of this panel to one of the more underutilized methods that we have at our disposal to alleviating congestion and reducing the damage inflicted upon our roadways – public transportation.

Ohio's 61 public transit agencies provide an average of 10 rides for every single Ohioan every year. 83 of Ohio's 88 counties are served by an urban, rural or specialized transportation program.¹

The state's goal must and should be to keep our roads and bridges in a state of good repair for as long as possible, and with every dollar stretched. As such, mass transit is one demonstrated way to achieve these goals. How exactly, allow me to provide a simple example.

The average passenger automobile, when containing a single occupant, weighs 4,000lbs. The average transit bus, when fully occupied, weighs 44,000lbs. If you place 48 cars on the road, they will take up more space, and add nearly three times more weight to roadways than that single, fully occupied passenger bus.

¹ Five Counties – Defiance, Holmes, Noble, Pauling and Wayne Counties, have no form of public transportation.

In rural settings, dial-a-ride trips do put wear and tear on roads, and existing system inefficiencies exacerbate this problem. Innovation that creates smart coordination of rides can reduce the number of these trips and ease pressure on our states roadways.

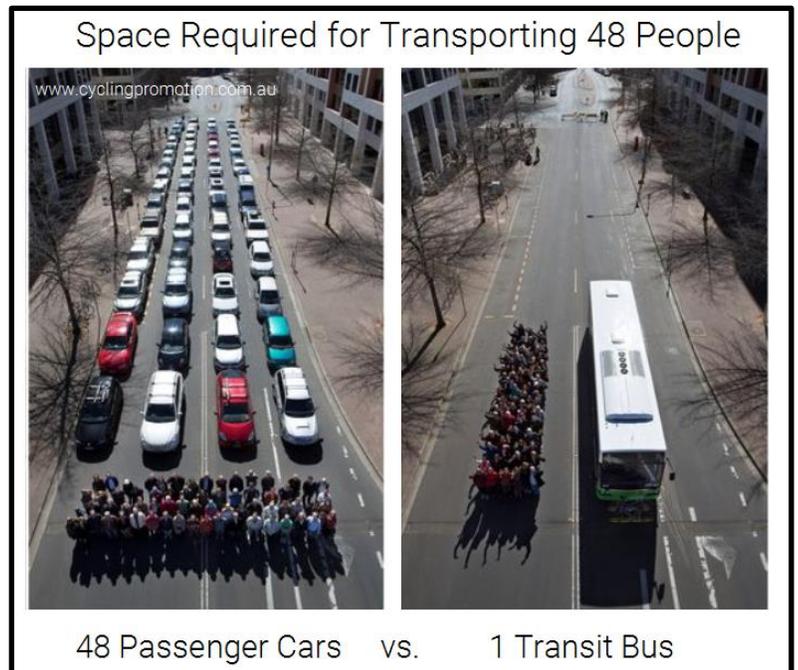
GOPC has long argued in support for restored and enhanced funding of public transportation in Ohio. The funding we are advocating for should go to operations, capital projects, and most importantly, innovation. Transportation is evolving and it is important that mobility options are increasing every year. While ridership on public transportation systems across the state continues to increase²,

further investment in public transportation would help to fuel an increase in ridership – alleviating roadway congestion and reducing wear and tear on infrastructure. Public transportation systems in Ohio are eager to lead their communities by bringing new mobility solutions that help get more people to work and critical services and, ideally, decrease costs.

Last fall, GOPC released our white paper, ***Fueling Innovation in Transit***, a copy of which I have included with my testimony. In the paper, we have outlined the depth and scope of the issues Ohio’s public transit agencies face due to nearly two decades of cuts and underfunding. More importantly, GOPC has outlined three recommendations which, taken together, could generate as much as \$123 million in new state funding for public transit agencies, creating opportunities to meet market demand and innovate service delivery to all Ohioans.

Specific to the budget before you, GOPC has recommended that the legislature increase the amount of FHWA flex funding which is currently made available to public transit agencies. Flex funds are currently the largest single source of funds for public transit systems in Ohio (apart from local revenue sources), Today, flex funding accounts for nearly 84% of all state funding that is provided for public transit but only 3.58% of the overall budget for transit in Ohio.

We applaud ODOT for its continued commitment in making this funding available for public transportation. This funding continues to ensure that Ohio maintain, sustain, and keep in good sound state the transit systems of Ohio. However, 32% of the public transit vehicles currently operating on the state’s roadways are estimated to be beyond their useful life and are in need of replacement.



² Ridership on statewide public transit systems increased 2% between 2013 and 2016. *Status of Public Transit in Ohio*, Ohio Department of Transportation. April, 2018.

GOPC recommends that the state double the amount of funds that are currently flexed to public transit each year. Providing an additional \$33 million per year (\$66 million per year / \$132 million per biennium) would provide needed funding to help institute innovations that could increase services and reduce costs, as well as reduce the number of vehicles on the road that are beyond their useful life. We have two additional recommendations for increasing funding for transit that we will bring before you during the Main Operating Budget.

As an urban and rural state, Ohio requires a range of transportation options to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people, goods and services. Public transportation serves as a vital link for millions of Ohioans.

Investment in public transportation must be considered alongside the important investment that is needed in maintaining and upgrading our transportation infrastructure to meet the needs of market demand and modern economic realities. Investing in both our infrastructure and a robust and comprehensive public transportation system can be a win-win: increased transportation options with less congestion and less wear and tear on Ohio's roadways. These paired investments are vital for Ohio's future.

Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on the issue of public transportation and why it is critical that Ohio recommit itself to investing in public transit, thus ensuring all Ohioans have access to safe and reliable methods of transportation.