

Testimony of the City of Columbus in regard to H.B. 62

Before the House Finance Committee

February 27, 2019

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, Members of the Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on House Bill 62. My name is Jennifer Gallagher, Director for Public Service with the City of Columbus.

Columbus is the largest city in Ohio, and the fastest growing city in the Midwest. We have seen a massive population boom over the past few decades, and estimates show that we are expected to grow by another 500,000 residents by 2050. That estimate only includes residents in the City of Columbus. It doesn't include the large number of workers coming into Columbus every day, or visitors to our City. Central Ohioans are already facing longer commute times than they were a decade ago.

The safety and upkeep of our roads and bridges is critically important to our residents. They need be able to get to work and school safely and efficiently.

The impact of inflation is squeezing local governments on both ends of the spectrum. Due to inflation, the buying power of the Ohio Motor Fuel User Fee has declined from \$0.28 in 2005 to \$0.18 in 2018. At the same time inflation has resulted in a 50% increase in construction costs.

Under current funding, Columbus is only able to cover a portion of our routine maintenance work with our share of Motor Fuel User Fee dollars. We currently need to spend an additional \$14-15 million per year to make up that difference. This allows none of the user fee dollars to be allocated to new projects.

One example of the issues we have been facing is the Columbus Crossroads project at the intersection of I-70 and I-71 near Nationwide Children's Hospital. Work on this 17 phase project has been going on for over 15 years. We have partnered with ODOT, and sought funding from the federal government to complement City funding. However, even with a history of strong collaboration we have only completed a quarter of the work. Without some type of increase in

funding, we don't know when we will be able to complete this critically important project.

We are finding increasingly difficult to keep up with transportation infrastructure needs in Columbus. In 2016, Columbus voters approved a \$950 million bond package, with \$279,600,000 allocated to roads and bridges. Due to the rapid pace of development we have already allocated the majority of those dollars.

Columbus citizens will vote later this year on a \$1.03 billion bond issue with \$291,410,935 allocated for roads and bridges. We are doing everything we can within our means to keep our city moving forward. As a major economic driver for the state economy, we need additional support to ensure that we remain an attractive destination for employers.

An increased investment in transportation infrastructure will allow all levels of government, from the State, down to cities and townships to plan more efficiently and make better use of our funding.

This issue is critically important to all of us. Thank you for the time you have spent gathering information and hearing from constituents, experts and your partners at the local levels of government. Now is the time to identify and employ an increased and sustainable funding mechanism for our shared transportation needs. Thank you.