

Testimony before the Finance Subcommittee on Transportation  
Tuesday, September 24, 2019



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Honorable Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Transportation:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about public transit funding and to thank the members of the House and Senate for the increase in public transit funding you provided in the 2020 and 2021 transportation and general revenue budgets.

My name is Carrie Woody and I am the executive director of Lancaster-Fairfield Public Transit and President of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA). OPTA is a transportation industry association representing transit agencies providing transportation services throughout Ohio. OPTA membership also includes private businesses employing Ohio residents and providing products and services to all sectors/modes of 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 members appreciate the significant increase in the public transit funding that was provided in the budget. This funding is a great first step in helping transit to rebound from the negative impacts of significant losses in funding including cuts of 65% of transit funding in the state's GRF budget between 2000 and 2008, and MCO sales tax losses. This funding will help some transit agencies maintain service to the elderly and people with disabilities by assisting in fleet investment and ensuring the state of good repair of transit vehicles.

This funding also provides a great first step in positioning public transit to continue to fulfill its role in contributing to economic development in regions throughout the state. Public transit contributes to economic development in several ways, for example:

1. **Increasing productivity** through transportation improvements that improves the accessibility of people to reach jobs, services, goods, and activities; and
2. **Enhancing job and labor force accessibility** by providing service that results in a larger pool of employees available for the job market and increasing the population's direct access to more job options, making cities and regions more attractive.

Finally, this funding is a first step that will allow some transit agencies to take a corresponding first step in developing new or incrementally expanding transit service that embraces the future of mobility including connected infrastructure and data, and emerging new mobility paradigms including mobility as a service. |

You may have noticed the “first step” theme here. That is because the funding total in the budget is only about 38% of the annual “total state funding goal” for public transit established by the state of Ohio in its Statewide Transit Needs Study. Addressing how we achieve that goal is an ongoing discussion and is not the immediate focus of OPTA’s current testimony.

OPTA and its members look forward to continuing the work we have been doing with the Ohio Department of Transportation’s Office of Transit over the past several weeks to develop, review and execute allocation formulas and programs that will maximize the impact of this funding. We also want to ensure that there is an appropriate return on the current \$70 million investment.

The current ODOT allocation plan calls for:

1. \$4 Million in competitive grant funding for the Rural Transit Program (RTP). That program supports the provision of public transit service, support for regional and statewide public transit operating and capital projects;
2. \$2 Million in competitive grant funding for the Elderly and Disabled Fare Assistance Program (E&D). This program provides funds to reimburse transit systems for providing half priced fare for elderly and disabled populations;
3. \$16.6 Million to be allocated by an ODOT formula for the Urban Transit Program (UTP). This funding is provided for all transit purposes;
4. \$44.4 Million in competitive grants for the Ohio Transit Partnership Program (OTPP). This funding supports the preservation of Ohio’s transit capital (including bus, rail, and preventative maintenance projects). ODOT will, *in coordination with the transit agencies*, introduce sub-allocations for awarding this capital funding. These sub-allocations could include matching federal grants, preservation, coordination, technology, workforce initiatives, healthcare initiatives, etc.;
5. \$2.5 Million for the Specialized Transportation Program (STP). STP funding will enhance Ohioans’ mobility through statewide planning, capital, or technology projects to improve coordination, regional mobility, and fund mobility projects for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

OPTA and its transit agency members will continue to work with OPTA as through a GRF Sub-committee that will:

1. Provide feedback on the ODOT processes for administration of transit funding in the State GRF;
2. Receive reports from ODOT regarding quarterly budget updates; and
3. Collaborating to ensure that state funds are encumbered and spent

4. Proposing and providing feedback on reporting and data collection on the expenditure of the funds.

OPTA will continue to collaborate with the Ohio Department of Transportation to ensure maximum utilization of the funds transit received from the state of Ohio. We also want you to continue to understand the ongoing funding need for public transit. That said, after nearly five years of reliance on the Ohio Statewide Transit Needs Study, OPTA believes an update of that study is in order. We recommend that this Committee propose to the state of Ohio and ODOT that the Statewide Transit Needs Study be updated so that we all can have the best current assessment of the ongoing funding need for public transportation.

Finally, as we are just at beginning of the formula allocation and grant application process, we have nothing concrete to report on expenditures or return on investment. OPTA, however, welcomes the opportunity to appear before this Committee regularly to provide you information and updates.

I welcome any questions you have.