

Akshai Singh
Organizer, Amalgamated Transit Union

To the Senate Transportation Committee,

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member for hearing my testimony this morning. My name is Akshai Singh, and I am an organizer with the Amalgamated Transit Union. My union represents thousands of bus drivers, mechanics, train operators, vehicle and facilities service workers, and dispatch and scheduler staff at transit agencies around the State of Ohio.

We have joined in coalition with MOVE Ohio, who you will hear from on the transportation bill coming from the House. MOVE also includes the Transport Workers Union workers here at COTA and at Akron METRO. I am here to urge this body to consider a proposed increase to the gas tax, conditional on funding public transportation at levels recommended by ODOT's Transit Needs Study, including through budget Section 203.80- which has been Ohio law since 2007. This section of law defines highway purposes of public transportation, and the areas of investment currently allowed by the Ohio Motor Fuels Tax. To maximize the efficiency of these investments, I urge this body to amend and align this language with the Federal Highway Administration standards for highway purposes. FHWA's standards allow ODOT to 'flex' federal highway dollars to Ohio transit, and comply with the Ohio Constitution in Article XII, Section 5a.

The late Lieutenant Governor and Cleveland Mayor Voinovich saw to the procurement of GCRTA's heavy rail cars in the late 70s and early 80s. George Voinovich supported Ohio's only transit rail system, and knew its value to our community and economic opportunities, which boasts an economic multiplier of 4x the impact for every dollar invested. These rail cars are now kept alive through the tireless work of our men and women of the ATU Local 268. They were a key reason for Cleveland being chosen as the host city for the Republican National Convention, anchor what growth we're experiencing, and provide access across the county, and to the world via Hopkins International Airport.

I worked for two years on the federal surface transportation reauthorization bill that would become MAP-21. That bill and subsequent reauthorization, the FAST Act, fund ODOT generously through federal general revenue transfers, as well as gas taxes, and recognize that even rail transit serves highway purposes- outlined in the National Highway Performance Program, no less- of mitigating traffic on a parallel right of way to, in this case Interstate 71, and Ohio State Route 10, mitigating both wear and tear on roadways by at least 10,000 vehicles per day (serving Maintenance purposes), and increasing the safety of all users on the corridor- for example during extreme weather events, or even feature movie filming, like on Ohio State Route 2.

The proposed gas tax hikes needs to address balancing Ohio's transportation systems and ability to attract and retain talented individuals and firms to locate in our state. Since 2003, the Brookings Institute has highlighted Ohio's imbalance towards highway expansion and lack of attention to local transportation needs- namely local road maintenance and public transit. They found in 2015, that Ohio metro areas had performed the worst in the nation at producing jobs accessible to population centers, while our land use becomes increasingly inefficient. Ohio's stagnant recovery since 2007 alone, relative to the nation, demands comprehensive approach to our infrastructure investments.

Ohio must take the ODOT Transit Needs Study's findings into account in raising new transportation revenues, and address our inability to stimulate economic development through narrow one-size-fits-all

transportation policy. The Ohio Constitution specifically addresses safety and hospitalization of roadway users in poverty, who we know disproportionately use transit, and are disproportionately struck and killed by vehicular traffic, predominantly while attempting to use designated pedestrian facilities safely.

In 2017, Ohio suffered its worst pedestrian fatality year in a decade, making up 12% of all road deaths. All transit users, whether they have disabilities or not, are pedestrians and roadway users. Even the Governor's proposal also includes transit agencies as users, subject to increased gas taxes without refunds. In 2017, Ohio also enacted unilateral cuts to sales-tax collecting transit agencies, amounting \$40 million per year, where car-insecure households face even more obstacles to access work than in years past. Should the legislature add work requirement provisions to Medicaid, public transit must absolutely be funded. All users, all Ohioans, must be considered with regards to allocating new transportation revenues.

Any new revenues must address Ohio's highway debts, refocus on maintenance, and allow for shifting new revenues to counties and municipalities to spend based on their respective transportation needs. This must include funding for modes that allow all users to access our public roadways safely. This can be done through clearly defined statute, and remain wholly within the scope of the Ohio Constitution.

If it pleases the Committee, I will address any questions raised by my testimony.