



MOVE Ohio!

Mobility & Opportunity for a Vibrant Economy in Ohio

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**Testimony of Stu Nicholson
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To the Ohio Senate Transportation, Commerce &
Workforce Committee**

Members of the Committee. Thank you for your time.

I am Stu Nicholson and I speak on behalf of MOVE Ohio and the millions of Ohioans who either depend on or choose to use public transit, bicycle or walk to connect with jobs, education, health care and whatever their other daily needs may be. And these numbers are demographically growing at both ends of the scale among young professionals and Ohioans 50 and over.

But what is also growing is the gap in per capita investment in public transportation between the State of Ohio and our neighboring states.

While Ohio's per capita spending has gone from 0.67 cents per capita in 2015 down to 0.60 cents in 2016....according to the US DOT and the American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials..... our neighbors, with the exception of Kentucky and West Virginia have all INCREASED their investment.

- Pennsylvania has gone from \$89.16 per capita to \$128.83....that's **200 times more than Ohio** and we are similar states in terms of total population
- Indiana has gone from \$6.35 per capita to \$9.41..... **15-times greater than Ohio** and in an arguably very fiscally conservative state.
- And in that State Up North..... per capita investment in public transit has risen from \$9.92 to \$26.78..... **45 times greater than Ohio.**

But what does this mean beyond dollars per capita?

It means even the most well-meaning steps the Ohio General Assembly or the current Administration may take on issues from business & job development to access to education and health care..... the lack of investment in transportation options beyond the highways, streets and bridges does not and cannot work as well..... if Ohioans “can’t get there from here.”

Neither can Ohio businesses grow as well, if they can’t connect with the widest and deepest labor pool that’s possible.

Neither can companies looking to locate in Ohio. Often high on their list is the availability of a robust, fully-arrayed transportation portfolio, which again connects them with Ohio’s workforce.

I know this from my experience working for both a major Ohio transit system as well as 7-plus years with the Ohio Rail Development Commission.

MOVE Ohio supports a fix-it-first” funding for better, safer highways and bridges. We recognize the need for a safe, efficient highway system. But that’s not enough.

We can and MUST do better.

Decades of gross underfunding and cuts to public transportation funding are hurting not just Ohio’s citizens, but our economy and the potential to grow business and jobs.

The \$7-million dollars for transit in the proposed ODOT budget comes from already flexible Federal funds. This “increase” is a nice gesture, but pitifully small.

A new city bus costs around \$600-thousand dollars. Not much left to spread around to Ohio’s 61 transit systems, 35 of which serve rural Ohio communities where transit is also very much in demand.

MOVE Ohio supports the Ohio House provision for \$100-million in federal “flex” funds: dollars that are an essential investment for capital expenditures on equipment as well as infrastructure upgrades for Ohio’s transit systems.

In addition, it is vital that an additional \$85-million in General Revenue funds be directed at the operational needs of our transit systems, the dollars that go enable the hiring of drivers, route planners, mechanics and maintenance crews. New equipment or a new light rail or bus route needs people to run them.

May I remind this committee that ODOT itself recommend an annual total funding level of \$120-million in it’s 2015 Statewide Transit Needs Report. It also recommended greater transit spending levels of \$185-million 2025.

We also call for the Senate to consider amending the purpose of Ohio's Road to Our Future Joint Legislative Study Committee to ***include identifying a long-term, reliable and predictable source of funding for public transit and active transportation.***

Again, we understand the need to fund state and local highways and bridges. But to ignore Ohio's transit needs again isn't kicking the can down the road..... it's throwing the can in the trash bin by the bus stop.