

Not too long ago, I was told of a heartbreaking story about an elderly, African-American Ohioan. He is a veteran who has honorably served our country is well loved in the community. I was told that of the time it takes for him to prepare, to wait, and to travel, totaling hours on end, to get to and from appointments. People like him require public transportation to get where they need to go. It is necessary to their individual freedom, as well as their health and wellbeing. They need help. Not just 2 years from now. Nor just 10 years from now. Right. Now. At present, Hyperloop is a concept, autonomous vehicles are still being tested, and more and more lanes are being added to try to lessen congestion for those who can still drive. But for the person to whom I just referred, these are not answers. Senators, public transportation needs your help. Right. Now.

Good morning, Chairman McColley, Vice Chairman Uecker, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee. My name is William Tarter, Jr. I am a former LSC fellow, and I am on the Executive Committee of the Cleveland Branch NAACP. I speak today on behalf of myself as a taxpayer and as a volunteer with the organization, but also on behalf of and with the full support of my fellow members of the Cleveland Branch NAACP. I do not speak on behalf of my employer, nor do I speak on behalf of the state NAACP chaired by the Honorable Former State Senator Tom Roberts, nor on behalf of the national NAACP.

Public transportation is important to Ohioans of all races and nationalities. Beyond the benefit of physical and mental health, there is also a workforce accessibility and inclusion component to this issue. According to data compiled from Pew Research Center, 34% of blacks and 27% of Hispanics report taking public transit daily or weekly, compared with only 14% of whites. According to the Center for Social Inclusion, public transit is vital particularly to people with low incomes and people of color who own fewer cars and tend to live further away from jobs than their white peers. In Cleveland, according to an article published by Vice.com, citing research by Brookings, there are 26.5 percent fewer jobs near the average Clevelander today than there was in 2000.

I would now like to transition now to connect public transit and the aging demographics of our state.

According to Miami University, by 2030, close to two-thirds of Ohio's 88 counties will have at least 30 percent of their county population that is age 60 and over. The need will continue to grow.

According to AARP, over half of seniors who do not drive, stay home on any given day. And even when they leave their homes, their time out tends to be limited. Compared to similar-age people who drive, 15 percent of those who don't drive make fewer trips to the doctor, 59 percent make fewer trips to shop or eat out, and 65 percent make fewer trips to visit friends and family. According to the National Institute of Health, loneliness is the lethal equivalent of smoking **15 cigarettes per day**.

Well some may say, why can't you "just raise fares?" In fact, many of the fares have already been raised. Many Ohioans today who rely on public transportation have to make decisions every day on food, medicine and housing. Continuously adding an additional financial burden could make a bad situation worse.

The bottom line is that Ohioans in urban and rural areas alike will drive less and rely on public transportation more. Job accessibility is critical to the needs of today's and tomorrow's workforce in Ohio. Research also shows that young professionals are driving less and taking public transportation more.

While there is certainly room to study the concept of autonomous vehicles, what the State of Ohio cannot afford to do is to ignore the clear and documented need of its residents. Senators, in this budget, now is the time to do something extraordinary on public transit that makes a difference.

In closing, my heart breaks for the elderly Ohio veteran that I spoke of when I opened my remarks. I dedicate this testimony to him. He has served and sacrificed for our state and our country. Through supporting high-quality public transportation, we can give him— and others like him -- what they need to live their life with the dignity they deserve. We must support them. Right now. Thank you.

Additional information: A few years ago, in Cincinnati, Ohio, the national NAACP passed a resolution declaring “public transportation [is] a basic civil right, that is accessible to all regardless of a citizen's address, race, age, religion, nationality, gender, orientation, or physical and financial ability.”