



**Testimony on HB 62 before the Senate Transportation, Commerce & Workforce Committee**  
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Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Uecker Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and other committee members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify about transportation funding in Ohio. I am the Disability Rights Attorney for The Ability Center of Greater Toledo, a Center for Independent Living serving seven counties in northwest Ohio with the mission of assisting people with disabilities to live, work, and socialize within a fully accessible community.

Northwest Ohio is currently suffering a public transportation crisis. The regional transit agency that serves our large, urban area, the Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority, does not cover the entirety of our most urban county, Lucas County, and does not cross over into cross-county suburbs such as Perrysburg and Bowling Green or across state lines into southern Michigan. Because of that, many Ability Center constituents, who are dependent on public transit, are unable to travel to areas of their own county or into Toledo suburbs without great difficulty.

To compound this problem, the current lack of funding has forced TARTA to implement cuts to services. As of this spring, they are no longer able to offer service on Sundays, holidays, or the first and last trips of the day. Our Lucas County Commissioners have put together a citizen task force to review the issues, and TARTA's recent presentation to that task force revealed that they have been cutting their budget for years due to decreases in funding and finally have had no choice but to begin cutting services. There is an impending dread that, without further funding, more service cuts will follow next year.

Without strong public transit in our region, our region will fall behind economically. Just as without strong public transportation in our state, our state will fall behind. There is a basic, unquestionable fact that people who cannot drive, or cannot afford a car, need public transit to work, and businesses need public transit to get workers. In our region, TARTA has stated many times that 60% of their overall trips, both fixed-line and paratransit service, are to work.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true as workplaces become more regional, or even national, due to technology.

Community integration for people with disabilities is impossible without strong public transit. Many people with disabilities cannot drive. A lack of public transit means difficulty getting employment -- and it means trouble getting to doctor's appointments, grocery and other shopping, going to community events, visiting friends, education, and many other things that we need day to day. A recent Ability Center outreach event at a local church revealed that, since TARTA's service cuts, four members of their congregation can no longer come to church every Sunday. They have no way to get there.

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<sup>1</sup> TARTA, MOVE Toledo: TARTA's Vision for the Future, available at [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ac528a896d4550687eb4200/t/5b32828170a6adff1cd48235/1530036867510/TARTA\\_MoveToledo\\_VisionPresentation\\_Revised062318.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ac528a896d4550687eb4200/t/5b32828170a6adff1cd48235/1530036867510/TARTA_MoveToledo_VisionPresentation_Revised062318.pdf).



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In our area, these cuts are coming at a time when public transit services are already insufficient to meet the growing need. In 2017, a DD Council Study found that, already, 23% of respondents reported that they could rarely, or never, get to work; 29% said they could rarely or never get to a worship service; and 22% said they could rarely or never get out just for fun. When asked the open-ended question where they would like to go, respondents gave some of the following answers: home; work; social; volunteer; parents; and grocery.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, the Eldercare Locator, a national information and referral call center for older adults and caregivers, reports that transportation requests are consistently either the first or second most common inquiry from the thousands of its weekly callers.

These state and national indicators are consistent with our own experience here in northwest Ohio. In an informal Ability Center survey from 2015, 72.4% of respondents had trouble getting to or were late to medical appointments in the previous year due to a lack of public transit. We hear on a regular basis that our constituents are unable to get to certain hospitals, schools, activities, social events, and many other places due to a lack of transit.

Because the public transit discussion is so relevant now, The Ability Center has asked people who use public transit in northwest Ohio to share their stories. I would urge you to visit our website to see some of their individual stories. The campaign is called, “I fill a seat on the bus,” and can be found at: <https://www.abilitycenter.org/2019/01/fill-the-seat/>.

While northwest Ohio has a particular, imminent crisis, all transit systems statewide are currently underfunded, according to ODOT’s own study from 2015. The same issues facing people with disabilities in northwest Ohio are being faced by people with disabilities all over the state. Because of this, we ask this committee to support the MOVE Ohio recommendation of setting aside \$180 million dollars annually into a transportation choice fund. This would include \$150 million for public transit and \$30 million for safe pedestrian infrastructure, which is necessary to get people to transit.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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<sup>2</sup> Ohio Developmental Disabilities Counsel, Ohio Colleges of Medicine Government Resource Center, Transportation Challenges for Ohioans with Disabilities: A Report to the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Counsel,3, (July 2017) (available at <https://ddc.ohio.gov/Portals/0/transportation-challenges-7-17.pdf>).