



MID-OHIO REGIONAL
MORPC
PLANNING COMMISSION

House Bill 62
MORPC Interested Party Testimony
William Murdock, Executive Director
Ohio Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee
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Chair McColley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding House Bill 62, the 2020-2021 state transportation budget.

My name is William Murdock and I am the executive director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission or MORPC. MORPC is a regional council of over 60 communities across Central Ohio's rural, suburban, and urban areas. We provide programs, services, and funding related to transportation, land use, data, sustainability, and economic prosperity. Our role in transportation in our region is critical. We provide planning, technical services, funding, and more for much of Central Ohio as we work with local governments, businesses, and residents to determine the region's transportation needs and priorities. MORPC serves as the federally designated metropolitan planning organization, or MPO, for transportation planning in the Columbus urbanized area. This means MORPC has transportation responsibilities and funding per federal law. We also work on transportation planning for rural areas throughout Central Ohio. Seven counties in our region surrounding the MPO recently formed the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO). We provide the staff and technical assistance which is valuable added transportation planning capacity for our rural and growing areas. It is also part of the rural transportation organization program with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). We also work with our communities to access other transportation programs from the Ohio Public Works Commission, Ohio Development Services, and more.

One of our chief public policy goals is to achieve an advanced, inclusive, and exceptional transportation system that connects Central Ohio's people and products to the world. Although we believe preparing for the future of mobility is a priority, I am not here today to advocate for bold changes to the budget to fund an exceptional transportation system. Today, I am here because I am concerned the bare minimum of investment needed from the State of Ohio will not happen in this budget. I am here to urge you to at least fund the basics.

We have real and urgent transportation needs in Central Ohio. Our communities know first-hand the unmet funding gap. For example, MORPC currently has about \$25 million in federal funding available for our urban and suburban areas, but over \$180 million requested in the

current round. We have \$29 million in public works for Franklin County to address \$50 million in requests. In our rural areas, we have identified over \$250 million in needed, but unfunded projects. These are not wish list projects, they are vetted, critical projects throughout the region. These existing funding gaps represent a range of deferred maintenance and delays on upgrades for economic development and safety.

The transportation funding crisis complicates already pressing needs in safety. In Central Ohio alone in 2017, there were 211 fatalities and 1,413 serious injuries from crashes. This is devastating for too many families here and across Ohio. And there's an economic cost; MORPC estimates the societal cost of these serious crashes is \$4.04 billion. As a State we are not doing enough on safety. While we are performing better than average in some metrics, "better than average" does not comfort the hundreds of families affected. "Better than average" is not good enough. Unfixed problems and poor road conditions affect safety for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians alike. We strongly advocate for increased safety funding as presented in the Governor's proposed budget.

Reduced funding will also worsen the economic costs of congestion. We estimate congestion to cost over \$921 million annually due to travel delay, excess fuel consumption, and health impacts from reduced air quality. The financial impacts of congestion, poor road conditions, and unexpected maintenance also cost drivers significant time and money and are especially hard on lower income families. Poor road conditions from deferred maintenance cost each driver an estimated \$533 annually. In our region alone that adds up to \$764.3 million. A modest fee increase allows for needed investments to reduce these unexpected costs for all drivers.

As you have heard from ODOT Director Marchbanks and countless other transportation experts from across Ohio, the preliminary budget plan for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 is troubling. The House-passed version of the transportation budget is an improvement from inaction and MORPC supports several of its provisions, but the increase is not sufficient. Our region has real, identified needs that require additional state transportation funding. This is why just last Thursday, our MORPC members – who represent over 60 communities – unanimously passed a resolution in strong support of Governor DeWine's proposed transportation budget and increase to the motor fuel user fee with indexing to inflation. Inaction cannot be an option.

With the advent of alternative fuel vehicles, the motor fuel user fee may not be the most representative or fair fee, but it is the most convenient collection mechanism since it has been in place since 1925. As Governor DeWine mentioned in his State of the State, an 18-cent increase is a minimalist approach to avoid further crisis. It allows us to continue to effectively leverage federal dollars, keep the system maintained, and make basic investments needed for safety and economic development. It also buys time to develop new funding mechanisms.

At 28 cents per gallon, Ohio currently ranks 29th in the nation, while we are 6th in the country in total Vehicle Miles Traveled, at 118.6 billion miles annually. The only border state with a lower fee is Kentucky. The last time legislators voted to raise the fee was 2003. The reality is a dollar then is worth 58 cents today. Inflation has cut the productivity of our dollars by nearly half, and essentially no additional revenues have been added. The purchasing power issue is a big one. The efficiency of new processes, better materials, and streamlined administration is important, but it cannot keep up with the loss of purchasing power for what needs to be spent to maintain our roads. Anyone who has had to recently replace a sidewalk or driveway knows how much

more it costs than 15 years ago. You can patch it and delay it only so long before it becomes an even more expensive hazard. Our transportation system is no different.

Inaction will cause negative ripple effects throughout Central Ohio. Many projects will be affected. For example, the Columbus Innerbelt will not be completed. This long-delayed project is critical to the region and the state to maintain competitive infrastructure by relieving traffic congestion and adding capacity at the junction of two very significant interstates. In addition, this project would help keep us safe by making improvements at three of the state's top 10 crash locations. Another example is the Centerburg Intersection Improvements project in Knox County. Neither roadway intersects the state route at a right angle and Updike Road is an offset intersection with SR 657. These conditions create safety issues that will be addressed with the improvements. For more information, we have provided lists of projects from throughout the region needed to improve safety and create and maintain jobs.

Inaction also affects our region's economic future. Despite significant funding gaps, we continue to develop infrastructure strategies to position Central Ohio for economic success. For example, the two projects just mentioned are Competitive Advantage Projects. Our region's economic development agency, Columbus 2020 and MORPC partnered to create the Competitive Advantage Projects program to advance strategic infrastructure investments across the Columbus region. Simply put, we've identified 43 priority projects needed for economic prosperity that are currently unfunded. The goal is to prioritize important infrastructure projects in rural, suburban, and urban areas of our region to work toward making the projects a reality. We're working to ensure communities across our region are strategically looking at what's necessary for the whole region to do better economically. Maintaining what we have is the bare minimum for economic prosperity. To compete nationally for jobs, we need the resources to invest in transportation infrastructure that gives us an advantage. Finding additional ways to incentive regional prioritization efforts like this should be a priority in this budget.

Central Ohio's local communities are concerned about the transportation funding challenges. In a major collaborative effort last year, a group of MORPC community leaders and elected officials – rural, suburban, and urban representing each level of local government – met to create a working document of state policy recommendations that address current transportation maintenance needs and also plans for future mobility needs. Along with my testimony, I provided a list of these recommendations. As part of this effort, local governments are also asking for flexibility to address their own transportation needs. A good option, as recommended by MORPC, was included in the House passed version of House Bill 62, which expands the permissive vehicle license fee cap by just \$5 for municipalities and townships. The last Ohio transportation budget (House Bill 26), gave counties similar authority to raise this fee to help fund road and bridge maintenance. It's already being used to advance critical road and bridge projects by county engineers. We think it is important to give Ohio's communities this tool to invest in basic and necessary repairs for the roads and bridges they maintain.

Improving our transit system is also a critical need for Ohio. It's not an urban issue. It's not a rural issue. It's an Ohio issue. No matter where they live, insufficient funding means we are underserving many Ohioans who need access to transit to connect to jobs and community services. Ohio can no longer remain 41st in the nation for state assistance in funding transit. This is why MORPC supports the \$100 million public transit allocation in the House passed version of House Bill 62. We cannot expect to grow our workforce or serve our most vulnerable

without increased state support for transit. ODOT's own Transit Needs Assessment in 2014 recommended state funding for public transit by 2025 should equal \$185 million annually.

I would also like to touch on another provision in the House passed version of the bill. MORPC is concerned that an annual \$200 fee on electric vehicles or EVs will stifle the adoption of this new technology. We agree that all users of roadways should participate in the cost of maintenance and repair, but not at the cost of disrupting efforts to adopt emerging technology in a state trying to lead in smart mobility. It could especially hurt our region, where the Smart Columbus initiative leaders are collaborating with automotive industry, business leaders, and local governments to deploy EV technology. 21 states already levy a registration fee for electric vehicles. Most vary from \$50 to \$150. Out of fairness, we support a fee within this range. If it is higher, EV owners will be penalized with a lump-sum, up-front fee that will make expansive assumptions about the number of miles they drive, the efficiency of their powertrain, and their ability to easily afford a \$200 up-front fee. Not all EVs are Teslas, new budget-oriented and used EVs are both an innovative and affordable option for our workforce. An overly high fee turns what should be a great option for long commutes into an unaffordable one.

It is also important to find new funding streams for Ohio's rural and Appalachian communities. One solution is to provide dedicated capital funds to Regional or Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) which have developed transportation plans to better prepare these communities for both safety and economic growth. Now that rural areas across the state – including Central Ohio – have clearly identified their needs, it's time to invest more than just planning dollars. We support our partners at the Ohio Rural Development Association's recommended allocation of \$6 million for use by the state's six RTPOs. Doing so will advance critical infrastructure programs throughout rural Ohio.

This funding crisis is happening during a period of rapidly changing transportation technology. Ohio is poised to be a leader in innovative and connected technologies with Drive Ohio, Smart Columbus, the 33 Smart Mobility Corridor, and so many other efforts. In Central Ohio, this is a major focus for MORPC and our business and local government partners. But we can't get to the future of transportation, if we can't fund the basic needs of today.

Ohio's residents and businesses are looking to state government for solutions and leadership so they can depend on the reliability and safety of our roads and bridges. Inaction is not an option.

We commend Governor DeWine and ODOT Director Marchbanks for their leadership in crafting a budget that addresses the state's urgent need for sustainable transportation funding. We strongly advocate for sustainable solutions to help all of Ohio's rural, suburban, and urban communities and each region's unique needs. We sincerely appreciate the committee's work on such an important and critical issue and urge you to consider our recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.