



**Transportation Budget Testimony (HB62)
Senate Transportation, Commerce & Workforce Committee
Interested Party Testimony | Jason Warner, Greater Ohio Policy Center
March 20, 2019**

Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee, I want to thank you for providing me with further opportunity to address House Bill 62, the state transportation budget.

Public transportation is a vital link for millions of Ohioans. In 2016, Ohio's 61 public transit systems provided more than 117 million trips in 83 of Ohio's 88 counties. Still, that leaves five Ohio counties, mostly located in rural areas where the population is aging and becoming less reliant on personal transportation, underserved. Despite nearly a decade of underfunding, ridership on public transportation systems across the state continue to increase, rising nearly 2% between 2013 to 2016.

The transportation budget sent to the Senate by the Ohio House represents the single-largest ever commitment by the state towards the funding of public transportation in Ohio History. The House-passed budget provides \$100 million per year through the use of Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) 'flex funding' for public transportation, with nearly 20 percent of the funding specified for elderly and disabled ridership programs. The federal program allows for 'flexing' of funding to a variety of transportation-related projects. Ohio first began flex funding for public transit more than a decade ago and the current transportation budget requires that ODOT make \$33 million available for public transportation.

I wish to convey to you Greater Ohio Policy Center's strong and enthusiastic support for the House-approved transportation budget's allocation of \$100 million per year in funding for public transportation through the use of FHWA flex funding.

The continued commitment on the part of Ohio to expand the use of flex funding towards transit is commendable. This funding ensures Ohio maintain a robust and effective public transit fleet. In 2015, it was estimated that Ohio needed capital funding investment of \$273.5 million just to bring Ohio's transit fleet to a state of good repair. A further \$192.4 million was identified as needed to invest in the vehicles and infrastructure needed to expand transit service to meet then current, unmet needs.

Investment in public transportation is vital to Ohio's economic wellbeing. Just last week, Cleveland State University released an economic study of the financial impact the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) had on its service area, Cuyahoga County. The results showed that GCRTA provides an annual economic impact of \$322 million to the county,

and found that access to public transit can lead to increased property value, greater employment and decreased poverty. The study found that 25,000 riders a day rely on RTA's services, with a collective income of \$485 million a year. The elimination of services would put 16,500 of those jobs at risk (66 percent).

Transit is not only a service that benefits Ohio's urban regions. It is becoming increasingly more needed in rural Ohio as well.

Recently, Healthy Choices Healthy Communities surveyed residents in rural counties in Northern Kentucky and Southeast Ohio regarding their transportation habits and their understanding of alternative transportation services. The survey found that 45 percent of residents in those regions rely on methods of transportation other than a personal automobile as their primary means of travel. These residents depend on services such as public transit buses, medicabs, taxis or hospital van ministry, at least once per month. Nearly a third of those surveyed indicated that they have difficulty at times finding transportation.

The study concluded that extended service and improved communications would enhance the mobility options of rural residents. With Ohio's senior population expected to increase 66 percent by 2030, most significantly in rural communities, it is imperative that we begin to make the important in system innovations now that will help institute innovations that result in reduced costs and greater access to mobility options for all Ohioans.

Greater Ohio Policy Center requests that the Senate retain the House-approved funding for public transportation at \$100 million per year. As an urban and rural state, Ohio requires a range of transportation options to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people, good and services. Public transportation serves as a vital link for millions of Ohioans.

Investing in a robust and comprehensive public transportation system can be a win-win for Ohio: increased transportation options with less congestion and less wear and tear on the state's roadways. These paired investments are vital for Ohio's future.

Members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee, thank you for your consideration and continued support of public transportation as a fully accessible method of transportation for Ohio's residents.