

SUB. H.B. 26: TRANSPORTATION BUDGET
INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY
3-8-17

Sharon Montgomery, traffic safety activist

Chairman LaRose, Vice Chair Kunze, Ranking Member Tavares, and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee, I'm here to offer a few comments on Sub. HB 26 from the perspective of a 15-year traffic safety activist.

I was quite relieved to read in ODOT Dir. Wray's testimony of Feb. 2, and hear in his comments on *Face the State* on Feb. 5 that he acknowledges that we can't just keep building more road lanes when we already can't afford to maintain the lanes we have. I have had this concern for some time, now.

I was discouraged, though, to read and hear that he sees technology as a large part of the solution to growing traffic congestion. Technological ways to redistribute traffic would have limited success. Studies show that when a road gains additional lanes, drivers who didn't use it before because of the congestion, then choose it because of the perceived reduced congestion, thus increasing the congestion. The only way to have fewer vehicles on the roads is to provide some way other than individual vehicles for travelers to get to their destinations.

The push for making roads and vehicles more dependent on technology to increase safety is based on two assumptions. One is that human error causes almost all vehicle crashes. This is correct. The other is that technology won't make errors. This is incorrect.

Technology is only as effective as it is programmed to be and who does that programming? Error-prone humans. Also, technology's effectiveness depends on the situations it is controlling to be standardized. Real life is not standardized; it is not a static flow chart of "if this, then that." The more the program is designed to cover varying situations, the more complex it becomes. The more complex it becomes, the more susceptible it is to malfunctions. Furthermore, technology is vulnerable to the growing problem of hacking.

So, technology is limited in its ability to increase traffic safety.

I read the changes HB 26 originally made to existing law with bated breath, hoping to read that Ohio will join other states in being more flexible in the use of gasoline taxes. In this bill, use of that revenue source remains extremely limited for public transit.

When I read the testimony from six other witnesses the day after I testified before the House Finance Committee, also asking for more public transit funding, I crossed my fingers. So, I was disappointed that the proposed House amendment to that effect was tabled.

Following the March 1 House vote on this bill, *The Dispatch* printed an editorial by the board chairman of Transit Columbus, noting a number of benefits of public transit.

Public transit will reduce congestion **and** increase safety. The fewer vehicles there are on the roads, the fewer vehicles there will be that can crash into each other, or property, or bicyclists, or pedestrians, or police directing traffic. And, the fewer vehicles there are on the roads, the fewer non-crash traffic violations there will be to use the time and other resources of law enforcement and courts.

Safety Dir. Born's February testimony before the House Finance Committee indicated that Ohio roads are the safest in the past six-year period than they have ever been. The Highway Patrol's traffic fatalities table given to the House Committee Feb. 2 shows averages for groupings of two to eight years. Averages can give useful information but they can also obscure important information. (And, using varying numbers of years in the groupings makes the comparison among groups less meaningful.)

The table shows the 2011-2015 period as having the lowest average number of fatalities. But, the numbers of fatalities for each of those years shows two declines **and two increases**. 2012 had 82 more traffic deaths than 2011. 2015 had 110 more than 2014. This paints a different picture from the table provided on Feb. 2.

I eagerly await the time when Ohio makes more use of public transit to solve a myriad of problems. Public transit can not only reduce congestion and increase safety, it can provide transportation for people who can't—or shouldn't (because of license suspensions, lack of insurance, or decreasing abilities)--drive, reduce harmful emissions in our air, and free up resources for police and courts to address other public safety problems.

Thank you for this opportunity to put in my "two cents' worth." I would be happy to answer any questions.

Sharon M. Montgomery
572 Bonnington Way
Gahanna, Ohio 43230
614-475-8588
smmontog33@yahoo.com