



March 8, 2017

Frank LaRose, Chair
Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee
Ohio Senate

RE: Testimony of Nathan G. Alley, Transportation Policy Coordinator, Sierra Club Ohio Chapter, To The Ohio Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee Regarding House Bill 26, The Proposed FY 2018-2019 Transportation Budget

Dear Chair LaRose and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony as an interested party regarding the proposed biennial Transportation Budget, House Bill 26.

My name is Nathan Alley, I live in Clermont County with my wife and daughter, and I am a Planning Commissioner in the Village of New Richmond. Today, I am speaking as the Transportation Policy Coordinator for the Ohio Chapter of the Sierra Club. The Ohio Chapter was established more than 40 years ago and represents more than 20,000 paid members in the State. The Sierra Club is particularly interested in the three “Es” of transportation: protecting the environment, growing a sustainable economy and promoting equity for all people regardless of demographics such as age or ability and regardless of whether they are walking, riding a bike, bus or train, or are driving. We stand united with many more organizations and thousands of individuals who need and want access to jobs, education, healthcare, places of worship, recreation and more.

Today, we are asking you to focus on two immediate priorities: (1) reallocate no less than ten percent of the Transportation Budget away from new roadway construction and towards transit and active transportation; and (2) purge the Transportation Budget of any and all provisions related to the proposed “Eastern Bypass” project in southwest Ohio. The Transportation Budget is borne on the backs of all taxpayers, and statewide expenditures should benefit all people and all modalities, not just motorists and land speculators.

More than two years ago, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) released a Transit Needs Study that illustrates our State’s transportation spending problem. Nearly a third of Ohio’s counties have no transit services, nearly a tenth of our residents don’t have access to a car, and the transportation sector spews out approximately one quarter of our State’s air pollution. And we sit near the bottom of a list of states ranked by transit expenditures. The Transit Needs Study identifies a gap of more than \$192 million in capital and \$96 million in operating funds that are needed annually just to meet existing demand for public transportation services. And we desperately need to *improve* the system. For example,

in the Greater Cincinnati region, less than 22 percent of jobs are accessible by a commute of 90 minutes or less on public transportation.

The American Public Transit Association estimates that every dollar invested in transit generates six dollars in economic returns and helps create nearly 20 percent more jobs than equal investments in new roadways. There is a great and growing demand for transit and other car-free transportation alternatives. Sensible transportation projects can and should benefit the environment, create opportunities for sustainable economic development, and provide equity and accessibility to all users, regardless of age, income or ability.

The proposed “Eastern Bypass” project stands in stark contrast to these universal needs — it is a private plan with little to no public support. In fact, the director of ODOT has described the Bypass as “an idea promoted by land developers for the sake of land development” and said that the Bypass “is not a new, feasible or good idea.”¹

According to the director of the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI), “experts most closely involved with infrastructure development in the region do not agree” that the Bypass would solve transportation-related issues in southwest Ohio.² Director Policinski also notes that the Bypass, which would be more expensive than other priority transportation projects in the region, and he states: “A bypass of this magnitude would have substantial environmental impacts. . . . The environmental study that would be required for this project would be immense. . . . OKI has met with [residents who] have expressed opposition to [the Bypass] because of its impacts on their communities.”³

For example, the Warren County Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution to oppose the Bypass in 2015, in part because residents are concerned about “the rural character of their environment being jeopardized.”⁴

Seven of Greater Cincinnati’s regional chambers of commerce, including the Clermont County Chamber of Commerce, agree that the Bypass “is not a feasible alternative” to other transportation projects in the area and have stated their opposition to the proposed project.⁵

¹ Jerry Wray and Mike Hancock, “Bypass won’t solve Brent Spence Bridge problem,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Sept. 14, 2015, available at <http://www.cincinnati.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/09/14/opinion-bypass-solve-brent-spence-bridge-problem/72247510/> (last visited May 24, 2016).

² Letter from Mark Policinski to the OKI Board of Directors, 2015, available at <http://www.empoweruohio.org/bridge2.pdf> (last visited May 24, 2016).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Warren County Board of Commissioners, Meeting Minutes, Oct. 20, 2015, available at <http://www.co.warren.oh.us/commissioners/Resources/AgendaMinutes/Minutes/2015/10/2015.pdf> (last visited May 24, 2016).

⁵ Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, et al., “Brent Spence corridor only option,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Oct. 22, 2015, available at <http://www.cincinnati.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/10/22/chambers-brent-spence-corridor-option/74388564/> (last visited May 24, 2016).

Testimony of Nathan G. Alley, Transportation Policy Coordinator, Sierra Club Ohio Chapter
March 8, 2017
Page 3 of 3

Just last week, you heard from the Assistant Director of ODOT that spending money on the Eastern Bypass at this time is unnecessary and redundant.

Transportation officials have estimated that the Bypass would cost billions of dollars that Ohio doesn't have and that should properly be directed to existing, high-priority needs such as repairing infrastructure and improving public transit. There are no good reasons to study the Bypass at this time.

Rather, the State should continue to pursue a Fix-it-First approach toward roadway maintenance. Let's fix the Brent Spence Bridge, for example, before we consider any new highways.

The State of Ohio should invest in existing infrastructure and fund multi-modal transportation options to protect the environment, improve the economy and increase accessibility. Two years ago, the Transit Study found that: "Trends show there is a definite rise in the need for convenient, affordable public transportation to jobs, medical appointments, shopping and recreational activities. Our transit agencies are struggling to fund this existing service, let alone meet the increased demand." Please reallocate no less than ten percent of the Transportation Budget away from new roadway construction and towards public transportation and Complete Streets.

Sierra Club and the Ohio Transportation Equity Coalition have proposed that an additional \$10 million of federal flex funds be designated to transit, for a total of \$50 million, and we support appropriating additional money from the general revenue fund to help local transit agencies fulfill match requirements. In the longer term, we encourage the State to investigate new sources of funding, such as replacing the motor vehicle fuels tax with a fee on vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and increasing the severance tax for extractive industries.

Please do all that you can in this Budget cycle to ensure that we achieve economic development, increase employment opportunities, reduce urban sprawl and congestion, and create more livable communities for *all* Ohioans.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony today.

Sincerely,

Nathan G. Alley