

Chairman, members of the committee – my name is Kirt Conrad. I am President of the Ohio Public Transit Association and CEO of the Stark Area Regional Transit Authority in Canton. I have worked in public transportation in Ohio for over 20 years. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the state's proposed transportation budget.

OPTA represents transit systems in 61 of Ohio's 88 counties. Ohioans make 115 million trips by transit every year. We project that number will increase to 250 million by 2025. The majority of these trips are taking people to work. School and medical services are the next most frequented locations.

As an association, we are glad the administration has proposed to increase investment on public transportation by \$10 million. And we are grateful the House also agreed to invest in public transportation. This investment is vital to meeting the state's current and future transportation needs and plan.

According to the ODOT Public Transportation needs study, 1200 of the 3200 buses in service, are beyond their useful life. Ohio ranks 37th nationally in per capita spending on public transportation – lagging behind smaller, rural states such as West Virginia, Wyoming and Vermont and Texas, Indiana and Oklahoma. The state of Pennsylvania spends over \$1 billion in state funds generated from the state lottery. ODOT's research found \$185 million in additional funding is needed to keep transit in a state of good repair.

On the federal level, the gas tax is split 80% to highways in 20% to transit. Federal funds only cover 80% of a bus. The remaining 20% must come from state or local sources. In Ohio, it is unconstitutional to spend gas tax on transit. This is one reason the proposed additional investment for transit is so important.

Between 2002 and 2015 state funding for transit has gone from \$43 million to \$7 million. As a result transit agencies have had to scale back service, making it more difficult for Ohioans to get to work, school, and medical appointments.

In 2009 for instance, we cut late night service, eliminated Sunday service, and raised fares by 25% caused by the Great Recession. Since that time, our ridership has increased by 40% or 700,000 additional rides. Today, we are still operating less service than we did in 2009. Our resources are stretched as far as they can and we are not able to respond to new needs. Some small rural systems (Knox County) and large urban (Cuyahoga) have made cuts.

Transit is playing an increasingly important role in the state's economy and future growth. Public transit helps Ohio grow and become more prosperous. According to ODOT, every \$1 Billion invested in transit operations leads to 41K jobs, \$3.8B in business sales and \$530M in tax revenues. Returns like those are why ODOT's additional \$10 million investment makes sense.

We are grateful that ODOT and the House recognize the importance of transit for our state. We encourage you to accept ODOT's recommendation so we can continue to get Ohioans to work, to school and to medical care.

Thank you.