



The Ohio Rural Development Alliance (ORDA) was established to ensure economic parity for Ohio's rural communities. ORDA's members advocate for policies that create sustainable and diverse economic growth and prosperity in rural communities. Infrastructure directly impacts our ability to attract and retain jobs and economic development. A strong transportation budget enables our local communities to expand and improve roadways and provide for adequate planning that positions our communities for maximum economic opportunity and we support substantial and sustainable funding for these purposes.

We support increasing the motor fuel user fee to provide the investment necessary to keep Ohio's rural communities competitive. Every community faces infrastructure in need of repair or expansion, but the impact can be far graver for the areas we represent. In rural Ohio, losing a single bridge or road can redirect traffic for miles and make commerce more difficult and costly. Additional spending on maintenance for repairing damaged roads forces communities to forgo badly needed improvements that otherwise foster economic growth. Based on estimates, ORDA member communities faced \$1.783 billion in unfunded infrastructure priorities in the last biennium.

We also urge the General Assembly to review the Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC) process. Rural communities are often disadvantaged under the current TRAC criteria. Specifically, rural communities struggle to meet the requirements of traffic counts and match funding under the current scoring method.

To this end, ORDA recommends the General Assembly consider creating a pilot program allocating \$1 million to each rural Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO), and with modified scoring criteria to advance critical infrastructure programs throughout rural Ohio.

Thank you for undertaking this needed review of a challenging topic. No revenue increase should be considered lightly, but given the clear and direct benefit to Ohioans, the time has come to increase the motor fuel user fee and address Ohio's transportation needs. Strong roads, bridges, and planning keep our state competitive and allow all Ohioans - urban and rural - to thrive.