

OHIO HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Interested Party Testimony on HB 74

February 17th, 2021

Testimony: Claudia Amrhein

Good morning Chairman Oeslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

My name is Claudia Amrhein. I am the President of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA) and GM/CEO of Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority in Portage County, Ohio. I am here to respectfully request support for maintaining current levels of state funding support for public transit in SFY 2022 and 2023.

Public transit continues to demonstrate during the pandemic how essential transit services are to economic stability and recovery. Every day, workers rely on public transit to get to their jobs in hospitals, grocery stores, nursing homes and to places that provide uninterrupted access to essential goods and services for everyone. Across Ohio, public transit continues running due to much-needed federal CARES funding. CARES funds are tremendously helpful but are a short-term fix during the pandemic, not a long-term solution to adequately funding public transit in Ohio.

Stable and predictable revenue is critical to maintaining essential transit services across Ohio. Local funding sources vary widely. The state of Ohio wisely supported increasing transit investment to \$70 million for budget years 2020 and 2021. This investment addressed years of transit underfunding and went a long way towards chipping away at the backload of capital maintenance projects.

The state's GRF investment in 2020 and 2021 brought in \$200 million in federal funds positively impacting Ohioans in rural and urban areas throughout the state.

The Ohio Transit Partnership Program (OTP2) launched in 2020 revitalized transit investment. The program's goal is to facilitate the most efficient and effective use of state funds in the provision of public transportation services, improving economic conditions, and providing a quality-of-life environment for the State of Ohio.

Through OTP2, ODOT met this goal by awarding nearly \$45 million in 2020 to support competitively selected projects in rural and urban areas all across Ohio. This represents about half of the funding requests received, which totaled \$87.5 million.

For 2021, ODOT recently announced \$30.4 million in competitive OTP2 awards from the \$115.5 million requests submitted, funding about 26% of total requests.

PARTA received over \$1 million in OTP2 funding in SFY2020 to support preventative maintenance activities, to replace aging equipment, and to cover 10% of the local match required to complete a \$3.4 million bus garage construction project. In 2021, we will use

the \$485,800 awarded design and to construct a CDL driver training pad and cover the 20% matching requirement for 5 small replacement buses.

State funding support frees up local dollars to ensure PARTA can continue to transport people all across Portage County. We provide countywide door-to-door service – shared ride, scheduled in advance transportation. This is particularly challenging and expensive in a largely rural county such as Portage, which is geographically widespread with large areas not serviced through fixed route service.

I can't stress enough the importance of our door-to-door services. Since March 2020, 80% of our door-to-door trips have been dedicated to taking our most vulnerable populations – elderly and disabled and those without access to a vehicle or unable to drive – to life-sustaining dialysis treatments, medical appointments, jobs, and basic living necessities.

State GRF investment in public transit enables communities to bring millions in federal grant dollars to support economic development and focus local funds on meeting the growing need for public transit services.

OPTA respectfully requests that the General Assembly fund transit at \$70 million and work to advance the 2015 Transit Needs Study recommendation of funding 10% of transit budgets.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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