



Dear Chairman Oelslager and Members of the Finance Committee

The year 2020 solidified that public transportation is an essential service. Despite a massive disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, METRO's commitment to Summit County remained the same. We transported essential workers and fulfilled essential trips. We created and adjusted policies and procedures to enhance our safety efforts for passengers and team members. We kept Summit County moving, even when the world slowed down.

We are extremely thankful for the State's record investment in transit in the last budget cycle. In the past two years, METRO RTA has used the GRF funds to leverage capital awards as a local match to federal funding, bringing to Ohio eight federal dollars for every two state dollars. This gives us the ability to free up local funding for operating costs, allowing us to continue providing essential service through during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and provide enough buses to ensure that social distancing and public safety.

State funding has also provided key funding for a Strategic Plan and Comprehensive Operational Analysis. These plans will guide our investments over the next ten years, setting the framework for innovation to meet the needs of our community now and into the future – a reimagining that has become even more important as we navigate beyond COVID-19.

While the federal COVID relief packages have provided a much needed short-term lifeline for transit agencies during this unprecedented year, we've also been faced with enormous increased costs and reduced revenues that will take years to return to pre-pandemic levels, if they ever do. To maintain the safety of our passengers, a higher volume of service must be provided to ensure social distancing, and increased cleaning efforts came with a \$500,000 price tag, which will continue into the future. Our farebox and advertising revenues decreased by \$2,000,000 in 2020 placing a strain on revenues normally counted on to provide these much needed services.

The Ohio Department of Transportation's proposed budget cuts funding for transit by 90% at a time when the need is greater than ever. We ask the legislature to reconsider this proposal and, at the least, retain the funding levels of the last budget cycle. Public transit is the lifeline, providing equitable access to opportunity to Summit County residents. Fifty-nine percent of METRO passengers identify themselves as a minority, 76% of our riders have an annual household income lower than \$30,000, and 69% do not have other means of transportation. Ohio needs transit, now more than ever and the state funding is a significant piece of our puzzle to maximize our investment in the communities we serve.

Sincerely,

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