



Written Testimony of Grace Gallucci
House Finance Committee
134th General Assembly
Columbus, Ohio
February 24, 2021

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Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the Committee, my name is Grace Gallucci, and I am the Executive Director and CEO of the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA), the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) that conducts transportation and environmental planning for Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina Counties. I appreciate the opportunity to address HB 74, the proposed Ohio Transportation Budget for State Fiscal Years 2022-2023.

In 2019, Governor DeWine and the General Assembly enacted a two-year Transportation Budget that did two important things beyond establishing a routine budget: 1) increased the motor fuel user fee for gasoline and diesel, and 2) increased state funding for transit. NOACA was very supportive of both efforts, and appreciated the state's leadership and bold action to fund Ohio's multi-modal transportation system, which is critical to Greater Cleveland's economic development and quality of life.

With that in mind, I would respectfully ask the Committee to maintain the upward trajectory relative to transit funding in Ohio. This will further the progress made in the last budget, and allow for the building of an even stronger multimodal transportation system.

With the emergence of COVID 19 this past year, we have all appreciated the value of essential workers – who kept our hospitals running and our grocery stores stocked. Many of these same workers depend on transit to get to their jobs and back home each day. And we've seen the importance of transit to residents accessing health care and vaccines in both urban and rural parts of the state. If anything, the past year has shown transit to be more valuable than ever.

Furthermore, as Ohio positions itself as an attractive state to residents and businesses wishing to relocate from elsewhere, the importance of well-funded and robust transit systems cannot be overstated. Transit investments improve local economies -- attracting new employers and new talent, and connecting workers to jobs -- as well as clean the air and improve equity. The last transportation budget showed foresight and progress for transit spending in Ohio, and I am asking the Committee to continue – not reverse – this forward momentum.

In fact, NOACA supports the creation of a long-term dedicated source of transit funding, to ensure stable funding into the future, and take this important funding stream out of the biennial budget cycles. Distributions from such a fund should be designed to reflect and leverage local investments made by communities, such as by providing matching funds to locally generated transit revenue. This would generate even more value for Ohio's transit investments. And I would encourage the Committee to support efforts to ensure that major transit system investments are considered eligible for funding through Ohio's Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC). Because transit is such an important component of Northeast Ohio's overall transportation system, more local flexibility with regard to TRAC funding would benefit our region.

Furthermore, pursuant to NOACA's goal of creating a truly multi-modal transportation system, I would respectfully ask the Committee to support AMTRAK's preliminary plans to expand service in Ohio, particularly in Cleveland. It is critical for Ohio to be able to work cooperatively with Amtrak and take full advantage of any federal funding that may become available.

I would also like to address another matter which is important to communities in Northeast Ohio: the formulas used to distribute the local government share of state gas tax dollars. Ohio's transportation system would benefit from a distribution formula that sends user fee dollars back to the communities where they were collected, in the true spirit of a "user fee." Allocating these dollars based on vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT), rather than current formulas, would result in a more fair distribution. For example, each of Ohio's eighty-eight counties receives an equal share of funds intended for county governments, regardless of population or roadway usage. Looking forward, as Ohio analyzes the use of a VMT approach for collecting transportation revenues, the state should likewise consider a VMT approach to distributing these funds.

Finally, NOACA supports Governor DeWine's distracted driving initiative, and we would support its inclusion in the Transportation Budget, provided there are adequate safeguards to reduce disparate impacts on communities of color. This initiative is consistent with NOACA's efforts to improve safety for all users of our transportation system.

Thank you for your time and attention to this testimony as you consider HB 74, to fund transportation in Ohio over the State Fiscal Year 2022-2023 biennium.