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The Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee
HB 74, Transportation Budget
February 25, 2021

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, and Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 74. My name is Diane Howard, and I am the Co-chair of NOBLE's public transit working group.

Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality (NOBLE) is a grassroots community organization that focuses on bringing the voices of low-income people to the state budget process. We do advocacy and organizing work around Health and Human Services funding, with particular focus on Medicaid, Kinship Care, Affordable Housing and Public Transportation.

Public transportation systems bring many benefits to individuals, communities, and the local economy. Some of those benefits include, but are not limited to:

- **Financial benefits to communities** - For every dollar invested in public transportation, approximately \$4 in economic returns are generated. *
- **Reduction in traffic congestion** - Public transportation can convey many more people in much less space than individual automobiles, which helps to keep traffic congestion lower, which in turn reduces air pollution from idling vehicles, and helps riders avoid the stress that comes from daily driving in highly congested areas.
- **Increased mobility** - For those who don't, or can't drive, public transportation allows them to get to work, to school, to the grocery store or doctor's office, or just to visit friends.

While all the above benefits are worth praising, NOBLE's membership is most grateful for the increased mobility that public transit provides for our disabled and elderly members.

In addition to the benefits listed, we were pleased to read the DeWine Administration's recent COVID-19 Minority Health Strike Force Blueprint recommendation to "improve access to public transportation to better connect communities of color to health care, jobs, and education." Thus, we urge you to ensure the state budget reflects this important commitment.

For all the above-mentioned reasons we would like to see public transit adequately funded.

While we have provided several reasons as to why public transit is important, NOBLE feels that HB 74 fails to adequately address the critical issue of public transit funding.

HB 74 significantly cuts annual state funding to public transit agencies down to \$7.3 million, compared to the current allocation of \$70 million for the previous fiscal year and \$63 million this fiscal year. The budget as proposed would also reduce federal funding for public transit through the state from \$65.9 million to approximately \$50 million in each fiscal year over the biennium. This substantial reduction in funding for public transit would only further burden transit agencies, whose costs have risen during the pandemic.

NOBLE recommends the following change be made to HB 74:

Transit and rail funding should be increased to \$150 million over the Biennium. In addition, we call for the establishment of a multi-modal development fund within the ODOT budget.

Both recommendations are in line with the needs identified in ODOT's own 2015 Transit Needs Study.

Ohio's dependence on safe, reliable transportation infrastructure will only increase as our state continues to recover from the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions on travel continue to be lifted. We strongly encourage the adequate funding of public transit. Thank you for your time, and we are hopeful that you will consider our above-mentioned recommendations.

*APTA's report, [*The Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment: 2014 Update*](#)

Respectfully,
Diane Howard