



**Senate Transportation Committee
Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 23 (Edwards)
Jason Warner, Director of Strategic Engagement, Greater Ohio Policy Center
Wednesday, March 8, 2023**

Chair Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Leader Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present interested party testimony on Sub. House Bill 23 (HB23), the state transportation budget for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC) is a statewide non-profit organization that champions revitalization and sustainable growth in Ohio's cities and metros. Transportation is one of the issues our organization has focused on as being a key driver to address these issues.

Issues of Support

Public Transportation Investment Growth

For the past several years, I have come before this committee to ask for your support for increased spending in public transportation. This year, I am very happy to be able to say that I stand before you in full support of the as-introduced budget proposal which maintained support for public transit at \$37 million per year. We are also pleased to see that ODOT plans to continue to reserve \$33 million per year in FHWA flex funds for use by the state's public transit agencies to address capital needs.

GOPC supports the change made in the House to expand funding to public transportation projects that support workforce transportation. Sub. HB23 creates the Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership Program which allows one or more regional transit authorities to work together to provide transit services for the workforce between jurisdictions, supporting the employment needs of economically significant employment centers. \$15 million per year is allocated for this new initiative.

While this funding is largely related to the development of the Intel project outside of Columbus, ensuring multimodal transportation for Ohio's workforce is critical for the state's future. GOPC has long advocated the need to move beyond investment in automobile-based transportation as the sole means of travel in Ohio, and support any effort to invest in multimodal transportation by the state.

Federal Funds for Passenger Rail Study

GOPC welcomes the news that the state will be requesting funding from the federal government to study the expansion of passenger rail service across Ohio. It is right and prudent that the state should take advantage of this unique opportunity to learn more and study the feasibility of greater accessibility to passenger rail.

Issues of Concern

Highway Interchange Development

GOPC is strongly opposed to a proposal which seeks to override local control and mandate ODOT construct a highway interchange on Interstate 71 between Medina and Cuyahoga counties which is strongly opposed by one of the impacted communities. Dictating the construction of specific roadway infrastructure in the state transportation budget sets a dangerous precedent and takes control away from metropolitan planning authorities in overseeing regional planning efforts. Because studies initiated by the Northeast Ohio Area Coordinating Agency (NOACA) are still underway, GOPC believes it is important to allow local planners, experts, and leaders to complete their work and come to a proper decision without receiving dictates within the transportation budget.

It is for these reasons that **we encourage the removal of this provision** from House Bill 23.

Additional Recommendation for Budget

Recommendation of Funds to Make Roadways Safe for Children, Pedestrians, and Bicyclists

GOPC strongly believes in the development of a transportation network that promotes the safe movement of people everywhere. One program that is designed to support active transportation is the Safe Routes to Schools Program (SRTS). This program, administered by ODOT with \$5 million in federal funds annually, supports the development of pedestrian infrastructure (sidewalks, bike infrastructure, safety signals, etc.) adjacent to schools. Recent changes at the federal level have expanded the number of schools that are eligible for SRTS grants from K-8 buildings to K-12 facilities.

To support this program and ensure that more communities have the opportunity to access this incredible program that is routinely oversubscribed, **we are encouraging the legislature to provide equal state GRF funds matching the federal funds available to the program.** By providing \$10 million per year in state and federal grants to support the SRTS program, we can ensure that more students in Ohio have the opportunity to commute to schools in a safe and efficient manner.

Conclusion

Chair Kunze, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts regarding House Bill 23. I appreciate your attention and will be happy to address any questions the committee may have.