



CITY OF LANCASTER

Mayor's Office

104 East Main Street

Lancaster, Ohio 43130

740-687-6600

Mayor@ci.Lancaster.Oh.US

David L. Scheffler, Mayor

House Bill 23

Interested Party Testimony

March 16, 2023

Ohio Senate Transportation Committee

Mayor David Scheffler, City of Lancaster

Chair Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 23. My name is David Scheffler, I serve as mayor of the City of Lancaster in Fairfield County.

I come before you today to urge you to restore the \$10 million appropriation for regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) that was passed by the House but removed by this committee yesterday.

RTPOs play a crucial role for rural areas. Five of these multi-county organizations across the state provide transportation planning and coordination services for their members – services valuable to many smaller communities who do not have the staff or resources that our large urban partners possess. Prior to RTPOs, rural counties coordinated their planning directly with ODOT. The creation of RTPOs created a voice and vehicle to empower local communities and regions to collaborate in their planning activities. These services include long- and short-range transportation plans, active transportation plans, thoroughfare planning, comprehensive planning, and economic development related planning to help communities strategize for growth. They bring together elected officials, planners, law enforcement, the private sector, mobility and transit organizations, and health departments to prioritize the needs of their regions.

In my own community of Lancaster, our RTPO, the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO) was instrumental in revitalizing our Southern Gateway area including developing reverse angle parking in our downtown. These improvements have greatly enhanced the area, priming it for more small business growth and making our streets safer for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.

Sadly, the current funding falls far short of meeting demand. CORPO had funding needs greater than the entirety of the statewide RTPO appropriation last year, receiving over \$5 million in requests with less than \$1 million to go around and only one dedicated staff member for the entire seven-county region. The work has increased exponentially, so the staff support needs to grow too. The \$10 million allocation is an attempt to correct this imbalance and provide needed support to these organizations. It is strongly endorsed by the Ohio Rural Development Alliance,

House Bill 23
Interested Party Testimony
March 16, 2023
Page 2

who represents other councils of government and planning organizations in rural and Appalachian communities.

I would also like to clarify that the increase in funds to RTPOs should not be conflated with the \$1 billion rural highway fund that was also struck from the bill yesterday. The RTPO increase is needed with or without the rural highway fund and should be considered on its own merits.

In summary, as you consider the next round of amendments, I strongly encourage you to restore this \$10 million of funds for RTPOs so that our rural and Appalachian communities' transportation needs can be met with the same rigor as our urban counterparts.

Thank you again, Chair Kunze and committee members for the chance to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.