

Ohio Senate Transportation Committee

April 17, 2024

Opponent Testimony

Senate Bill 155

Chairwoman Kunze, Vice-Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee. My name is Brent Painter and I have the pleasure of serving as the Economic Development Director & Chief of Staff Mayor for the City of Strongsville, OH, which is located on the boarder of Cuyahoga and Medina Counties.

I'm testifying today as an opponent of Senate Bill 155 because the provision which was passed in House Bill 23 the state's current transportation budget and signed by Governor DeWine has allowed for the local responsible entities to come to the table to work towards addressing the transportation issues, which exist within the city. The issues before you are not a new, it is an issue that has been a topic of the city's residents and businesses in Strongsville for almost 20-years. The intersection of State Route 82 and Howe Road is listed as one of the highest crash areas in Cuyahoga County and the state, which has forced the city to make changes to traffic flow including limiting turns.

Strongsville is the 5th largest city in Cuyahoga County with a population of over 46,000 residents. Unlike other areas of Northeast Ohio, the City of Strongsville has seen steady growth throughout the last 40 years including almost 4% population growth between 2010 and 2020. The city has grown from approximately 28,000 residents in 1980 to the current 46,000 residents. Strongsville has seen population and economic growth while the Cleveland region has been losing population—the Cleveland region has a net loss of population of over 84,000 people from 2000 to 2022. Strongsville is succeeding while our region struggles.

I outline these data points, because when areas grow new challenges sometimes arise. One of those challenges has been the need for improved roadway infrastructure within and outside of the city's jurisdiction. Strongsville's population and job growth has increased the stress on the region's transportation network. The success of Strongsville, a successful Northeast Ohio community, is dependent upon the safe and efficient flow of traffic into, out of and around our community.

Over the past 20 years the city has engaged our regional partners including organizations like NOACA the regions Metropolitan Planning Organization to express our concerns and about the intersection of Howe Road and State Route 82 and the potential need for new access for those drivers who are commuting to their homes or businesses to the south of Strongsville. These discussions have largely been dismissed in favor of planned projects to do nothing to reduce traffic coming from Interstate 71 and into the city's jurisdiction.

Over the past decade projects have been completed on the state's roadway network, specifically at the exit for State Route 82 and southbound Interstate 71. This work has improved the traffic congestion and safety issues that exist in the southbound lanes of Interstate 71, and we appreciate the work to improve safety for drivers who live and visit our city. Unfortunately, those improvements have not addressed the traffic congestion and safety issues at the immediate intersection as drivers exit onto State Route 82. The current intersection has six lanes of traffic including designated turn lanes allow drivers to access Howe Road heading south. During high peak traffic hours and non-peak traffic hours this intersection has significant volume of traffic flowing through it. Howe Road runs parallel to Interstate 71 and ends at Boston Road where the City of Strongsville and the City of Brunswick boarder one another. Howe Road is primarily a residential two-lane street just after the intersection of State Route 82 and Howe Road. The residents of Howe Road and those residents who access the street as they commute north have advocated for years for improved access due to high volume of traffic, which at times can limit their ability to safely exit their driveways.

I would like to also take a moment to address one item that have been brought up during past hearings from proponents of the legislation. First, it has been said that the City of Strongsville's effort to see a new access or interchange built to alleviate traffic congestion as drivers exit Interstate 71 onto State Route 82 and the intersection of Howe Road is really an effort to divert truck traffic generated by Foltz Parkway. This assertion is false. The city has been engaged in an almost 10-year permitting effort with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a potential expansion of Foltz Parkway, which would open additional city owned land for development. The permit we are seeking very clearly shows the extended road being cul-d-sac'd well before reaching Boston Road. This is important, because the city is not seeking or would be permitted to extend the road any further without first going back to the Army Corps and engaging and another exhaustive permitting process, which includes public participation. (As I said previously our current effort has taken almost 10-years).

The City of Strongsville shares the same desire as any community in the region when it comes to decisions regarding new or improved infrastructure. We agree decisions should be data driven and believe the provision this bill seeks to repeal is allowing for the responsible entities to undertake the appropriate studies to gather the needed data and make decisions accordingly.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and would happy to answer any questions at this time.