

House Transportation Committee
Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 54 (Stewart)
Jason Warner, Director of Strategic Engagement, Greater Ohio Policy Center
Tuesday, February 11, 2025

Chairman Willis, Vice Chairman Daniels, Ranking Member Grim and members of the House Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 54, the state transportation budget for fiscal years 2026 and 2027.

My name is Jason Warner. I am the Director of Strategic Engagement at the Greater Ohio Policy Center. GOPC is Ohio's leading advocate for urban revitalization and sustainable growth, advocating for policies that revitalize Ohio.

One issue GOPC advocates for is for a modern transportation and mobility network across the state. We want that network to be safe and reliable for users of all modes. Additionally, we disseminate best practices, information on funding, tools, and technical assistance to develop transportation networks that create vibrant, revitalized spaces in the cities and towns of Ohio.

The state of transportation in Ohio and what Ohioans need.

In the next 25 years, Ohio is projected to lose 5.7% of its 2020 population. This means that we will have fewer rate payers available to support the long-term maintenance costs of Ohio's highways and roadways. During this same period, Ohio's motor fuel tax receipts are expected to decline.

Simultaneously, the share of aging Ohioans will grow and their desire for independence will continue. Working age Ohioans, especially those in our urban job centers, will look at other states and expect Ohio to have a similar range of transportation options that are safe and convenient. If they cannot find it here, they will go where it can be found.

To continue connecting Ohioans to opportunity and independence, Ohio must protect the important transportation assets we already have and prepare for a future where a variety of transportation modes will safely and efficiently connect Ohioans to work, school, medical services, and desired amenities.

Maintaining our built-out highway system and avoiding expansion projects.

Ohio's transportation system expanded greatly at the height of Ohio's manufacturing history and during a time of rapid suburbanization.

Today, Ohio's transportation system is built out, and the marginal gains expected from proposed new expansion projects will come at high costs for future generations. Now, and in the future, the state must be responsible stewards of limited public dollars. Given our population projects, we must prioritize maintaining our current highways and roadways at the highest levels

possible, critically assess the cost and benefits of any new expansion project, and limit system expansion to only the most needed projects that show clear, long-term demand.

Protect lives and promote public health with safer streets.

Local governments and ODOT are making streets safer for vulnerable road users - cyclists, pedestrians, transit-users and buggy-users— as well as motorists. However, funding for these safety measures is modest and typically implemented through individual, small-scale projects. Most of Ohio's local roadways have few or no options for non-drivers, due to their current design. As a result, today's roadway designs are a large factor in Ohio's stunningly high rate of pedestrian injuries and deaths. In 2023 alone, Ohio rated higher in pedestrian deaths (151) than the national average (143.5).

Ohio must take a comprehensive approach to creating local roadways and mobility infrastructure that gives Ohioans of all ages and abilities more and safer transportation choices. Transportation investments that are appropriate to the local context will boost safety and convenience, support healthy lifestyles, and create vibrant places where people want to live, shop, and work.

We applaud the DeWine administration for the commitments it has made to continue to support safety programs at ODOT such as the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) and encourage the legislature to maintain this funding over the next two years.

Invest in public transportation.

Despite historic levels of funding in the last six years, public transportation systems are still struggling to get workers to jobs, and others like seniors and people with disabilities, to their destinations. In addition, 25 Ohio counties still have no public transportation services.

To ensure Ohio's prosperity, the state must continue to invest funds into public transportation. These investments will connect working Ohioans to jobs and critical services and preserve the independence of Ohioans who cannot or choose not to drive.

Support Rail Expansion.

Expanding passenger rail service in Ohio will increase connections between and within the state's regions and connect Ohio to the rest of the Midwest. Viable cross-state passenger rail will reduce the assumed need for roadway expansion and allow existing rail infrastructure to better support the increased demand for commercial and industrial freight logistics. As Ohio continues to study this critical expansion, we encourage the legislature to continue to show support for this effort.

Conclusion

Chairman Willis and members of the House Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony and for GOPC to share our views on what it will take to create an infrastructure system that gives Ohioans of all ages and abilities access to safe, reliable modes of transportation.