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SFY 2026-27 Transportation Budget Testimony

Claudia Amrhein, General Manager/CEO Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority

Chairman Willis, Vice Chair Daniels, Ranking Member Grim, and members of the House Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the state transportation budget for state fiscal years 2026 and 2027.

My name is Claudia Amrhein. I am the GM/CEO of Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority in Portage County, Ohio, and immediate past president of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA).

Public transportation is a vital link for millions of Ohioans to access jobs, healthcare, education, social activities, and basic daily needs like housing and fresh food. Public transit also is an essential tool for economic development and growth across our state.

Businesses small and large cite worker transportation as an obstacle to filling essential employment vacancies. And as Ohio continues to attract historic investment, like Intel, Ford, Honda, and Amazon Web Services, the need to fill jobs is increasing. Ohio leaders must ensure our public transit providers are adequately funded to meet the needs of this changing workforce.

The proposed state transportation budget (HB 54) maintains \$70 million annual funding for transit as was approved for the FY24/25 budget. We ask today that you consider increasing this to \$85 million annual funding, as supported by regional economic development organizations and chambers of commerce across the state. We also urge that you maintain \$15 million funding for the Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership (OWMP) program created in the last budget.

The total \$100 million funding request is essential for supporting Ohio's workforce and economic development efforts. Projects supported by the OWMP program may not reach fruition without continued funding. For example, at PARTA we'll be using FY25 workforce mobility funding to study and develop plans for addressing commercial and employment center developments built over the past decade. Locations are far from where potential workers live and are not accessible to traditional fixed route services, creating a transportation barrier.

Transit authorities across the state are focused on developing service and capital investment plans to support the growing need for workforce transportation. Continued state funding is a vital investment for supporting Ohio businesses that need to attract and retain dependable workers, and for workers across the state who depend on public transit to reach these jobs.

Chairman Willis, thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of transit investment in the transportation budget. I appreciate your attention and consideration and am happy to answer any questions you or members of the committee may have.