

Proponent Statement: Dawn Distler, CEO METRO RTA HB No. 54

Ohio House Transportation Committee February 11th 3:30pm, Rm.122

Chair Willis, Vice Chair Daniels, Ranking Member Grim, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding funding for public transportation in Ohio. I am Dawn Distler, Chief Executive Officer of the METRO Regional Transit Authority in Akron.

Ohio's continued economic growth depends on a strong, reliable transportation infrastructure. Public transit plays a critical role in connecting Ohioans to jobs, education, health care, and essential services—ensuring businesses can attract and retain the workforce they need to compete in today's economy.

When industry leaders such as Intel and Amazon consider expanding in Ohio, they look for a workforce that can reliably get to work. Without adequate public transportation, investment in the polymer industry cluster will see businesses struggle to fill jobs, economic growth to stifle, and opportunities for working Ohioans lost. Reliable transit is not just about mobility—it is about ensuring Ohio remains a top destination for employers and investment.

Across Ohio, passengers take millions of trips each year, supporting local economies and strengthening communities. Whether the public transportation user is a student in Summit County heading to class, a senior in Butler County accessing medical care, or an employee commuting to one of Ohio's many growing industries, every trip has value. Without continued investment at the state level, businesses and families in every district—including yours—will feel the impact.

Public transportation is not an urban or a rural issue—it is a statewide priority supporting job creation, workforce development, and independence for seniors and individuals with disabilities. Governor DeWine's budget prioritizes Ohio's technology-driven economy, workforce development, and support for seniors, families and children. Public transit is a proven tool that helps achieve these goals by ensuring Ohioans have the access they need to participate fully in our state's economy.

Investing in transit on a state and local level is an investment in Ohio's future. In the last transportation budget, this committee made a significant commitment to public transportation, and those dollars drove expanding access for workers; helping business growth and creating jobs in our communities. Done right, infrastructure does more than just move people; it drives economic development, strengthens local businesses, and ensures Ohio remains competitive for years to come.

Additionally, we must prioritize the safety of our bus operators. The growing number of assaults against transit workers is unacceptable. I urge you to support proposed amendments to current state legislation that will protect these essential workers and allow them to do their jobs safely.

I appreciate your past leadership and support for public transportation. I encourage you to continue making the strategic investments necessary to keep Ohio's economy strong, our businesses thriving, and our workforce connected to opportunity.

Thank you for your time and consideration