



Testimony to the Senate Government Oversight Committee  
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Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96. Ohio Bicycle Federation is opposed to the code section 163.01(2) regarding recreation trails, as it would significantly impede our communities from conducting public infrastructure improvements.

We are deeply concerned about language in House Bill 94 that would remove recreational trails from the definition of “public use” in Ohio’s eminent domain law. Trails are a critical asset to Ohio, both for recreational purposes and commuting, and are widely used across the region. In addition, users travel from far and wide to use our trails. Just last weekend, a group of cyclists from various states were cycling the Ohio to Erie Trail, and stayed at Gahanna Historical Society’s Bed & Breakfast.

Local governments officials are sensitive to the needs of property owners and limit their use of eminent domain. An example is the Big Walnut Trail in Gahanna, where the initial plan was to route the trail entirely along the Big Walnut Creek. When several property owners in one of the neighborhoods opposed the initial plan, the route was changed to build a sidepath along a nearby roadway. But sometimes eminent domain is necessary and should be permitted when there is no alternative route available.

The bill seems to imply that recreational trails are not important to Ohio residents. We often find that residents who were initially opposed to trail development change their minds after the trail is built. Again, in Gahanna, there were a few residents who opposed the development of the Big Walnut Trail but after the trail was built, they realized that they enjoyed the trail, whether to take their grandchildren out for walking or biking, or to meet neighbors who often became friends. These are true stories we learned from these same residents.

A recent survey in Gahanna found 60% of our residents are supportive of new trails being built. The increase in traffic due to commercial and residential development has made safe alternatives for non-motorized traffic even more desirable. Why is it permissible to use eminent domain for freeways but not for trails for non-motorized travelers? Why is it permissible to use eminent domain for parks but not for trails to travel to those parks?

We strongly urge you to remove the legislation that prohibits eminent domain from use for recreational purposes.