

The Beta District - NW 33 Innovation Corridor Council of Governments

Terry Emery, Chairman

House Bill 96 | May 07, 2025

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony today on House Bill 96, the state operating budget. I am Terry Emery, serving as the Chair for the NW 33 Innovation Corridor Council of Governments—a region that is led by a jurisdictional council of governments including the Cities of Marysville and Dublin and Union County who share a unique passion for innovation, progress, and collaboration.

The Beta District is a premier innovation corridor in Central Ohio, where public and private partners collaborate to test and deploy cutting-edge technologies in real-world environments. The district supports smart mobility, autonomous vehicles, and next-generation infrastructure—all of which rely on robust, high-speed broadband connectivity. The U.S. 33 Smart Mobility Corridor spans 35 miles through the Beta District, connecting Dublin, Marysville, and East Liberty. This corridor is equipped with a 432-strand fiber-optic network installed entirely within the public right-of-way, forming a redundant loop of broadband infrastructure that supports real-time data exchange essential for connected and autonomous vehicle testing. Broadband is the backbone of the Beta District's mission, enabling data-intensive research, real-time communication, and the seamless integration of advanced technologies.

We are grateful for the continued leadership of Governor DeWine and the Ohio House in supporting the development and expansion of broadband infrastructure. As the Senate deliberates the budget, we urge you to continue this collaborative effort to ensure that every Ohioan has access to reliable, affordable internet.

However, we would like to raise a concern with a provision that was added during House deliberations—specifically, the language that appears to exempt broadband providers from local and state right-of-way regulations and associated fees. We respectfully ask the Senate to remove this provision.

Remove Broadband Internet Access Service Provision

The provision related to broadband internet access service appears to exempt broadband providers from local and state right-of-way access regulation and fees. The ability for local governments to regulate the use of public rights-of-way through permits and fees is critical. Local management ensures public safety, protects infrastructure, ensures orderly development, and enables coordination among multiple users of these shared public spaces. Cities are responsible for managing streets, sidewalks, and utilities that serve as critical public assets and must balance access for utilities, telecommunications providers, and construction projects with the needs of residents, pedestrians, and local businesses. Permit systems are not barriers—they are mechanisms that ensure transparency, accountability, and efficiency. They allow cities to minimize disruptions, recover the costs of inspections and oversight, and safeguard the long-term

value of public assets. Without this authority, municipalities could be left with limited tools to manage competing interests in increasingly complex urban environments.

Additionally, Beta District members have demonstrated that local control has facilitated partnerships that improve connectivity and reduce costs for residents and businesses alike. The current language's ambiguity—especially the use of the word “entry”—could lead to legal and operational confusion, undermining years of thoughtful broadband policy development and could impair local government's use and management of public rights-of-way.

On behalf of the Beta District and our member jurisdictions, we thank you for your time and consideration. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that Ohio's broadband future is inclusive, sustainable, and locally empowered.