



NORTH CENTRAL
AREA TRANSIT

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Senate Transportation Committee

HB54

Interested Party Testimony on Public Transportation

March 4, 2025

Chairman Patton, Vice Chair Schaeffer, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Good Afternoon Chairman Patton. My name is Mary Habig and I am the Public Transportation Director for North Central Area Transit. I currently oversee public transportation in three rural counties in North Central Ohio, Seneca, Crawford and Huron. I come to you today to testify on behalf of all the small urban and rural transit systems and the communities we serve in Ohio to respectfully request that you continue to fund public transit.

When you hear of "Public Transportation" many people think about the big Gillig buses that stop here at the Statehouse, the big buses in Urban cities. But, public transportation is also mini vans going down gravel roads in Rural Ohio; Seneca, Crawford, Huron, Ottawa, Lancaster, Washington, Monroe, Guernsey to name a few; taking your people to life's basic needs: Medical, (including mental and addiction treatment centers), education, employment, grocery shopping and yes, to the hair dresser.

Many who live in Rural Ohio, depend on public transit to get them to and from specialty care in Columbus, Cleveland, Toledo, Canton, etc. as specialty care isn't available in small hospitals, including cancer centers, women centers, heart specialists. They travel two hours to see specialists.

Many of our elderly depend on public transit to travel to medical appointments, grocery shopping and to Senior Centers, where they can get a warm meal; for some, that's their only meal. Plus, they are able to socialize with others; they are not stuck at home, being isolated from others. They are enjoying their "gold years".

Many folks with disabilities are able to obtain employment, because of public transit. They are able to continue their education by going to trade school and/or college, because they have access to public transit in Rural Ohio. They do not have to feel like they are a burden on their families and neighbors. They have the freedom to go where they want without feeling bad about themselves or their disabilities.

A growing population using public transportation are the 25-65 year olds going to employment. The workforce is growing; they are being productive and they and their families are striving because they have access to public transit. Workforce Development and Public Transit go together, it's really that simple. I believe many employers will tell you this, they need employees and public transit delivers. Again, it's really that simple.

Every day, people who have made wrong/bad decisions are using public transportation to access substance abuse treatment centers. They are trying to better their lives so they can main stream back into society, clean and sober. I'm proud, we in public transit have the opportunity to help them. Help them look forward to their future as a productive, working man or woman. Seeing them smile when they get on or off the bus, is priceless.

With the technology on our transit buses, public transit is the "ears and the eyes" of our neighborhoods. Recently, one of our transit buses in Seneca County, just happened to capture a child being physically abused in a parking lot. The abuser had no idea he was being recorded. With this video, there is one less child abuser off the streets. With that being said, we need to insure our transit drivers are protected. We ask that you please consider protecting our transit employees when they are assaulted while operating a transit vehicle. Please consider increasing the penalty for an assault, at a minimum, the same as a school bus driver.

As a wife of a Vietnam Veteran, I can honesty tell you, PTSD is real; Mental Illness is real. These soldiers have seen and done things the rest of us can't even imagine. In Rural Ohio, public transit agencies have partnered with the Veterans Agencies to ensure our veterans have access to health care, jobs and support service, which can help our veterans maintain house stability. Many Veteran Agencies have vehicles, but they are not accessible. Our public transit system is 100% accessible.

Public transit allows your people, of all walks of life, freedom; Freedom to go where they need to go, without feeling they are a burden to their families, neighbors and friends; Preserving their dignity.

In closing, I ask you to think about these questions:

- If public transit funds are cut, where will this leave your people in Ohio?
- How many of your people are going to lose their employment?
- How many lives will be lost, including unborn children?
- What's going to happen to your veterans, esp. those that suffer PTSD and Mental illness?
- What's going to happen to those that depend on public transit to get them to their much needed medical appointments, including addiction centers, counseling centers?
- Do we just let them back to the streets and alleys?
- Will the crime rate increase, as people will become desperate?
- What's going to happen to the children and many young adults that depend on public transit to get them to school, trade school, college, training, esp. those with disabilities?
- How are the seniors going to get to the senior centers, grocery stores etc.?
- And yes, let's not forget, how many elderly ladies are going to have "Bad Hair Days"?

Thank you Chairman Patton and Transportation Committee for your time and consideration.



Mary E. Habig, Executive Director
North Central Ohio Transit