



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

Ohio Senate Transportation Committee March 4, 2025

Chair Patton, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a testimony regarding funding for public transportation in Ohio. My name is Dawn Distler, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the METRO Regional Transit Authority in Akron where I began my career as a bus operator more than 3 decades ago.

Ohio's quest to be a giant in economic growth depends on robust and reliable transportation infrastructure. Public transportation is essential in connecting Ohioans to employment, education, healthcare, entertainment, and other vital services, ensuring businesses can attract and retain the workforce necessary to compete in today's economy.

As companies like Intel and Amazon consider expanding in Ohio, one of the critical factors they evaluate is the availability of amenities that will support a thriving workforce. Reliable and frequent public transit is one of the most sought-after amenities for today's workers. Without adequate transit options, industries, particularly those in Northeast Ohio's polymer sector, will struggle to find workers, economic growth will stagnate, and opportunities for Ohioans will diminish. Public transportation is not just about mobility; it is vital to keeping Ohio a prime location for business investment.

Across the state, public transportation supports over 100 million trips annually, contributing to local economies and enhancing community connections. In Summit County, METRO RTA serves riders for many reasons, but one thing remains clear: every trip has value. One of our fastest-growing rider demographics includes students from the University of Akron and Akron Public Schools Career and College Academy, who rely on our services for workforce development opportunities, including getting to school, work, internships, and mentorships. Without continued state investment, businesses and families in every district, including yours, will feel the effects.

Governor DeWine's budget emphasizes Ohio's technology-driven economy, workforce development, and support for seniors, families, and children. Public transportation is a key tool to advance these goals by ensuring Ohioans can fully participate in our state's economy. Transit is not just an urban or rural issue; it is a statewide priority for job creation, workforce development, providing independence for individuals with disabilities, and allowing seniors to remain in their homes.

Investing in transit, at both the state and local levels, is an investment in Ohio's future. In the last transportation budget, this committee made a significant commitment to public transportation, which helped expand access for workers, facilitated business growth, and created jobs in our communities. When done right, infrastructure doesn't just move people—it fuels economic development, strengthens local businesses, and ensures Ohio remains competitive for years to come.

I want to thank you for your past leadership and support for public transportation. I encourage you to continue making the strategic investments necessary to maintain Ohio's economic strength, keep businesses thriving, and ensure our workforce stays connected to opportunities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

