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Chair **Patton**, Vice-chair **Schaffer**, Ranking Member **Antonio**, and members of the Senate **Transportation** Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for House Bill 54, the transportation budget for fiscal year 26-27. And more specifically, to advocate for the creation of a connection between US Route 23 and I-71 that has been cited in the Ohio Department of Transportation's Strategic Transportation Development and Analysis (STDA) report.

This report is one that has been years in the making. As Ohio continues to bring new jobs and markets of opportunity to the state, the accessibility of inter- and intra-state transportation becomes an increasingly pressing issue. ODOT, in conjunction with the US Federal government has continued the improvement of I-75 and are working on I-475 supporting north-south. Recent improvements to the I-80/I-90 turnpike have also enhanced the transport of goods and supplies east to west. We, however in northwest Ohio continued to experience the neglect of critical infrastructure at the state level to finish the missing connection between our region into central Ohio, and consequently, the rest of the state. For some time now, there has been resounding complaint from both public and private sector within Ohio's northwestern region about the road design which not only extends the travel time from the region, but also presents serious hazards for drivers on US Route 23.

One key factor is the 23-mile stretch that connects our region to I-71 which holds a total of 39 traffic lights—meaning you cannot even travel a full mile on this roadway without potentially stopping at a light despite this being a major intra-state connection. Route 23 is used by both passenger and cargo vehicles to travel throughout Ohio and beyond. What was notable in this report was, while it offers some solutions, these solutions were closer to I-270. There is still no clear plan to create a connection between US Route 23 and I-71 despite the study's \$10-million dollar price tag and a publication delayed 45 days from the mandated legislative deadline. Ohio cannot no longer wait for this crucial infrastructure to be remediated. Currently, it

can take 40-minutes to get through this 23-mile stretch, notwithstanding a lane closure or an untimely car accident in the roadway.

In reviewing the recommendations of this report, in my opinion, they are not forward-thinking. This map raises serious challenges in the implementation of these recommendations. These challenges, in addition to zoning homes, businesses, and even cemeteries, also making it unsafe by closing left turns and creating what we call a “Michigan left turn”. In addition to concerns about safety, the report doesn’t adequately weigh the future impact that the opening of the Gordie Howe bridge will have on the increase in trailer trucks into the state of Ohio. In today’s trucking industry the transportation of goods and supplies require timely delivery. If you speak with terminal dispatchers they are looking to move goods and supplies fast, safely, and efficiently.

As we are thinking about essential transportation costs and the future of the state of Ohio, I urge both this committee and the ODOT agency to take the concerns of the Northwest region seriously and remedy this terribly inefficient highway.