



OHIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Matt MacLaren, Director of Travel and Tourism Policy
Ohio Chamber of Commerce

Proponent Testimony – House Bill 54
March 12, 2025

Chair Patton, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 54. My name is Matt MacLaren, and I am the Director of Travel and Tourism Policy for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

For 132 years, the Ohio Chamber has served as the state's leading business advocate and represents over 8,000 companies that do business in Ohio. Our mission is to aggressively champion free enterprise, economic competitiveness, and growth for the benefit of all Ohioans.

Investing in our infrastructure is a key lever that we identify in the Ohio Chamber of Commerce [Blueprint for Ohio's Economic Future](#). We supports HB 54 because it provides more than \$11 billion over the next two years in needed funding for maintenance and improvements to Ohio's transportation infrastructure including improvements in our highways, airports, railways, and public transit.

Funding contained in this bill is needed to serve Ohio's growing businesses. Ohio has recently welcomed announcements of expansions and new operations by Intel, Ford, Honda, Amazon Web Services, Anduril, and more; all of which depend on highway maintenance and improvements for their success. Funding in this bill will also be used to improve Ohio roads that are already experiencing traffic above their capacity. An example of a road that needs improved is US 23, between Worthington and Waldo. It is the main roadway serving a growing amount of transit between central and northwest Ohio and it is already experiencing traffic that severely exceeds the roads capacity. The capacity is so great for this important stretch of road that we not only support improvements to it, we also support the building of a connection between U.S.23 and I-71 to the east.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce is honored to be a part of the Access Ohio 2050 steering committee that is led by the Ohio Department of Transportation. ODOT is showing great foresight by organizing this committee to plan for the safe and comfortable transportation of people and goods in Ohio's future by roads, railways, airports and more. In addition to our roads, improvements to Ohio airports and railways are an important part of HB 54. Ohio airports provide over \$16.5 billion to our total economic output. Airport capacity expansion and a greater number of direct flights encourage economic activity through ease of access to state businesses and amenities and are important to attracting people to move to, and stay in, Ohio. Ohio railways are important to the transportation of goods, and provide an opportunity for increased passenger rail in our state. The Ohio Chamber of Commerce has not taken a stance on passenger rail as we think more information needs gathered before we can determine how to best meet the state's needs. Because of this, we encourage funding of "Step 2" for the "3C&D" rail line, Ohio's portion of the Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit rail line; and Ohio's portion of the "Midwest Connect" rail line. The "Step 2" study is needed to evaluate the use of passenger rail to meet Ohio's future transportation needs.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce supports the inclusion of public transit in this transportation budget. We have signed onto a letter with many other members of Ohio's business community asking for an increase in funding for public transit. Public transit plays a key role in supporting our workforce and economic development in urban and rural areas. A report by the American Public Transportation Association notes that 50% of trips on public transit are to and from work. Ohio's growing business community is depending on employees to be able to get to work.

Finally, we are supportive of the \$15 million each fiscal year that this bill contains for the Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership Program. This would continue the mobility partnership program, created in the FY24/25 budget, which supports public workforce transportation in rural and urban areas. The program works across state agencies and local governments to provide regional connection efforts that align with job centers.

Chair Patton and members of this committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of HB 54 and its investment in Ohio's transportation infrastructure. This investment in Ohio is vital to facilitate trade, tourism, connectivity, and continue the economic growth of our state.