

March 14, 2025

Molly Bryden

Testimony to the Senate Transportation Committee on H.B. 54

Chair Patton, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, my name is Molly Bryden, and I am the climate and sustainability researcher with Policy Matters Ohio. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute working toward a more vibrant, equitable, sustainable, and inclusive Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 54.

We urge you to restore original language in H.B. 54 that would re-establish Ohio's membership in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission. Rejoining the MIPRC is a commonsense decision, enabling Ohio to have a seat at the table for regional transportation planning discussions critical for bringing long-term economic development opportunities to the state. Investing in Ohio's passenger rail infrastructure is an investment in Ohio's future. Bypassing this opportunity to advocate for improvements in Ohio's passenger rail services and infrastructure will harm Ohio's standing as a national leader in economic development and exacerbate growing transportation burdens among Ohio families.

Ohio chronically underinvests in public transportation, overlooking the transportation needs of the 7.4% of Ohio households without a vehicle¹ – the 13th-highest share in the country. At the same time, the state's share of statewide transit funding is lower than in 41 other states, leaving transit agencies more reliant on local funding sources than in 43 other states.² Increased state funding would enhance transit agencies' capacity to meet growing demand for affordable, reliable transit services among 81.5% of Ohioans who think public transit is critical for connecting both rural and urban communities.³ However, Ohio's transportation funding priorities consistently neglect Ohioans' transportation needs and preferences – and neglecting to rejoin the MIPRC for a meager \$25,000 per year upholds Ohio lawmakers' unreasonable, uneconomical opposition to clean, efficient transportation systems.

The MIPRC provisions eliminated from the Senate's version of the transportation budget earmark \$25,000 per year to cover Ohio's dues – the only financial obligation incurred, and an inconsequential investment from the \$11.5 billion transportation budget

¹ American Community Survey 5-Year Data, 2019-2023.

² [National Transit Database TS1.1 – Total Funding Time Series](#), Federal Transit Administration, 2023.

³ [Ohio Statewide Transportation Preference Survey](#), National Comparisons, 2024.



proposed by the Senate. While insignificant compared to statewide transportation spending, the \$50,000 investment over the biennium would bring broad economic benefits to the state, even in the absence of further rail development.

It's time that this General Assembly reverse the harms caused by the Kasich administration's decision to leave MIPRC and forego \$400 million in federal funding for high-speed passenger rail development⁴ that left Ohioans with inconvenient, infrequent services from existing routes that run through the state. Ohio's appointees to the MIPRC would have the opportunity to negotiate with commissioners representing neighboring states to secure more convenient, reliable schedules for the three passenger rail routes currently operating in the state, incentivizing ridership and raising tax revenue.

Moreover, opportunities to expand passenger rail would reinforce Ohio's economy by creating jobs and increasing tax revenue, while improving transportation access and connectivity across Ohio's communities. In fact, a comprehensive analysis of Amtrak's proposed corridor connecting Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati — the "3C+D" corridor — projects that the expansion would create more than 1,000 jobs and generate tax revenue ranging from \$600,000 to \$1.2 million per year, annually adding more than \$100 million to gross state product.⁵

Taking the first step to improve passenger rail services in Ohio would also support the retention of younger Ohioans who favor public transit to single-passenger vehicles and attract new residents, easing concerns about Ohio's potential population decline while providing a much-needed boost to Ohio's workforce. Finally, expanding passenger rail corridors to connect Ohio's largest MSAs would reduce traffic congestion and wear-and-tear on Ohio's highways, generating savings on highway maintenance down the road.

Ohio lawmakers have a responsibility to expand access to clean, efficient, and reliable transit options. Investments in sustainable and accessible transportation options like public transit and interstate passenger rail are critical for connecting Ohio's communities to social and economic opportunities, while improving health and environmental outcomes by reducing emissions from the state's second-most emissive sector. As a MIPRC member state, Ohio's commissioners could collaborate and coordinate with our neighbors, advocating for improvements with Ohio's working families in mind, bringing an array of opportunities to the state. The Midwest will continue to see investments in passenger rail infrastructure, with or without Ohio's input. The question, then, is whether Ohio will have a seat at the table for discussions that implicate the interstate corridors that run through the state.

⁴ ["Kasich Administration Shirks Fiscal Obligations for Transportation Consortium: Back dues owed to Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission,"](#) Ohio House of Representatives, Democratic Newsroom, May 2013.

⁵ ["Economic Impact of the 3C+D Corridor Project,"](#) prepared for All Aboard Ohio by Scioto Analysis, October 2023.