



**Testimony before the Ohio Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee**  
**Joanna Pinkerton, President/CEO, Central Ohio Transit Authority**  
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Chair McColley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Fiscal Year 2020/2021 transportation budget. My name is Joanna Pinkerton, and I serve as the President and CEO of the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), the leading mobility provider for the Central Ohio region. In 2018, our organization provided nearly 19 million rides within our service area which encompasses all of Franklin, and portions of Delaware, Licking, and Union counties.

I come from an engineering background, having served first in the private construction industry, then with the Union County Engineer's Office before taking a leadership role with ODOT to work across the state with local and regional communities to identify transportation investments that support economic growth. From there I joined The Ohio State University, overseeing daily operations of the Ohio State Center for Automotive Research and then leading the Honda – Ohio State Partnership, the nation's largest industry/academia based research partnership focused on transportation systems. Before accepting the role of President and CEO of COTA nine months ago, I served as the Chief Operating Officer of the Transportation Research Center Inc. in East Liberty, Ohio. I share this background with all of you to provide a picture of the multiple lenses from which I view this broad issue.

With challenging circumstances comes great opportunity. The fiscal cliff Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Director Jack Marchbanks has shared and which this esteemed Committee is addressing through legislation should be viewed as such - - *an opportunity* - - to address infrastructure needs, but to also BE BOLD and invest in forward-thinking, well-funded, solutions-based mobility that supports Ohio's shift to an innovation economy.

I would like to address three important issues contained within the proposed legislation before sharing with you my insights on steps Ohio can take to ensure our transportation network is built to keep pace with an innovation economy:

First, it is important to share that COTA is supportive of the need to increase the motor fuel tax to repair and maintain the state's roads and bridges. I believe our infrastructure is essential – it is part of a larger equation to ensure mobility – and have provided more details below.

Second, the current version should be amended to increase the gas tax reimbursement to transit agencies. H.B. 62 does not increase the current reimbursement level, which is 27 of 28 cents. While roughly half of COTA's fleet of 322 busses are fueled by compressed natural gas, the reduction in reimbursement from the state will come at a significant operational cost to our organization. By our estimate, the cost incurred by COTA alone would be roughly \$360,000, which would negate any potential revenue gain from the state if the \$7 million dollar increase shared by Director Marchbanks in House Finance Committee is realized.



Third, that the proposed funding levels for public transit fall well short of the necessary investment in the 61 transit organizations who provide vital services that support economic and workforce development, access to healthcare and education, and mobility to millions of Ohioans annually. The state currently funds transit at the lowest amount it has since 2000; and, Ohio currently spends less on transit per capita than the state of South Dakota. ODOT itself highlighted the growing need for greater investment by the state in mobility, recommending in a 2014 Transit Needs Study that state funding for public transit by 2025 should equal \$185 million annually, 10% of the anticipated combined spending by Ohio's transit agencies (\$1.84B). The amount under consideration today is \$40 million as expressed by the Director in House testimony, well short of ODOT's own recommendations. I have included the ODOT Transit Needs Snapshot with my testimony for you.

Now let me provide further background on the need for public transit by addressing a common misconception that mobility needs are only an urban issue. It may surprise you that a study by Healthy Choices/Healthy Communities revealed that nearly half of residents in rural Southeast Ohio counties rely on transportation methods other than a personal car as their primary means of mobility. Fifty five percent of respondents use services like a public bus system, medicab, taxi, or hospital van ministry at least once a month. Ohio's senior population is expected to increase by 66 percent by 2030, demonstrating transportation becomes a barrier to accessing essential services for those whom are unable to drive themselves. I've included information on this study as additional background for you.

Information provided by my colleague with South East Area Transit (SEAT), serving Guernsey, Muskingum, and Noble Counties, provides further context to the growing need in rural counties. In 2018, SEAT provided more than 146,000 rides within its service area, and 26% of those were for ADA or elderly customers. While the transit system provides a total of five fixed routes, the demand response volume is growing rapidly. Demand response passengers increased nearly 60% just this past December compared to December 2017. Ensuring aging in place seniors can move freely within rural counties is a growing concern that should be addressed now by increasing transit funding to \$185 million per year.

COTA, an urban and suburban provider of transit, witnessed an increase in ridership in 2018 of more than half a million trips – an unprecedented increase 3%. We are experiencing greater demand from the suburbs of Columbus, and our new bus rapid transit service (the CMAX) implemented last year displayed more than a 17% increase in ridership along that one corridor. Our local and federal investment in the Cleveland Avenue corridor was strategic and thoughtful, coordinated with multiple partners and connects people to 200,000 jobs, three post-secondary institutions, and two hospitals. The increasing current and future demand not only includes aging in place, but also includes busy professionals, college students, car-free households by choice, the newest and largest generation of adults whom prefer to move in a shared economy, and those who depend on our services daily as a means to increase quality of life. Dozens of businesses have reached out to COTA to expand our services to their front door; needs we are trying to meet, but are constrained by lack of state funding. These are needs that a \$185 million per year spread across 61 transit agencies can help address.

Make no mistake, the demand for mobility is in nearly every county of our state, and I ask that this Committee take a bold step toward increasing the amount of funds directed toward transit to the suggested \$185 million level.

The state should also look longer term at how to address meeting the needs of an innovation economy. **Simply put, this is an opportunity to craft the future of mobility and position Ohio to lead.**



What I've learned throughout my career is that the digital revolution has radically altered every aspect of our existence. Yet, transportation is one of the last industries operating largely as it has for the past hundred years, which is one of many reasons we are gathered in this room here today. We continue to build, plan and fund systems without tying them to the health of our people and our economy. There is a global mobility revolution underway – being led by consumer needs and demands. The tech industry, automotive companies, developers, and businesses are responding with products and services. And, it is time for us to shift from a century old model and embrace this revolution to ensure Ohio competes both nationally and globally.

How should Ohio evolve?

**We must optimize the existing roads we have.** Most agree that repairing our current infrastructure to handle capacity is essential. However, whatever funding method is put forth should think beyond stop-gap measures. Experts agree, building more lanes does not solve every problem, and will result in this same discussion being had again in less than a decade. It is important the committee acknowledge the world has already shifted to a sharing economy and is now moving on to an innovation economy. This is demonstrated most significantly in the mobility industry, where people now share cars with strangers, and in the most productive economies, they move across multiple modes to optimize trips. My leadership team and I have witnessed this in person in other places across the nation. We recently evaluated how a peer regional transportation commission is partnering with an artificial intelligence team; installing data analytics systems on existing roads and traffic signals. The result? - - A double digit percentage improvement in capacity simply by analyzing real-time conditions on the existing system. COTA is looking into how this optimization of existing infrastructure might work here in Central Ohio.

Related to the concept of optimizing our existing infrastructure, **Ohio must embrace using technology and data to move people more efficiently, spurring an evolution toward multi-modal mobility.** We need to count and fund the movement of people and goods, and not just the movement of tires and vehicles. We should measure success by the economic impact and social determinates of health. Our current funding model incentivizes building systems which creates our own congestion and funding problems. It is odd that we would promote a system that allows potentially empty vehicles to clog and damage roads, while high occupancy vehicles are not prioritized when they could be part of the funding solution. And, we still put the burden on individuals, which is an economic model that data and demographics suggest does not exist anymore. In Ohio, the implications are stark – if households do not have access to transit, almost one-third of household income is spent on transportation; further reducing their disposable income.

In most of Ohio and specifically in Central Ohio, the percentage of citizens over 65 and under 35 years of age moves from 22 to 70 percent in just a couple decades. Our current infrastructure is not set up for that enormous shift in our demographics. That means well-beyond repairing our system, we must be bold enough to imagine how the young and old will use the existing system. Many will no longer drive by choice, others will age-out of the driving public - - and all should have new, innovative, more cost effective mobility choices. This changing reality will have a tremendous impact on communities, including the state's 26 urban and 35 rural transit systems.

**We also recognize the future of mobility is connected infrastructure and data.** Vehicles, roads and people are beginning to communicate, creating efficiencies we can hardly conceive of today. Much like the time when we could not imagine we would carry a computer in our pockets, the mobility revolution



will reward those whom maintain and repair infrastructure which counts – investments which support people. Without a funding formula that realizes the connectivity of the future, we would be selling the state and its future residents and businesses short.

In just the last two years, I have been involved in projects like the US Route 33 Smart Mobility Corridor and Smart Marysville, where vehicle manufacturers deploy safety technology in vehicles to identify solutions (on the existing road without widening) that may be significantly more cost effective than major new capital projects. And, system redesigns like COTA implemented this past year resulted in us providing more than a half million more trips for people using the EXISTING road system and less buses, by simply optimizing our system with data and the addition of a few connected traffic signals. Imagine what will happen if we increase connectivity and introduce analytics with artificial intelligence.

Any future funding models must include these components if our transportation infrastructure is to be sustainable, encourage future economic development, embrace the innovation economy and increase quality of life.

And, I want to be clear, my agency is not alone in this thinking; it is the business community as well. Mobility accessibility is a common theme among companies looking to expand and/or relocate. Chambers of Commerce list accessible transportation as one of the top needs of their members. COTA and other transit organizations consistently receive service requests from businesses each year. We have outstanding requests from dozens of companies, neighborhoods, communities and/or counties asking us to expand transit access to them.

The Ohio Competitiveness Report by Montrose Development Advisors shares - - *“states looking to capture job growth and address the economic loss caused by growing traffic congestion need to recognize investing in mobility solutions is critical to a region’s success. Funding should increase and create innovative programs to connect workers with existing job centers.”*

A dedicated funding source by the state will help us answer this call.

The current approach to funding transportation has put the state in this difficult position and does not focus on people based outcomes. Our funding should maintain and repair - - but just as important, invest in optimization of the system to ensure people and businesses have access to jobs, healthcare, education, and a sustainable quality of life. The state’s further investment in transit and multi-modal people moving solutions is an incredible return on investment. Ohio’s transit systems generate \$3.6 billion in economic activity and create and support 180,000 private sector jobs. A \$185 million dollar investment by the state will be a terrific return on investment and allow us to do much more.

Mobility should not be a barrier for Ohio’s residents and businesses, as it is now for growing portions of our rural and urban populations. As bold leaders and thinkers my hope is that Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021 are when Ohio puts funding mechanisms in place to put Ohio on a path toward prosperity enabled by mobility-rich transportation solutions.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.