



OHIO SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
March 10, 2021

Interested Party Testimony
Dawn Distler

Good morning Chair Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to provide testimony.

My name is Dawn Distler. I am the CEO of METRO Regional Transportation Authority serving Summit County, Ohio. I am here to respectfully urge your support for state funding for public transit in SFY 2022 and 2023.

The year 2020 solidified that public transportation is an essential service. Despite a massive disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, METRO's commitment to Summit County remained the same. We transported essential workers and fulfilled essential trips. We created and adjusted policies and procedures to enhance our safety efforts for passengers and team members. We kept Summit County moving, even when the world slowed down.

Public transit is the lifeline of our community, providing equitable access to opportunity to our residents.

- 59% of METRO passengers identify themselves as a minority;
- 76% of our riders have an annual household income lower than \$30,000, and
- 95% do not have a driver's license or another reliable means of transportation.

Now, more than ever, it is critical that we continue to provide open and accessible transit service that connects our community members to jobs, ensures access to healthcare, and supports the economic development of our region.

Here are some recent stories from our passengers that showcase how crucial public transit is to our community:

- Michelle is a single mother of two toddlers who spends about 80 hours a month on METRO to get her children to school and for her to get to work in Cuyahoga Falls. Michelle used to take SARTA to get to school at Stark State College.
- Crystal is homeless, and her only way to get to the Social Security Office was METRO.
- Marc and his family have used METRO bus service for most of his life for all kinds of uses ranging from shopping, access to entertainment, visiting friends, school and more. Marc's mother uses METRO to get to work and takes his grandmother to and from doctor's appointments. Most

recently, bus service has been helping Marc get to job interviews and to his current job in Fairlawn. Without METRO, these trips would not be possible for Marc and his family.

Ohio needs transit, now more than ever and the state funding is a significant piece of our puzzle to maximize our investment in the communities we serve.

We are extremely thankful for the State's record investment in transit in the last budget cycle. In the past two years, METRO RTA has used the general revenue funds to leverage capital awards as a local match to federal funding, bringing to Ohio eight federal dollars for every two state dollars. This gives us the ability to free up local funding for operating costs, allowing us to continue providing essential service through during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and provide enough buses to ensure that social distancing and public safety.

State funding has also provided key funding for a Strategic Plan and Comprehensive Operational Analysis. These plans will guide our investments over the next ten years, setting the framework for innovation to meet the needs of our community now and into the future – a reimagining that has become even more important as we navigate beyond COVID-19.

METRO RTA respectfully requests that the General Assembly restore transit funding and work to advance the 2015 ODOT Transit Needs Study recommendation of funding 10% of transit budgets. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Dawn Distler

CEO, METRO RTA

Dawn.Distler@akronmetro.org

