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March 9, 2021

Ohio Senate
Transportation Committee
Honorable Stephanie Kunze, Chairwoman

RE: H.B. No. 74 Enact FY 2022-2023 transportation budget

On behalf of the Butler County Regional Transit Authority, we applaud the Ohio House of Representatives' revision to H.B. 74 and urge the Senate Transportation Committee to support increased funding for public transit in the FY 2022-2023 transportation budget.

For years, public transit in Ohio has been withering on the vine as commuters and young professionals demand better transportation options, and corporations and small businesses seek reliable transportation for their workforces. All the while, many smaller public transit systems are consumed with the growing need to transport elderly and disabled riders to grocery stores, dialysis, medical appointments and more with fewer and fewer resources.

At BCRTA we have done a lot with very little, but agencies like ours can only be pressed for thriftiness for so long. Eventually, we will be spread so thin that what we must provide is so poor and fledgling it is discounted as incompetent or worse.

The infusion to the last biennial transportation budget was a welcome sign that public transit had not been forgotten and that Ohio valued the needs of those who travel without a car or cannot drive. Unfortunately, it was only a small beginning to what should be a major multi-year commitment. This budget's originally proposed statewide investment of \$7.3 million per year would be wholly inadequate compared to the \$63 million provided in the last budget. For reference, BCRTA's annual budget is more than \$6 million and barely scrapes the surface of local need. Although we understand the importance of reallocating dollars during and following a pandemic, a more than 88% decrease would have been punitive, unreasonable, and would have long-lasting effects on transit systems statewide. We should be increasing transit funding, not divesting.

"But what about all the federal CARES money transit received?" some may ask. CARES is plugging a hole. CARES was a temporary solution to a temporary problem. Although it was welcome assistance for my system and others, it was a one-time shot in the arm to prop up operations while a pandemic was raging. For some systems it will continue to be helpful operating assistance for stability until the economy fully rebounds. CARES is not sustaining development of transit systems and it is not addressing capital investment. Most importantly, CARES is not helping agencies leverage their other federal grant dollars that require state or local contribution.

One of *the most* important functions of Ohio's contributions to smaller transit systems is its ability to match much larger grant dollars from the Federal Transit Administration. Cutting transit funding in this budget cycle as had been proposed would represent lost federal



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opportunities for Ohio transit systems. A \$50,000 grant from Ohio can leverage another \$200,000 for equipment and other capital expenses for BCRTA or other transit systems with access to federal grant dollars. However, if that \$50,000 is not available that \$200,000 cannot be drawn and could potentially be reallocated elsewhere, outside that community or Ohio. In addition, many of these dollars are spent with local vendors and suppliers.

Reducing transit funding will also limit opportunities to fund new equipment and innovative new service demands. BCRTA is currently evaluating ways to fund new service to support transportation between local businesses with limited parking and the new Spooky Nook major sports complex in Hamilton, Ohio. BCRTA staff were considering grants through ODOT but would be unlikely to be considered in our view due to the high demand from many other systems that are still in great need of replacement buses and other basic state of good repair items to maintain regular service. This new proposed service in Hamilton would help support and drive the local economy but could be in jeopardy due to any proposed cuts or just the many years of divestment in Ohio's public transit that are starving our peers for capital investment. Starving transit starves innovation and local growth.

In addition, unreliable current funding levels also prevents BCRTA from being able to provide health insurance to its employees. No employee at our agency receives employer-sponsored health insurance. Even with recent additional federal pandemic assistance, this is unlikely to be a sustainable proposition without laying off significant staff and cutting service by 50%. I ask you: Is this the type of public transit agency we expect will move Ohio into the future?

Please consider investing in public transit for those who cannot drive, those who choose not to drive, those who need a ride to work, school, the grocery store, dialysis or their doctors. Public transit in Ohio is a valuable asset and a worthy investment.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew M. Dutkevicz
Executive Director

Butler County Regional Transit Authority

FYI

- BCRTA provided more than 620,000 trips in 2019.
- In 2020, Ohio provided \$367,445 to BCRTA, 5.5% of our annual revenue.
- In 2019, Ohio provided \$401,507 to BCRTA, 6.3% of our annual revenue.
- In 2018 Ohio provided \$4,095 to BCRTA, 0.07% of our annual revenue.