



Greater Cleveland
Regional Transit Authority

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Testimony of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority

The Ohio Senate
Transportation Committee
HB 74, Transportation Budget

March 10, 2021
10 a.m. Finance Hearing Room

Chairman Kunze, Vice Chairman Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Greater Cleveland RTA, and our General Manager, CEO India L. Birdsong, I am here to advocate for our organization, our ridership, our employer and education community, and our region.

Public transportation is central to our region's economic and cultural vitality. The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority ("GCRTA") is a strategic asset, providing mobility for thousands of daily trips to work and school, to the grocery store, to the doctor, and to enjoy all Cleveland and its surrounding communities have to offer.

We were pleased to read the DeWine Administration's recent COVID-19 Minority Health Strike Force Blueprint recommendation to "improve access to public transportation to better connect communities of color to health care, jobs, and education." We urge you to ensure the state budget reflects this important commitment.

Two years ago you increased Ohio's public transit funding from \$40 million to \$70 million per year statewide. However, that was short-lived due to the pandemic, resulting to cuts to \$66.8 million in State Fiscal Year 2020 and \$56.0 million in State Fiscal Year 2021.

Despite those cuts GCRTA was able to use the \$25 million in funds we received to purchase 16-40 foot CNG buses, allocate \$6 million for preventative maintenance which made funds available for rail track replacement on our light rail system, allocate \$4.5 million toward our rail car replacement program and initiate our Baby on Board pilot program to provide transportation to expectant mothers.

On February 16, 2021 we awarded a second light rail track replacement project using \$6 million of State Fiscal Year 2021 funding and this morning we opened our newly reconstructed East 79th Street Rapid Station on property that we purchased from our State Fiscal Year 2020 funding.



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Obviously, we were disappointed to see the executive budget slash this funding by nearly 90%, to \$7.3 million for State Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023, which would have been a giant step backwards. Given everything we as a transit industry are doing, we believe an increase should be considered and we are collaborating with our peer agencies through the Ohio Public Transit Association (“OPTA”) to see this appropriation increased.

We are grateful that those efforts have resulted in the Ohio House of Representatives partially restoring the Transit funding to \$56 million for both State Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 with a combination of General Revenue Funds and Federal Flexible Funds. However the truth is the state should be funding transit at double that amount per ODOT’s own Transit Needs Study.

Last month the American Society of Civil Engineer’s Ohio Section released their 2021 Report Card for Ohio’s Infrastructure. They graded 16 categories of infrastructure for a statewide overall grade of C- with the Transit Grade of D. The Report Card cited the long-term chronic lack of state funding for transit, the resulting decrease in transit ridership, and increased age of transit vehicles throughout the state.

Despite the pandemic, we continued operations, maintaining payroll for over 2,000 workers. After implementing COVID-19 protocols, GCRTA maintained construction activities for the remainder of 2020. Twenty-four of these projects supported an additional 2,223 worker slots, provided nearly 56,000 hours in wages and included 86 companies from the northern Ohio region. Our in-state supplier expenditures totaled over \$190 million last year. GCRTA dollars help support business development and economic activity across the state.

In addition, Cleveland is uniquely blessed with a rail car system—but one that is now beyond its useful life. We urge the State to contribute to funding the rail car replacement program, including clarifying that rail cars are eligible for Transportation Review Advisory Council (“TRAC”) resources or finding other funding for our rail car replacement program

We urge your support for public transit in this bill and I would be happy to answer any questions you have. Thank you.