

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 Claudia Amrhein. I am the President of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA) and GM/CEO of Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority in Portage County, Ohio. I am here to respectfully urge your support for state funding for public transit in SFY 2022 and 2023.

Employers in every community are trying to fill jobs. Small businesses on Main Streets across Ohio are struggling to stay open or reopen. Hospitals, health departments, and pharmacies are providing preventative and emergency medical services while trying to distribute vaccinations to vulnerable people.

Employment, economic development, and healthcare: these crucial social priorities have something in common: public transit intersects with each one of them every single day. Transportation that is open and accessible to all people is essential to ensure all Ohioans can contribute to our local economies and meet their daily living needs.

In many cases, the answer is having a reliable car. But that is not always an option. Portage County in NE Ohio is largely rural and geographically widespread. PARTA runs traditional fixed route services through Kent and Ravenna but to meet the needs of people in predominately rural areas of Portage County, we provide countywide dial-a-ride services – shared ride, scheduled in advance transportation.

Let's meet some of our clients:

- Penny, age 77:
  - Lives in Windham at the far eastern edge of the county, a food dessert.
  - First registered with PARTA in 1995 and has been riding with PARTA ever since.
  - Uses PARTA to get to the grocery store and pharmacy.
- Jeannie, age 80:
  - Lives alone in a senior living facility.
  - Does not drive and uses a walker; she has mobility restrictions due to health problems.
  - PARTA is her only means for transportation.
  - Jeannie needs to get to UH Portage Medical Center for treatment.
  - Before retiring and moving to Kent, Jeannie lived and worked in Cleveland and regularly used GCRTA. During her lifetime she has been a choice rider and transit dependent.
- Arnold and Norma, a couple both age 83 who live in Rootstown:
  - This long-married couple are inseparable, and sadly, both are showing signs of dementia.
  - Norma needs regular dialysis treatment and Arnold accompanies her on every trip. He waits the 4 hours it takes for Norma to receive her treatment before the pair take PARTA home together.
  - Arnold and Norma can't afford a private medical transport service, which could cost over \$100 per trip. Norma is eligible for reduced fare and Arnold accompanies her as her caretaker, so each trip to dialysis only costs the couple \$3 riding with PARTA.
- Annie
  - Is a legally blind, graduate of Kent State who chose to stay in the area after graduation.
  - Annie has relied on PARTA since 2002.

- She currently lives in Kent and works at a nursing home facility in Aurora.
- Annie uses PARTA to make the 12-mile trip to Aurora to get to her job.

Penny, Jeannie, Arnold & Norma, and Annie are just a few examples of Ohioans who rely on public transit services because they cannot drive to get to work, to medical services, or the grocery store.

Local funding sources vary widely. In Portage County, we're fortunate to have a .25% sales tax to support our operations. But in many rural areas, there is no dedicated local funding to support the trips that Annie and Arnold & Norma need.

Stable and predictable State general revenue funding is critical to maintaining essential transit services across Ohio.

For PARTA, the state funding support received in 2020-21 helped cover the local match cost for capital projects and in turn, freed up our limited local dollars to ensure PARTA can continue taking Jeannie to the hospital and Penny from her home in Windham to the grocery store and Rx.

In fact, Since March 2020, 80% of our dial-a-ride trips have been dedicated to taking our most vulnerable populations – elderly and disabled and those without access to a vehicle or unable to drive – to life-sustaining dialysis treatments, medical appointments, jobs, and basic living necessities.

OPTA 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 very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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