



Board of County
Commissioners
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Testimony before the Senate Transportation Committee
Regarding Ohio House Bill 74
March 17, 2021

Lucas County Board of Commissioners
Tina Skeldon Wozniak, President
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Chairman Kunze, Vice-Chair Reineke, ranking member Antonio, and all esteemed members of the Senate Transportation Committee, the Board of Lucas County Commissioners respectfully submits this written testimony to formally ask the Committee to restore the amendment to House Bill 74 that would allow Lucas County to join the Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA) by a majority vote of existing member jurisdictions instead of the unanimous approval that is required today.

TARTA enables everyone in our community to have access to transportation regardless of their age, race, physical ability, or economic background. Allowing a majority of the seven community members to agree to the county's participation will allow the Authority to become a truly regional entity and one that serves all residents of Lucas County. This amendment is critical to TARTA's ability to make future investment to expand services and offer more opportunities to link employers to employees, consumers to commercial activities, and patients to medical appointments.

Prosperous metropolitan regions throughout the country include strong public transit systems as an integral part of their transportation portfolio. Transit is an integral driver upon which businesses and workers both rely to effectively compete and provides a foundation under which workforce development, health, affordable housing, and education initiatives flourish.

The region has recently enjoyed robust economic development as it was named the number one metropolitan statistical area in economic investment for metro areas with populations from 200,000 to 1,000,000 by *Site Selection* magazine and the number two manufacturing region in the country by *Business Facilities* this year. For northwest Ohio to continue to prosper and contribute to the growth of the state economy, we need a transit system such as those in every other metropolitan region of Ohio.

New TARTA CEO Kimberly Dunham has made great strides to make the service more responsive to the needs of our community's businesses and citizens. She deserves the opportunity to reinforce the transit agency to serve the current and future transportation needs in the greater Toledo area. Yet, TARTA has been insufficiently funded for decades, necessitating the use its federal capital funding to compensate for a growing operating shortfall. The condition of its vehicles, facilities, and equipment have suffered as a result. Vital upgrades in technology that will allow TARTA to deliver operational efficiencies are perpetually out of reach as well.

To compound these problems, TARTA currently has a fragmented service area that doesn't include some of the region's most heavily visited destinations and a funding structure that burdens too few taxpayers while failing to raise funds sufficient to meet the needs of area residents and businesses. The inclusion of Lucas County as a TARTA member is the first step to remedy these ills. For the agency to establish a more sustainable funding structure that will lead to the dependable service our community deserves, state law mandates that at least one county must be a member.

To remedy these challenges, the Board of Lucas County Commissioners asks that you make it possible for the voters of Lucas County to have a voice to invest in the future. We have continuously demonstrated our support for public transportation, convening a transit task force led by private businesses, labor, and social services leaders and citizen advocates who were charged in 2019 with evaluating the service and offering possible solutions to its weaknesses. More recently, on March 2 of this year, we passed Resolution 21-197, urging the reinstatement of the provision in the Transportation Bill that we are requesting today.

A strong and truly regional TARTA is instrumental to continue the momentum to grow the local economy and facilitate the implementation of a modern, efficient public transit system, and one that offers greater mobility across the entire region for everyone. Again, the Lucas County Commissioners implore the legislature to reinstate the amendment to House Bill 74 that would allow TARTA to amend its membership with the consent of a majority of the member jurisdictions.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.