

Ohio Senate Transportation Committee Testimony
Jim Kinnick, P.E., Executive Director
Eastgate Regional Council of Governments
June 16, 2021, 9:00 a.m.

Chair Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Committee, my name is Jim Kinnick, and I serve as Executive Director of the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 162, sponsored by Vice Chair Reineke.

First, for those who may not be familiar, I'd like to introduce my organization. Eastgate Regional Council of Governments is an association of local governments in Northeast Ohio, Ashtabula County, Mahoning County, Trumbull County; and all cities, villages, and townships in those counties are members. Although our members are unique, they share many common interests, including the success of the Ohio Turnpike.

Eastgate is directly responsible for a variety of federal, state, and local planning and projects. As a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), an Area wide Water Quality Management Agency, an Economic Development District, and an Appalachian Regional Commission Local Development District, Eastgate maintains required certifications and planning documents to qualify the region for federal and state funding.

As I have learned and as I fully support, the Commission is seeking legislative amendments to its authorizing statute, Chapter 5537 of the Ohio Revised Code. This legislation supports the construction and technology upgrades that the Commission is currently undertaking to modernize its toll collection system. This authority is necessary for the implementation of Open Road Tolling (ORT) and All-electronic Tolling (AET).

The Commission's modernized toll collection system, when it debuts in early 2023, will level the playing field for the Ohio Turnpike and its customers. You see, toll authorities around the nation are also moving to ORT or AET. In fact, the Pennsylvania Turnpike is now an AET system.

So why is Senate Bill 162 important to Eastgate and its interests?

First, our communities would like to ensure that the Ohio Turnpike stays current with technology to serve and protect its customer base in the most modern way possible. A modernized Ohio Turnpike is good for the State of Ohio, good for its citizens, and good for the Eastgate Council of Governments.

Secondly, Eastgate has a vested interest in safeguarding the Commission's ability to effectively and efficiently collect tolls as its primary source of revenue. The Mahoning Valley relies on the Ohio Turnpike to safely and efficiently move its goods to market and its people to places of employment; as well as their favorite travel destinations.

In fact, the new Open Road Tolling system will relieve our citizens of occasional traffic backups that occur in the area and open up travel between Pennsylvania and Ohio.

In summary, Ohio Turnpike leadership has done its due diligence with Senate Bill 162. This bill allows the Commission to work with the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles to require vehicle owners to pay their delinquent tolls before they can register their vehicle; and it protects customers' confidential information and establishes an appeals process that is fair and clear.

Eastgate appreciates your consideration of the Commission's efforts to better serve its customers and provide what will truly be a safe, modern and efficient route along the northern corridor of Ohio. I respectfully urge your support of Senate Bill 162.

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have via phone or email. I can be reached at 330-207-0188, Or at jkinnick@eastgatecog.org.