



The Honorable Scott Oelslager  
77 S. High Street, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Oelslager:

I write today in support of House Bill 62, which as proposed by Governor DeWine, would raise the motor fuel user fee \$0.18 and be indexed to inflation. This increase is necessary to address the \$1 billion budget shortfall the Ohio Department of Transportation is currently facing.

The Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (OMEGA) is a collaborative body of member governments that serves as a facilitator between state and federal government agencies and local entities to provide opportunities in economic and community development through networking, education, planning, research and allocation of resources.

Throughout the 10- county OMEGA region, counties and municipalities often struggle to fund routine maintenance projects, and emergency projects such as slips caused by the recent freeze-thaw cycle and unusually rainy weather. These slips can cause long detours and create significant safety concerns when township roads become impassable or when bridges are closed for long periods because of a lack of funding for repairs.

Many municipalities in the OMEGA region are currently facing significant clean-up and repair costs as a result of flooding, landslides and road slips. These unexpected events can devastate a community's already-lean budget, and an increase in funding would allow these entities greater flexibility and stability when addressing emergency repairs.

Eastern Ohio has seen unprecedented growth and investment as a result of Marcellus and Utica Shale drilling and extraction as well as the siting of natural gas power plants and attendant processing facilities for the oil and gas industries; however, this sudden and sustained growth has far outpaced county and municipality budgets' ability to maintain and repair roads subject to an equally unprecedented increase in the amount of traffic – particularly heavy truck traffic.

The investment provided by an increase in the motor fuel user fee is necessary to keep our rural communities competitive as the oil and natural gas industry continues to mature and ancillary businesses identify Eastern Ohio as a profitable location. This investment is vital to our rural communities and our ability to attract and retain sustainable, diverse economic development.

A healthy, reliable transportation budget enables our communities to expand and improve roadways and provide for strategic planning that positions our communities to embrace economic opportunity and foster subsequent economic growth.

There exists a need for the General Assembly to continue to assess how electronic and alternative fuel vehicles can also pay their fair share to maintain the roads they use and to continue to explore additional resources for public transit.

OMEGA also serves as a Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) for eight of the 10 counties in the OMEGA region, and as such supports the General Assembly creating a pilot program which allocates \$1 million to each RTPO with modified scoring criteria to advance critical infrastructure programs in rural Ohio.

OMEGA's RTPO counties currently have \$55 million in unfunded projects of regional significance, including safety improvements, major construction projects and maintenance and preservation projects. With the myriad constraints on municipalities' budgets, the prospect of completing many of these projects is dim without a dedicated funding source.

Despite documented needs over several years, the motor fuel user fee has not increased since 2003. This has created an unacceptable backlog of critical projects in our rural communities, and I appreciate your time and attention to an action which demonstrates a clear and direct benefit to Ohioans – both urban and rural. The time has come to increase the motor fuel user fee and address Ohio's transportation needs.

Sincerely,



Jeannette M. Wierzbicki, P.E.  
Executive Director  
Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association