



May 22, 2023

Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Galonski, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 64. My name is Laurie Jadwin and I am honored to serve as the Mayor of the City of Gahanna. I am submitting testimony in opposition to House Bill 64, as the Bill would significantly impede Gahanna and communities like ours from conducting needed public infrastructure improvements that benefit all of our residents.

As cities continue to evolve, the need for public infrastructure improvements continually change as well. Local governments must have the flexibility and authority to meet the demands of our residents and to take steps necessary to provide for their needs. This is particularly true in communities within the Columbus Region that are experiencing historical economic growth as a result of Intel and similar projects. While these new projects are bringing positive economic impacts to our communities, they also bring increased demands on infrastructure. For cities like Gahanna, which are largely established, built-out communities, we will need to look to rebuilding and reinvesting in existing infrastructure in order to expand to meet these pressures. Having the ability to be nimble in responding in a timely and a cost-effective manner will be critical not only to our communities' long term success, but also to our ability to economically survive. The provisions proposed in House Bill 64 will work directly contrary to those goals, as they are likely to increase costs for local governments (and thereby our taxpayers), likely to delay the timeliness of projects, and likely to subject local governments to increased litigation.

In addition to the potential for negatively impacting the ability of local governments to respond to developing infrastructure demands, we also are deeply concerned about language in House Bill 64 that would remove recreational trails from the definition of "public use" in Ohio's eminent domain law. Trails are a critical asset to Central Ohio, both for recreational purposes and commuting, and are widely used across the Region.

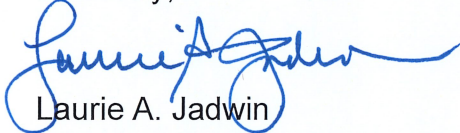
Trails are integral to a community's quality of life and offer numerous benefits to residents and visitors alike. Trails are more than recreational. They provide space for health and wellness activities and are a key component in our transportation network, connecting neighborhoods to jobs, schools, health care, retail, and greenspace. In Gahanna, a recent survey conducted as part of our city's Parks Comprehensive Master Plan reaffirmed the importance of trails to our residents. Specifically, the top two priorities identified by our residents for future investment by the City were developing more multi-use trails and connectivity, and improving the existing trail system. The feedback from our residents is in line with a statewide survey conducted by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, where more than 82 percent of respondents indicated trails are "extremely important" or "very important" to their daily lives. When asked what prevents them from using trails, 42 percent of respondents answered that there are not enough trails, and 35 percent said trails are too far away. Both of these surveys demonstrate that trails and greenways are a resource that people – your constituents – value. Restricting our ability to expand and enhance them will only hinder us from improving overall quality of life for our residents and workers.

As transportation needs evolve in any community, local governments must be prepared to respond. New development, jobs, and housing will always bring new public service challenges and greater transportation needs. While local governments and park districts rarely use eminent domain for trails, it is a necessary tool of last resort when making significant investments in complex networks. House Bill 64 would eliminate this option and make it more difficult to fill gaps in regional trails, such as the Central Ohio Greenways network.

Chair Hillyer and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to submit opponent testimony on House Bill 64. We strongly urge you to reject these measures and protect our ability to meet constituent needs.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (614) 342-4045 or Mayor@Gahanna.gov.

Sincerely,



Laurie A. Jadwin
Mayor