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Ohio House Finance Committee - Proponent Testimony H.B. 23
Laura Koprowski, Chief Executive Officer
Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the committee: I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony at this hearing on a subject that means so much to so many Ohioans, which is state funding for public transportation.

My name is Laura Koprowski, and I am the Chief Executive Officer at the Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority also known as TARTA. TARTA's services connect people to essential destinations such as jobs, education, and healthcare.

At TARTA, we are experiencing rapid transformation and growth as our voters took a historic step in 2021 when they voted to expand TARTA's services to all of Lucas County and the City of Rossford in Wood County. Now, TARTA can reach transit deserts in our rural and suburban communities that have lacked affordable and accessible mobility options. It also means TARTA is now a resource for the many businesses and employers in these areas.

In fact, that expansion of service is already underway thanks to funding from the last state transportation budget bill. This funding made it possible for us to launch an innovative service called TARTA Flex. TARTA Flex is an on-demand service designed to connect suburban and rural areas with TARTA's bus routes. It can also be used door-to-door within the TARTA Flex zones.

By using the TARTA Flex app or calling TARTA, customers easily request their ride by providing their pick-up and drop-off locations. This is modern transit when the customer can have the service adapt to their needs and schedule. We have added special features for our older adults and people with disabilities. In addition, our customers can count on a qualified TARTA driver and vehicle to take them safely to their destination.

With TARTA Flex, we now serve the Eugene Kranz Toledo Express Airport and the many employers located at the Airport. We reached out to the Toledo Lucas County

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Port Authority to work in collaboration to make this happen. TARTA Flex also reaches our major Amazon Distribution Hub in the City of Rossford in Wood County. TARTA Flex is a pipeline to connect workforce to jobs which is top of mind for so many business owners.

To me, what we've done with the TARTA Flex service represents the kind of creativity and innovation that this committee can expect from Ohio public transit systems, and the kind of return it can expect from every dollar spent.

State funding for transit is making other critical TARTA projects possible such as:

- Modernizing to an electric fleet and the necessary electric charging infrastructure;
- New paratransit vehicles to transport our most vulnerable populations; and
- On-board technology for surveillance and safety.

TARTA works closely with business interests such as the Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Regional Growth Partnership to facilitate its crucial role in connecting workers to jobs. We have earned the support of our local transportation business organization, the Transportation Advocacy Group of Northwest Ohio.

If Ohio expects to continue to grow its economy and workforce, then it needs to provide the resources to help facilitate that growth through public transit. The time is now to invest in public transportation through H.B. 23.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the members of this committee for allowing me to submit this testimony today.

