



Senate Transportation Committee
Proponent Testimony, SFY 2024-25 Transportation Budget
Carolyn Conley, Transportation Director,
Hocking Athens Perry Community Action

Good morning, Chairwoman Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the state transportation budget for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025.

My name is Carolyn Conley, and I am the Transportation Director at Hocking Athens Perry Community Action, a non-profit organization committed to empowering individuals and promoting self-sufficiency. In line with this mission, HAPCAP operates public transportation systems in Athens and Hocking Counties and provides statewide intercity bus service connecting many of Ohio's rural communities to its urban centers. I am here today to speak about the importance of public transportation in rural Ohio and to urge the Senate Transportation Committee to continue to support public transit.

Living in rural Appalachia Ohio, while beautiful and peaceful, can be isolating even if you can provide your own transportation with a personal vehicle. It is even more isolating if you do not have access to reliable transportation. With the help of state funding, we expanded service in Athens and Hocking County in 2020, providing transportation to all residents within the two counties. We help get people to work, grocery stores, pharmacies, and medical appointments. While open and accessible to all, most people we serve are elderly, individuals with disabilities, or families living on the edge. They are the most vulnerable in our communities. With the help of our services, they can be self-sufficient, have a better quality of life, and contribute to our local economies.

In a recent conversation with a Navy Veteran living in Hocking County, he reported he is losing his eyesight and is now unable to drive. He frequently uses Logan Public Transit to take him grocery shopping and to a local dinner to meet friends for breakfast. In his words, he would be "stuck without it." An Athens On Demand Transit passenger rides once a week to equine therapy and for shopping trips to Walmart. He noted that he is able to live more independently because of public transit.

Our rural communities support public transportation and work hard to provide local match for our programs. Still, unfortunately, we do not have dedicated local funding, such as a tax levy. Without the help of state funding, we would leave federal dollars on the table and have no choice but to reduce service. The state general revenue funding is critical to maintaining and, over time, potentially growing our services as the need grows.

Chairwoman Kunze, thank you again for the opportunity to speak today in support of transit investment in the transportation budget. I appreciate your attention and welcome any questions you or members of the committee may have.

Thank you very much for your consideration.