



**House Bill 23**  
**Interested Party Testimony**  
**March 21, 2023**

**Ohio Senate Transportation Committee**  
**Mayor Matt Starr, City of Mount Vernon**

Chair Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 23. My name is Matt Starr, I am the Mayor of the City of Mount Vernon in Knox County. I am testifying today to urge you to restore the \$10 million appropriation for regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs). Endorsed by the Ohio Rural Development Alliance, this amendment was a much-needed improvement for rural transportation development in Ohio. Reverting to the “as-introduced” version will hold back our RTPOs and their member communities from realizing their full potential. For many rural and Appalachian communities that have less resources than their urban counterparts, staff assistance with planning can be difficult to come by.

There are three main reasons why I believe this committee should increase the amount to at least \$10 million. First, many of the areas in these RTPOs are interstate-free areas. So, what we need help with is the existing infrastructure like for county roads, city streets, township and village roads. When the state highways are closed for construction, it is very difficult to get from location to location in these rural areas. For example, in eastern Knox County, if US 36 is closed, motorists are rerouted many miles out of the way - some continue to endure dirt roads. We’re not asking to build in redundancy - only to help improve the existing infrastructure.

Second, our transportation replacement schedule in rural communities is not every 15 years but every 50 years (sometimes longer). However, we know how to stretch these investments and make them count for a longer lifetime. We understand that there are matching funds that are required, so we are used to leveraging those resources to garner larger investments to make transportation safety projects happen at once rather than over many years. By the way, we have a lot of experience stretching those investment dollars and completing projects.

Third, the RTPO serving Knox County – the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO) - has developed a Transportation Plan for the region through collaboration

and cooperation among the different communities and members. We know we need to think in “regional” terms. As such, CORPO has been a tremendous resource. Unfortunately, we had funding needs greater than the entirety of the statewide RTPO appropriation last year. Over \$5 million in requests were submitted with less than \$1 million to go around and only one staff member could be funded for the entire seven-county region. Having the financial support from this bill will allow these great ideas to continue to come from our communities.

\$10 million per fiscal year would do big things for rural Ohio towns that we may not be able to do with our own limited resources.

As you consider the next round of amendments, I strongly encourage you to restore this \$10 million of funds for RTPOs so that we can meet our rural and Appalachian communities’ transportation needs.

Thank you again, Chair Kunze and committee members for the chance to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.