



Mid-Ohio Regional
Planning Commission

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Proponent Testimony – House Bill 26
Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation
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Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Reece, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the benefits and importance of House Bill 26, the 2018-2019 state transportation budget.

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), where I am pleased to serve as Executive Director, is a voluntary association of more than 60 political subdivisions. We are Central Ohio's regional council and provide programs, services, and funding related to transportation, energy, data, and economic growth. MORPC also serves as the federally designated metropolitan planning organization, or MPO, for transportation planning in the urban and suburban areas of the Columbus Region in Franklin and Delaware Counties and parts of Licking, Union, and Fairfield counties. This means MORPC has transportation responsibilities and funding per federal law. We also work on transportation planning for our rural areas, especially those facing significant growth. Recently, seven counties in our region, surrounding the MPO, worked with MORPC and ODOT to form the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO). We are staffing this endeavor, and our region is encouraged by added transportation planning capacity through the approval and development of this program by ODOT. For the first time, urban, suburban, and rural areas are connected to transportation and infrastructure planning focused on region-wide safety and economic growth.

Our goal is to connect Central Ohio's people and products to each other, to jobs, and to the global market. It is also very important to maintain our existing roadways, improve safety, and invest in a comprehensive and advanced transportation system. For all of these priorities, we believe the proposed transportation budget has a lot to offer.

These goals take foresight, planning, and significant investments to ensure our transportation system remains a critical driver for jobs and economic growth. As you know, the financial need is great at both the state and local levels. Although Ohio will receive additional funding via the federal FAST Act and we anticipate slightly higher state transportation revenues, the need for additional investment is significant and outpaces these increases. Proposing a first-time-ever compressed natural gas (CNG) tax of 28 cents per gallon does help with increasing revenue. However, we favor an approach phasing in this additional user fee over time, because many Central Ohio communities have significant investments in CNG fueling systems for both public and private fleets. Ultimately, one budget alone cannot fix the needs gap, but this budget creates a path forward on new solutions for some of the most pressing transportation issues we face in Ohio.

MORPC has a long history of working closely with the state to ensure that our residents and visitors are safe while traveling. We support ODOT's Highway Safety Program, which provides over \$135 million annually to help reduce the occurrence of fatal and serious injury crashes on public roadways. We look forward to continuing our collaborative work with ODOT and other agencies to ensure the safe travels of our families and neighbors on our transportation system. We continue to discourage distracted driving and drunk driving, while encouraging greater seat belt use. Simply put, there is much work to do because too many of our loved ones are dying on our roads. We appreciate ODOT's focus and partnership on safety.

Transportation technology is quickly changing in every area. This change is happening at a time when we urgently need better ways and more options for moving people and goods. We consider ourselves lucky to be working on transportation policy during this time of great innovation and are hopeful it will lead to increased efficiency, heightened safety, and better services. It is also quickly becoming a competitive advantage for the whole state and is especially exciting when Ohio can capitalize on emerging technologies and advanced data through the Smart Columbus initiative, Ohio State's Center for Automotive Research, the Transportation Research Center, and the US-33 Smart Mobility Corridor, among others. We commend the support for these activities in House Bill 26.

More specifically, with this bill focusing on the US-33 corridor and I-270 in Central Ohio, we can create one large testing ground for smart transportation technologies for our entire state. This is due in large part to the high-capacity fiber optic cable that will be installed – ensuring the necessary data is collected to adjust for real-life variables. This kind of technology will not only create jobs and allow for a more efficient driving experience in the future, but it will also reduce costs and ensure safety. It is not only good for Central Ohio; it is good for *all* of Ohio and ensures that our state remains a leader in transportation innovation and research. This all will quickly develop and strengthen Ohio's ability to create and attract new jobs and new firms from around the world, and become a leader in smart transportation technologies.

This transportation budget would implement many aspects of what can be considered big ideas for down the road, but it also includes what someone would naturally expect to find in a transportation budget. For instance, it highlights the 90 percent of capital construction money that will go toward preserving and maintaining our existing roadways. It also helps to address the need for transit assistance by increasing public transit funding by \$10 million through flexible federal funds, which we support as an advocate of a multi-modal system with many options for all residents to get around. ODOT recently studied the statewide needs for transit in urban, suburban, and rural areas and we believe there is a strong case for more investment. This transportation budget is an important step.

House Bill 26 proposes authorization for variable speed limits and for pilot opportunities to add traffic on hard shoulders of highway corridors. In Central Ohio, this approach has had tremendous benefit for commuters using bus transit on I-670, where buses have been able to use the shoulder as an additional lane during rush hour. That is why we are looking forward to working with ODOT on the details of the proposed pilot to make hard shoulder running available more broadly on I-670 during rush hour. In conjunction with variable speed limits, our hope is these new approaches will be implemented in a way that ensures the safety of all motorists and emergency vehicles while preserving expedited access for commuters using transit and shared transportation.

We commend Governor Kasich and Director Wray for putting together a forward-looking transportation budget that embraces the significant changes we will face in the industry during the next ten years. We especially urge support for investments in smart transportation technologies to ensure greater safety for Ohioans, to create jobs and economic growth, and to strengthen Ohio's role as a leader in innovation.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.