

Testimony to the House Finance and Appropriations Sub Committee on House Bill 35

Amanda K. Woodrum

Good afternoon, Chairperson McGregor, Ranking Member Reece and members of the committee. My name is Amanda Woodrum and I am a researcher at Policy Matters Ohio, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization focused on issues facing working families here in Ohio. Most of my research focuses on energy and poverty. I also help convene Ohioans for Transportation Choice, a statewide network of advocates calling for greater state investments in alternative transportation options. Ohioans for Transportation Choice is currently made up of a diverse group of advocates including environmental groups, advocates representing the poor and people with disabilities, transit coalitions across the state including those in Lorain County, Columbus, Cleveland and Cincinnati, and minority workers in transportation. The complete list of the 21 organizations currently endorsing our message is at the bottom of my written testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding House Bill 35.

The State of Ohio spends billions of public dollars each year on Ohio's transportation system. However, routinely less than 1% of those dollars go towards public transportation. In fact, Ohio ranks 47th in the nation for its commitment to public transit. We have underinvested in public transit as well as other transportation choices like safe facilities for pedestrians and those who commute on bicycle. As a result, we have created a transportation system that is dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists (with nearly 1,000 pedestrian deaths between 2000 and 2009 in Ohio, and more than 12,000 bike crashes from 2005-2010 with 94 fatalities). It leaves Ohio's public transit system lacking and too often in crisis, and largely forces Ohioans to drive.

But cars are expensive—expensive to own, expensive to operate, and expensive to maintain. They also rely heavily on polluting fossil fuels imported from elsewhere. For middle-income families, the costs of driving for essential trips represents up to 20 percent of basic family budgets. For low-income Ohioans, the cost of driving is often prohibitively expensive. For the elderly and those with disabilities, driving may not be an option at all. Transportation also accounts for roughly 25% of all emissions in Ohio and half of the \$40 billion we spend on energy each year in Ohio. Roughly \$20 billion leaves the state each year to purchase the oil to fuel our cars and trucks. This is a drain on our economy. And with rising and volatile gas prices, there will be continued pressure on the basic family budgets of Ohio households. That is why we are calling on you to invest in more affordable, accessible, and environmentally friendly transportation choices, and choices that rely much less, or not at all, on imported oil.

That is why we are asking that you consider creating a Transportation Choice fund within Ohio's multi-billion dollar transportation budget, and that you start by setting aside at least \$75 million in flexible federal transportation funds for that fund, annually, for FY2014 and FY2015. And that you ramp up Transportation Choice funding to 10 percent of the state's multi-billion transportation budget by 2020.

By investing to increase Ohio’s transportation choices, we can reduce Ohio’s economic vulnerability to oil, while promoting jobs, giving firms and workers low-cost and accessible commuting options, improving public health, reducing emissions, and providing affordable, accessible, and environmentally-friendly transportation options.

We believe Ohio needs a 21st century transportation system made up not only of roads and highways but also a complete network of affordable, accessible, and environmentally-friendly transportation options, including public transit, passenger rail, streetcars, hybrid buses, electric vehicles, and walk-able, bike-able streets. Building a complete network of alternative transportation options will also spur economic development, employ people, reduce urban sprawl and congestion, increase urban vitality and create more livable communities for all Ohioans. During Ohio’s economic recovery, projects to expand alternative transportation options can provide a much-needed economic infusion by creating jobs, using energy resources more wisely, and reducing the level of energy dollars leaving the state each year.

Funding for “Transportation Choices” should include: 1) Surface Transportation Program funds for capital and infrastructure investments in public transit, passenger and freight rail, biking, walking, electric vehicle infrastructure, and public and private fleets conversions to employ homegrown power; 2) Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality Program dollars for capital spending and new public transit operations and for diesel emission reduction; 3) Transportation Alternatives funds to help meet bicycle and pedestrian needs; and the accessibility needs of transit dependent riders; and, 4) Highway Safety Improvement Program funds to also help meet bicycle and pedestrian safety needs.

Mr. Chairman thank you for allowing me to testify on this legislation. I am happy to answer any questions that you or any of the other members of the committee may have.

**Alliance for Regional
Transit – Cincinnati**



**Lorain County
Transportation Co-op**



**Northeast Ohio
Transit Coalition**



**The People’s Department of
Transportation**

