

Testimony to the Senate Transportation Committee on House Bill 35

Amanda K. Woodrum

Good afternoon, Chairperson Manning, Ranking Member Cafaro and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 35. 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. In the transportation sector, those two issues come together. That is why 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 poor people 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 22 organizations currently endorsing our message is at the bottom of my written testimony.

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 also underinvested in other transportation choices like safe facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

As a result, we have made it difficult to get by without a car in Ohio. Most Ohioans have little choice but to drive. But cars are expensive—expensive to own, expensive to operate, and expensive to maintain. They also rely heavily on 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. In fact, nearly 9% of Ohio households have no access to a car, and nearly 9% of workers commute to work via alternative modes of transportation.

On the whole, transportation accounts for nearly half of the \$40 billion we spend on energy each year in Ohio. We import 98% of the petroleum we use from out of state. Roughly \$20 billion leaves Ohio each year to fuel our cars and trucks, about 5% of the state's gross domestic product. This is a drain on our economy. And with rising and volatile gas prices, there will be continued pressure on both our economy and the basic family budgets of Ohio households.

Another drain on our economy is that young professionals are moving to more vibrant, walkable communities, and too often leaving the state. Research from the National Association of Realtors shows “millennials own fewer cars and drive less than their predecessors. They'd rather walk, bike, car-share, and use public transportation — and want to live where that's all easy.”

Unfortunately, in Ohio, because we have underinvested for decades in transportation options, public transit is lacking and too often in crisis. Biking and walking is not only not easy here, it's dangerous.

Between 2000 and 2007, there were nearly 1,000 pedestrian deaths in Ohio, 38% of which were elderly or children; and between 2005-2010 there were more than 12,000 bike crashes with 94 fatalities. Transportation also accounts for roughly 25% of all emissions in Ohio. This is why we are asking you to invest in more affordable, accessible, and environmentally-friendly transportation choices, choices that rely much less, or not at all, on imported oil.

We ask 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. This would be just roughly 2% of the transportation budget. We recommend that you ramp up Transportation Choice funding to 10 percent of the state’s multi-billion transportation budget by 2020 to better reflect the composition of Ohio’s transportation system users.

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. 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, including young professionals. 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.

To start with, funding for “Transportation Choices” can 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. Chairperson Manning, 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