

Transportation Testimony to Toledo City Council

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I am Amanda Woodrum, sustainable development researcher for Policy Matters Ohio and co-chair of Ohioans for Transportation Choice. Policy Matters is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with the mission of creating a more vibrant, equitable, sustainable and inclusive Ohio. Ohioans for Transportation choice is a statewide network of advocates from a diverse cross-section of interests including environmental, anti-poverty, local governments, young professionals, cyclists, people with disabilities, and transportation experts.

We have underinvested in public transportation for decades, both as a state and as a nation. We have built a system that revolves around driving cars and trucks. However, cars are expensive to operate and maintain, often prohibitively expensive for low-income working families, and may not even be an option for the elderly, people with disabilities, and youth. A system built almost entirely around roads and highways drains our urban core cities and town centers of their vitality, endangers pedestrians and cyclists, and encourages a more sedentary lifestyle. Cars and trucks depend heavily on polluting fossil fuels imported from elsewhere and that are volatile in price, putting our economy at risk.

Ohio does a particularly bad job. Our state ranks 47th in the nation for its commitment to public transportation. We spend less than 1 percent of the state's multi-billion transportation budget on public transit. Ohio's transportation system, in its current form, is inequitable, unsustainable, and bad economics. Ohioans spent more than \$50 billion on energy in 2011, roughly 10 percent of the state's gross domestic product; more than half of that went to fuel our cars and trucks.

Ohio needs a 21st-century transportation system. Research indicates that young people want to live in vibrant communities with walk-able, bike-able neighborhoods with access to public transportation. Transportation is critical for working families. It gets people where they need to go when they need to get there – including to work, school, the doctor's office, and the grocery store. In our car-centric state, the roughly 8 percent of Ohioans without access to a car are hampered in their ability to get where they need to go.

Toledo City Council can promote a more equitable, more sustainable and smarter transportation system by adopting an aggressive complete street policy. You can demand that Ohio make public transportation a higher priority, that policymakers focus on ensuring safe routes to school and funding the infrastructure to promote safe walking and cycling. Roughly half of the state's multi-billion-dollar transportation budget comes from the federal government, and most of these dollars could be used to increase transportation choice in Ohio rather than putting them into roads and highways as Ohio does now. Toledo City Council can pay close attention and weigh in on federal transportation funding debates where public transit funding is under attack. We should be doing more to bring our transportation system into the 21st century, not less.

*Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, non-partisan research institute
with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.*