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# POLICY MATTERS OHIO

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*Full report on web at: <http://www.policymattersohio.org/OhiosCommuters.htm>*

## **Ohio Lags in Public Transit Investment**

### **Policy Matters report finds that more transit could help revitalize state**

Ohio lags dramatically behind most other states in investment in public transportation according to a new report from Policy Matters Ohio. The report, which includes a survey with local transit directors in Ohio, an analysis of national transit data, and a review of the literature, finds that expanded public transit could revitalize cities, provide commuters with more options, assist lower-income riders, and reduce carbon emissions in Ohio.

High summer gas prices increased the demand for public transportation in Ohio, but simultaneously forced Ohio's transit agencies to cut their already inadequate level of services because of the associated increase in operating costs. Policy Matters' analysis of data from the National Transit Database on nine large Ohio transit systems, found that from May 2007 to May 2008, while the number of public transit rides taken by Ohioans averaged an increase of 5%, both the number of vehicles operated and miles traveled declined, by 6% and 8% respectively.

Policy Matters' survey of both urban and rural transit systems in Ohio, conducted in the fall of 2008, found a unanimous increase in ridership, but eight out of twelve transit authorities were reluctantly cutting or considering cuts in hours, routes, or vehicles in operation, while others were putting expansion plans on hold or considering fare increases, citing a lack of revenue to cover rising expenses.

"Ohio must make public transit a higher priority," said the report's author, Amanda Woodrum, Policy Liaison at Policy Matters. Ohio ranks 40<sup>th</sup> in the nation in mass transit spending as a percentage of total state transportation expenditures. Less than one percent of Ohio's transportation budget goes towards public transit. Per capita, Indiana spends 3.6 times more, Michigan nearly 10 times more, and Pennsylvania more than 33 times more than Ohio does on public transit.

Already low state expenditures for public transportation have declined 48 percent over the past 10 years, adjusted for transportation-related inflation. The proposed state budget continues that downward trend into 2011. Because of the lack of state support, 70% of transit funding in Ohio came from either local revenue sources or fares, making it difficult for local entities to start, maintain, or expand services to meet increasing demand. Other report findings include:

- In Ohio, a constitutional prohibition means that zero state gas tax revenues go towards public transit. In contrast, 18 percent of federal gas tax dollars go to transit nationwide.
- Ohio ranks fourth among states for total carbon emissions, putting approximately 275 million metric tons of carbon into the air annually.
- For every \$1.25 million spent on public transportation projects, approximately 51.3 jobs are created—nearly 19 percent more jobs than new roads or bridge projects create, according to the Surface Transportation Policy Project.



- Ohioans currently send at least \$8 billion out of our state's economy, each year, to import fuel for highway travel.
- At July's fuel prices, a median-income Ohio family spent between 8.2 and 17.6 percent of pre-tax dollars, just for essential trips like commuting to work. A low-income driver would have had to spend 30 percent of pre-tax income to drive a car for essential trips at those prices.
- Most Ohioans - 83% - drive in their car alone to commute to work.

The report lauds Governor Strickland for proposing to develop a strategic blueprint for Ohio's future transportation system, allowing for the creation of regional transportation innovation authorities, and backing them with some financial assistance. The report goes on to argue that the proposed state budget does not make public transportation a priority, nor does it create a dedicated and continued source of funding for public transportation purposes.

The report ends with several recommendations to bolster transit spending in Ohio:

1. Amend the state constitution to allow 20 percent of Ohio's gas tax revenues to go into a new Transit Trust Fund, similar to federal transportation policy.
2. Require that workplaces receiving economic development subsidies be located in transit-accessible communities.
3. Fund the Ohio Transit Clean and Green Initiative - \$50 million over five years to purchase 500 environmentally-friendly, electric or bio-fuel propulsion buses. The legislature should restore Governor Strickland's proposed funding levels of \$20 million over the next biennium, for the first two installments of that initiative, an amount that was reduced by the Ohio House of Representatives to \$15 million.

"Transportation spending should better reflect the positive role public transit can play in creating a more equitable, vibrant and sustainable Ohio," Woodrum said. "In this recession, investing in mass transit can be part of a much needed economic infusion. When compared with private cars, public transit saves energy, spurs economic development, employs people, assists firms and workers by lowering the cost of commuting, reduces suburban sprawl, increases urban vitality, reduces traffic congestion, and is far less harmful to the environment."

*Policy Matters is a non-profit policy research institute, dedicated to creating an economy that works, on the web at [www.policymattersohio.org](http://www.policymattersohio.org).*