



Groups Share Views on Public Transit, Fuel Tax with Joint Study Committee

As the Road to Our Future Joint Legislative Study Committee nears the release of its report, various groups around the state submitted written testimony weighing in on topics ranging from public transit to the state's taxing structure.

The joint committee, created in 133-HB62 (Oelslager), is expected to meet on Tuesday, Nov. 17 to review an initial draft of its report, and will meet again on Tuesday, Dec. 1, to approve its final report.

Witnesses submitted testimony to the joint committee because it has not been able to hold in-person hearings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Copies of the testimony can be found at www.hannah.com> Important Documents & Notices>Library.

Groups speaking on public transit thanked lawmakers for their increase in funding for public transportation in HB62 and asked for that funding to be continued in the next transportation budget next year.

India Birdsong of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, the largest transit agency in the state, said that despite HB62 stepping up funding, the pandemic has led to those funds being reduced and that highlights the need for dedicated transit funding in both the General Revenue Fund and within the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) budget.

Among the items Birdsong requested that lawmakers consider are policies to encourage denser development along priority transit corridors and allow for transit vehicle to infrastructure (V2X) communication to improve transit vehicle travel times; use of ODOT traffic and congestion data being generated during the COVID-19 pandemic to incentivize modal shift to transit during peak periods in a post-pandemic return to work, school and events; for the definition of transit vehicles to differentiate between buses and rail cars within ODOT and within the TRAC eligibility criteria; increase and dedicate state funding for transit both in the General Revenue Fund and in the ODOT transportation budget; and restoring federal flex funding in the ODOT transportation budget at a minimum as recommended in the ODOT Transit Needs Study.

"Finally, we ask the state of Ohio to consider serving as a 25 percent partner in our \$300 million Rail Car Replacement program. We recently were awarded a \$15 million USDOT BUILD grant to support this initiative. However, of the \$132.6 million that we have committed, to date \$4.5 million is

from the state of Ohio," Birdsong said.



Amanda Woodrum of Policy Matters Ohio called for expanding funding for more accessible, affordable public transit and safe pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure. She recommend funding public transit at the level recommended by ODOT's 2015 transit needs study, which suggested the state should support a full 10 percent of Ohio's billion annual public transportation needs, which she said would require an annual appropriation of roughly \$185 million in each fiscal year.

Jason Warner of the Greater Ohio Policy Center also called for more of an investment in public transportation. He said investment in public transportation must be considered alongside the important investment that is needed in maintaining and upgrading transportation infrastructure to meet the needs of market demand and modern economic realities. He said investing in both can be a win-win for the state with increased transportation options with less congestion and less wear and tear on Ohio's roadways.


He said the General Assembly should maintain the current level of funding for public transportation when considering ODOT's budget next year, and highlighted funding sources the state could use that the group believes could generate more than \$123 million in new state and local funding for Ohio's public transit agencies. Those sources include restoring the use of Federal Highway Administration flex funds; applying the state sales tax to parking services; and ending the out of state auto sales tax exemption.

In other testimony, Joe Cannon of the Ohio Automobile Dealers Association told the committee his group opposes a suggestion to eliminate the current tax system relating to motor vehicle purchases by non-residents and encouraged lawmakers to retain current law.

He noted that previously, consumers who entered Ohio to purchase vehicles were not subject to Ohio sales tax, which he said made Ohio an appealing destination. The group worked with the Legislature and the Ohio Department of Taxation to "neutralize" tax in the sale process, settling on a policy that "if your state is taxing Ohioans, then Ohio will tax you, as long as your home state gives credit for tax paid in Ohio."

"While we preferred the old law which applied no tax, the current reciprocity effort has worked well for both consumers and our industry for years," he said. "Please note this is not a 'unique exemption' which has been conveyed, as this system is applied across the country, since vehicles are taxed where they are titled versus at the point of sale."

Thomas Balzer, president and CEO of the Ohio Trucking Association, weighed in on HB62's increase in the diesel tax. He said with the increase, the majority of income for fuel taxes has shifted to higher levels toward the trucking industry.



"Should the state feel the need to implement another increase to the motor fuel tax, we would ask that the state first bring parity between the tax on diesel and other motor fuels. The bifurcated system of taxation unfairly targets Ohio's trucking industry, which has been so instrumental to the state during the COVID-19 pandemic," he said.

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