Friday, June 21, 2019

The Honorable Larry Householder, Speaker of the House, Ohio House of Representatives
The Honorable Emilia Sykes, Minority Leader, Ohio House of Representatives
The Honorable Larry Obhof, President, Ohio Senate
The Honorable Kenny Yako, Minority Leader, Ohio Senate
The Honorable Scott Oelslager, Finance Committee Chairman, Ohio House of Representatives
The Honorable Jim Butler, Speaker Pro Tempore, Ohio House of Representatives
The Honorable Jack Cera, Finance Committee Ranking Member, Ohio House of Representatives
The Honorable Matt Dolan, Finance Committee Chairman, Ohio Senate
The Honorable David Burke, Finance Committee Vice Chairman, Ohio Senate
The Honorable Sean O’Brien, Minority Whip, Ohio Senate

To the Members of Leadership & the Committee on Conference on House Bill 166:

As the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate come together to address differences in House Bill 166, the biennium budget for fiscal years 2020 and 2021, Greater Ohio Policy Center respectfully requests that the legislature reinstate public transit funding which was eliminated by the Ohio Senate the Senate-passed version of House Bill 166.

The Senate zeroed out funding to line item 775451 in the bill under consideration. This line item provides $6.5 million in each year of the biennium to support the Elderly and Disabled Fare Assistance Program, ensuring Ohio’s most vulnerable residents have access to transportation services to access work, healthcare, and basic personal services. This funding, along with the previously approved funding for public transit in the transportation budget (HB62) is vitally important for transit systems across the state.

While explanations for why this funding has been zeroed out in House Bill 166 have varied, Greater Ohio Policy Center believes that it is vitally important that this funding be reinstated by the conference committee.

Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Director Jack Marchbanks, in his testimony to both the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate stated as follows, as it relates to the funding requests for the main operating budget: “the significantly smaller ($6.5 million each year) appropriation in this legislation is still important. This relatively small appropriation item includes $400,000 in annual administrative costs we are required to fund in order to be eligible for federal funding. About $2 million annually is used to fund the Elderly & Disabled fare reimbursement program for small urban and rural transit systems. The remainder is used for grants that help rural and small urban transit systems provide their required match to receive federal grant funding.”

Greater Ohio Policy Center endorses the position of ODOT as it relates to this funding. We recommend the legislature address this issue in the conference committee by either re-addressing the funding originally allocated in House Bill 62 and increase funding to $76.5 million.
per year, or reinstate the funding in House Bill 166 ($6.5 million) and remove the spending restrictions inserted into House Bill 62, which requires $63.5 million to be spent for capital projects and $6.5 million for operational support, providing ODOT with greater flexibility in the allocation of the $70 million allocated by the transportation budget.

Additionally, the Ohio House of Representatives added language to budget which would treat property owned by residential housing developers differently than other property by freezing the taxes for up to three years or until the sexennial reappraisal is completed or until construction begins, or the property is sold. Greater Ohio has opposed similar legislation (House Bill 149) because of our concerns that the bill incentivizes urban and suburban sprawl at a time when we should instead be supporting infill and density development. The Ohio Senate removed this language from the budget.

**Greater Ohio recommends that the Conference Committee support the Senate-version of House Bill 166 and keep this language out of the budget.**

Greater Ohio does not object to any community that deliberately chooses to enter into agreements such as those proposed by HB149 and the House-version of HB166. However, to enact such a provision as a state mandate will undercut the redevelopment plans of many Ohio communities.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and previous support for public transit funding in the Ohio Budget.

With regards,

Jason Warner  
Manager of Government Affairs  
Greater Ohio Policy Center

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1 From testimony before the House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation (April 2, 2019) and the Senate General Government and Agency Review Committee (May 14, 2019).