



WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE OHIO HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
PROPONENT TESTIMONY  
HB 74

February 18, 2021

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to write in support of HB 74, the transportation budget for fiscal years 2022-2023.

As Ohio continues to navigate the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, we appreciate the fiscal challenges facing the Ohio Department of Transportation in the coming years as they work to continue to fund infrastructure improvements and new construction with reduced revenues.

We also want to thank the General Assembly and the DeWine Administration for their work in passing a gas tax increase in the previous transportation budget, which prevented an even greater shortfall in transportation infrastructure funding, for the state and for local governments. Although motor fuel consumption decreased due to travel restrictions during the pandemic, the gas tax increase means local governments have access to revenues that will help them continue to make municipal roadways and bridges safer.

HB 74 contains several provisions that invest in local transportation infrastructure and public safety. The League supports the following:

- **Distracted Driving:** HB 74 would make it a primary offense for an adult to handle any electronic wireless devices while driving and increases fines for those using electronic devices habitually while driving. Additionally, in cases where a driver using an electronic device causes serious injury or death, the language would enforce the same penalties as for drunk driving.
  - This update to Ohio law is much needed. A study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute found that dialing, texting or simply reaching for a phone while driving triples the risk of a crash. Strengthening Ohio's distracted driving laws can reduce crash fatalities. 14 states have enacted such laws before 2018; 11 of those states saw a reduction in traffic fatalities within two years of the passage and enforcement of those laws. This language will enable municipal law enforcement to help keep the roads of our cities and villages safer.
- **State and Local Partnerships:** HB 74 allocates a total of \$357 million in fiscal year 2022 and in fiscal year 2023 to local programs. The Ohio Department of Transportation is also working

with local partners to address 150 dangerous intersections across the state and is providing funding to help local governments address pedestrian safety concerns within their local communities.

- **Federal Aid:** HB 74 allocates \$126 million in federal aid to local governments to cover some of the gas tax revenue lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic's travel restrictions. The funds come from \$333 million in federal aid that has been approved for roadway construction.

We thank the DeWine administration for its continued investment in and support of local transportation infrastructure and public safety, and we urge the General Assembly to support these provisions. However, HB 74 fails to adequately address the critical issue of public transit funding. The League respectfully requests the following change:

- **Public Transportation:** HB 74 significantly cuts annual state funding to public transit agencies down to \$7.3 million, compared to the current allocation of \$70 million for the previous fiscal year and \$63 million this fiscal year. The budget as proposed would also reduce federal funding for public transit through the state from \$65.9 million to approximately \$50 million in each fiscal year over the biennium.
  - This substantial reduction in funding for public transit would only further burden transit agencies, whose costs have risen during the pandemic. Cuts to public transit make Ohio's municipalities substantially less business friendly. Reliable public transportation draws businesses and the workforce to Ohio's cities, ensuring residents can get to their jobs. It is important to note that the need for public transportation is not limited to Ohio's urban areas, but there is a critical need for public transportation in the rural parts of the state as well.

Ohio's dependence on safe, reliable transportation infrastructure will only increase as our state continues to recover from the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions on travel continue to be lifted. We strongly encourage the adequate funding of public transit, and we appreciate the investment HB 74 makes in Ohio's local communities. Thank you for your time, and we urge your support of this legislation.

Respectfully,



Kent Scarrett  
Executive Director  
Ohio Municipal League