



MORPC
MID-OHIO REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

**William Murdock, Executive Director
Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
Governor's Advisory Committee on Transportation Infrastructure
February 6, 2019**

Members of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Transportation Infrastructure, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to you today about Ohio's transportation funding crisis and what we can do to address the state's transportation fiscal cliff. As it is around Ohio, this is a major issue for Central Ohio's rural, suburban, and urban areas.

My name is William Murdock and I am the executive director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission or MORPC. MORPC is a voluntary association of over 60 local governments that provides programs, services, and funding related to transportation, land use, data, sustainability, and economic prosperity. We serve as the federally designated metropolitan planning organization, or MPO, for transportation planning in the Columbus urbanized area. This means MORPC has transportation responsibilities and funding per federal law. We also work on transportation planning for our non-urbanized areas in Central Ohio. Seven counties in our region, surrounding the MPO, recently formed the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO). We are staffing this endeavor, and our region is encouraged by our added transportation planning capacity through the development of this program with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT).

One of our chief public policy goals is to achieve an advanced, inclusive, and exceptional transportation system that connects Central Ohio's people and products to the world. In working to achieve this goal, we collaborate with districts of ODOT to implement transportation projects throughout our region. We know first-hand of the unmet need for transportation funding requests. For example, MORPC currently has about \$25.8 million in federal funding available during our current round, but \$180 million in requests around Central Ohio that cannot be funded. It also has \$29 million in public-works dollars for Franklin County to address \$50 million in requests. This gap in funded projects represent a range of deferred maintenance, needed expansion, and upgrades critical to economic development and safety.

As you heard yesterday, from ODOT Director Marchbanks, the preliminary budget plan for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 is troubling. The vast majority of revenues are allocated for maintenance rather than increasing capacity. This is demonstrated by the decreasing size of the ODOT capital program from a high of approximately \$2.4 billion in fiscal year 2014 to approximately \$1.7 billion in fiscal year 2020. In order to meet its requirement to present a balanced budget,

ODOT is expected to make an across the board 10% cut to discretionary funds. The anticipated reductions will eliminate funding for new projects aimed to adding capacity and relieving congestion on Ohio roads, as well as delay needed maintenance and upgrades to existing bridges and roadways. We applaud ODOT and our local governments for being creative and efficient stewards of funding for our system over the last few years, but these additional cuts jeopardize their ability to effectively maintain our roads and bridges and invest in what's necessary for growth.

Impact

A cutback in transportation investment will have a negative ripple effect throughout the state and Central Ohio is no different. There are many projects that will be affected. For example, the Columbus Innerbelt will not be completed if we do not act. This project is critical to the region and the state to maintain competitive infrastructure by relieving traffic congestion and adding capacity at the junction of two very significant interstates. In addition, this project would help keep us safe by making improvements at three of the state's top 10 crash locations. Another example is the Centerburg Intersection Improvements project in Knox County. Both roadways do not intersect the state route at a right angle and Updike Road is an offset intersection with SR 657. These conditions create safety issues that will be addressed with the improvements. These two projects are Competitive Advantage Projects, which is a joint initiative between MORPC and Columbus 2020 - the economic development organization for the Columbus Region - to advance strategic infrastructure investments across the Columbus region. Simply put, we identified 43 priority projects needed for economic prosperity. The goal of the initiative is to prioritize important infrastructure projects in rural, suburban, and urban areas of our region to work toward making the projects a reality. Finding additional ways to incentive regional prioritization across the state would go a long way in improving Ohio's roads.

The transportation funding cliff complicates already pressing needs in safety. MORPC estimates the societal cost of serious accidents in Franklin County alone in 2017 was \$1.89 billion on top of the tragedies suffered by so many families with 91 fatalities and 710 serious injuries. This safety story repeats itself across the state. Reduced funding will also worsen economic costs of congestion. For our region, we estimate congestion to cost over \$921 million annually due to travel delay and excess fuel consumption as well as health impacts from reduced air quality. Poor road conditions from deferred maintenance cost each driver an estimated \$533 annually. Making needed investments will make our roads safer and reduce the costs of congestion and poor road conditions.

Recommendations

Last year, a group of MORPC community leaders and elected officials – rural, urban, and suburban representing each level of local government - met several times to put together a working document of state policy recommendations that address current transportation maintenance needs and also plans for future mobility needs. As Central Ohio's population grows largely from significant migration from outside of Ohio and natural growth and as infrastructure needs stretch beyond existing funding levels, finding long-term funding mechanisms is essential. Some of these recommendations are provided below.

MORPC recommends an increase to the motor fuel users' fee, which is the primary source of Ohio's highway construction revenue. With the advent of alternative fuel vehicles the motor fuel users' fee may not be the most representative fee, but it is the most convenient collection

mechanism since it is already in place. We can discuss new mechanisms down the road, for now let's worry about repairing the roads in front of us. At 28 cents per gallon, Ohio currently ranks 29th in the nation, while we are 6th in the country in total Vehicle Miles Traveled, at 118.6 billion miles annually. The only border state with a lower fee is Kentucky. We also encourage that the fee be indexed to keep up with inflation.

We also encourage expansion of the permissive vehicle license fee to municipalities and townships. The last Ohio transportation budget (House Bill 26), gave counties the authority to raise this fee by \$5 to help fund road and bridge maintenance. Over a third of Ohio's counties have done this. It's already being used to advance critical road and bridge projects by county engineers. We think it's important to also give Ohio's municipalities and townships this same tool to invest in basic and necessary repairs for the roads and bridges they maintain.

The state of our roads and bridges is without a doubt the crisis we must address first. As the committee continues its work, there are other transportation funding issues we must also confront. Such as identifying a dedicated funding source for public transit. Doing so would address a critical workforce issue in rural and urban areas to connect people to jobs. It would also provide needed services for older adults and those unable to drive. Given the high concentration of job centers in metropolitan areas combined with the great needs for rural mobility, Ohio can no longer remain 41st in the nation for state assistance in funding transit. Also, finding new funding streams for rural and Appalachian communities of the state such as providing a dedicated capital funds to Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO) would better prepare these areas for both safety and economic growth.

Finally, this funding crisis is happening during a period of rapidly changing transportation technology. Ohio is poised to be a leader in innovative and connected technologies with Drive Ohio, Smart Columbus, the Smart 33 Corridor, and so many local efforts. But we can't get to the future of transportation if we can't fund the basics for our roads and bridges.

We commend Governor DeWine for his leadership in forming this committee and we urge his administration and members of the Ohio General Assembly to use MORPC's staff and local governments as a resource as we work to solve this issue together. Although we represent Central Ohio and our unique infrastructure needs, we strongly advocate for solutions to help all of Ohio's rural, suburban, and urban communities and each region's unique needs. This fiscal issue impacts Ohio's ability to keep families safe, to stay competitive economically, and to keep a high quality of life. We urge you to act now to address Ohio's transportation funding crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 614-233-4101 or wmurdock@morpc.org, with questions or whenever we can be of service.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William Murdock". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

William Murdock

Executive Director, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission