Letter of Support for Ohioans for Transportation Choice
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Feb. 14, 2013

Is Ohio’s transportation system helping to create the walkable, vibrant, energy-conserving, affordable communities we will need to be sustainable in the future? Or is it producing more sprawl and dependence on the automobile? These questions have very real implications both for the health and well being of Ohio’s nearly 12 million residents as well as the solvency of its transportation agency. The answer to both can be found in the Fix it First policy President Obama laid out in his State of the Union Address. Fix it First is a policy that Ohio has adopted in the past. The path to its return can be found in Representative Matt Lundy’s budget request titled, Ohioans for Transportation Choice. The benefits of a $75 million annual dedicated fund for municipalities will make real transportation choices including bike and pedestrian amenities and more robust transit systems. The benefits are manifold. They include:

Improving the safety of Ohio streets. According to analysis from the non-profit group Transportation for America, Between 2000 and 2009, 973 people were killed while walking in Ohio, which cost the state $4.18 billion. Reducing pedestrian fatalities just 10% would have saved Ohio $418.39 million over 10 years. Overall, Ohio ranked 30th out of 50 states for pedestrian danger.

Americans want choices. A Future of Transportation National Survey (2010) found that 66% of Americans want more transportation options so they have the freedom to choose how to get where they need to go. In addition, a Natural Resources Defense Council 2012 focus group consisting of registered voters from both parties in Northeast Ohio pegged their expectation for transportation choices, including transit, closer to 10
percent of the state transportation budget. Currently, Ohio’s transportation budget for multi-modal transportation options hovers around 1%.

Support Complete Streets policies. The addition of Complete Streets in to the municipal toolkit offers more resiliency and better value for the state’s transportation funding. The state is in a position to support the complete streets policies enacted in Columbus, Cleveland and soon to be in Cuyahoga County. In Cleveland, the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating agency is the MPO responsible for transportation funding and policy. NOACA adopted a complete streets policy, and its member communities, particularly Cleveland, are experiencing a rise in projects designed to meet the city’s 2011 Complete and Green Streets legislation. Municipalities are sure to follow Cleveland and Columbus‘ example in adopting complete streets, and will need the support of the General Assembly in implementing their plans to redesign streets to accommodate all users.

Pairing transportation with demographic trends. Walkable urbanism is emerging as a strong trend in the real estate market, including Northeast Ohio where population growth in Cleveland’s city center outpaced all other ZIP codes in the county in 2012, and represents a powerful demographic shift that the state would do well to acknowledge and start adopting its policies and funding channels to if it hopes to fulfill its mission of providing the most efficient transportation system. Efficiencies are built in to the transportation system that provides multi-modal options.

The Cleveland bi-partisan focus group favors transportation being used to support well-designed density. Republican and Democrat alike had strong positives for ‘vibrant' communities and more 'convenient' transit--two ideas that scored well here.

The need for multi-modal options are growing in urban and suburban area alike. As suburbs struggle to redevelop underperforming infrastructure, well-designed density such as the $44 million “town center” retrofit underway in Shaker Heights and in Dublin, are poised to lift many boats, including our cities and towns hoping to attract a well-
educated workforce, younger, college-educated bright minds who are primarily choosing to live where transportation options are plentiful.

Sources:

“Dangerous by Design” (2011) Transportation for America
http://t4america.org/resources/dangerousbydesign2011/states/?state=oh

“Clevelanders want more transit, shocked by its lack of funding”
http://www.gcbl.org/blog/2012/06/clevelanders-want-more-transit-shocked-by-its-lack-of-funding

“What makes a complete street?”