

**Statement of Joanna M. Pinkerton, President/CEO, Central Ohio Transit Authority
before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Hearing on “Advancing Public Transportation under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law”
March 15, 2022**

Thank you, Chairman Brown, for the opportunity to testify this afternoon on the enormous opportunities I see for central Ohio under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

This legislation represents a long-overdue commitment to repairing our transportation networks and repurposing them for a future economy, and in ways some may not realize. It addresses many of the ill-effects of decisions of years past – congestion, pollution, and intentionally divided communities. Our transportation networks have not kept pace with rapidly-evolving changes in how we live, work and do business; and, they certainly do not account for the rapid and exciting advancements in technology which directly impacts the movement of goods and people. With this new infrastructure funding, we can begin to shift our old ways of thinking to fix that.

Ohio’s two Senators played a central role in drafting this transformative legislation through listening and raising their awareness of the necessary investment needed to support our nation’s economy. I would like to share some examples of how the Central Ohio Transit Authority can put these funds to work for central Ohio.

CIG Funding for LinkUS:

Central Ohio is a region of 2.2 million people, with an expectation to grow to 3 million in the next two decades. We know that through smart growth and planning principles, transit can build communities which lead to a higher quality of life built around affordable housing and equitable access to amenities and employment opportunities. Our transformational LinkUS initiative is exactly that. Entities across our region are collaborating to address our growth more sustainably – through high-capacity, high frequency transit corridors that will support more dense transit-oriented development.

Two of our planned corridors are already in the Capital Investment Grant (CIG) funding pipeline at the Federal Transit Administration, and a third corridor will be submitted later this year. We worked diligently to align these projects with the outcomes expected in the CIG program and expect LinkUs will benefit greatly from the infrastructure bill’s improvements to the Small Starts portion of that program.

Sustainability:

At COTA, we understand and take seriously our role in protecting lives through improving air quality in our region. Public transportation is the original “green” transport industry, making more efficient use of infrastructure through shared resources, shared trips, less emissions, and a smaller carbon footprint than what is required to subsidize single occupant trips. Our industry knows, that to have a lasting impact, we must commit to converting transit vehicles to clean fuel vehicles. At COTA, we are on track to meet our commitment to be diesel-free by 2025. And, we are preparing our path forward to a net carbon neutral future. Last year, with the help of a Federal low/no grant, we proudly deployed our first electric transit vehicles, and we went a step forward with our local energy providers to ensure they are

powered by entirely renewable energy. The FTA just announced more than \$1B in funding to assist us and others in our fleet transition, and we will work diligently to secure federal dollars to accelerate our move to a clean-fueled fleet.

Workforce:

Our front line operators – in our fixed route service, our on-demand microtransit COTA//Plus service, and Paratransit service – are essential to our mission. And the transit industry is facing workforce challenges like many sectors of the American economy. At COTA, we did not lay off a single transit operator during the pandemic, yet the current labor shortage has forced us to make service reductions. We are short almost 20% of the operators necessary to operate our fixed route service – putting a burden on our community and customers who experience service delays, and stretching our heroic front-line staff thin through overtime and aggressive work schedules. Through innovative recruiting and training, we are starting to see progress in skilling up a new generation and workforce retraining funds will be key to this momentum.

Technology and Innovation:

This law will not only improve the condition of our roadways, it can transform how we use them. It has the potential to dramatically improve safety and increase capacity through efficiencies that do not require expansions.

In central Ohio, our current highway capacity can meet even future demand – **IF** we invest in emerging technology and repurpose our existing assets. Connected and shared vehicles hold the potential to make moving both safer and more efficient. This will help bring us closer to the goal we all share: an end to crash-related injuries and fatalities.

Our vehicle systems are connected and they each generate more than a terabyte of data each day. This creates a huge opportunity to leverage that data to solve many of the issues our inefficient transportation systems cannot handle at the moment. The new federal investment takes bold steps to support transit agencies and other local officials in upgrading transportation technology systems.

Thanks in part to an Innovative Mobility Integration (IMI) grant from the Federal Transit Administration, COTA has partnered with new artificial intelligence start-up companies to use traditional traffic management data built on old ways of operating, and coupling it with predictive analytics to increase safety and reduce travel times across our region.

COTA brings a unique approach to serving our region. Our mission is to connect people to prosperity through innovation, dedication and teamwork – and, the more innovative, the better. The transportation systems built by previous generations made huge strides to bring us where we are, but it is time to re-invest and re-imagine how those systems can be utilized for future generations more equitably. The once “future” trends are already here – generations of workers and those soon to join the workforce want quality of life and outcomes from their services. They believe mobility should be ubiquitous and accessible in the palm of their hand – part of an American lifestyle which includes the pursuit of happiness through enriching and meaningful actions.



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Understanding this, we have developed partnerships with The Ohio State University Center for Automotive Research (OSU CAR), the Transportation Research Center (TRC), US 33 Smart Mobility Corridor, emerging and pre-emergent tech companies to see how we can better move **ALL** lives forward by trying new things. The newly added flexibility in this law allows – for the first time – for agencies on the cutting edge to implement recent research and successful demonstration of technology into standard every day practice. This is one of the most vital parts of the bill – just as we fund asphalt, concrete, steel, and plastic – we have to fund the digital to connect them all.

When the public, private and academic sectors work together, we can create seamless networks to make the movement of people and goods easier and more cost-effective. This is exactly the type of environment needed to attract global businesses and investments.

Conclusion:

The bi-partisan infrastructure bill is exactly the type of Federal support needed for agencies pushing the envelope like ours. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you how we see this historic legislation impacting our growing region.

Thank you.