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January 14, 2014

Mr. Jerry Wray, Director  
The Ohio Department of Transportation  
1980 West Broad St.  
Columbus, Ohio 43222

Re: Access Ohio 2040 Draft

Dear Director Wray:

All Aboard Ohio is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the Access Ohio 2040 Draft Plan. All Aboard Ohio is a statewide organization established to educate Ohio citizens, community and business leaders, and elected officials on the benefits of passenger rail travel. We were founded as the Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers in 1974, and evolved into All Aboard Ohio in 2005. We work collaboratively with organizations across Ohio that are concerned with mobility, growth, economic development, and environmental issues at state, regional and local levels. Together with the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP), the Midwest High Speed Rail Association (MHSRA), and our counterpart organizations in Indiana, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania we focus on the improvement and expansion of passenger rail and public transportation services to meet the needs of citizens and visitors to our states.

We have examined Access Ohio 2040 Draft and find it contains a great variety of useful information and many relevant strategies to improve Ohio's transportation infrastructure and services. The section of maintaining and improving the highway system outlines policies and programs to meet the needs of the driving public and of the trucking industry in a logical and systematic way. Kudos to the ODOT team for that. We also commend the sections on meeting the growing needs of bicycle riders whether they be for commuting, getting to school or recreational purposes.

However, we believe the draft document gives short shrift to passenger rail, intercity bus and local transit; and largely ignores the connectivity between modes that allows travelers to make their trip without an automobile. We note that 9 percent of Ohio households do not own an automobile. A growing elderly population will continue to have difficulty in reaching essential services, shopping, social and recreational activities and visiting friends or family members as alternative transportation options become increasingly scarce. The Access Ohio 2040 Draft documents the decreasing availability of intercity bus and rail services in Ohio. Two maps below (Attachment A) add further definition to this decline. Recent news items and research publications indicate the growing preferences of college students and young professionals for alternative transportation options. Ohio needs to recognize these trends and respond to the growing needs and demands for multimodal transportation solutions to maintain and enhance mobility. Failure to do so will place Ohio at a competitive disadvantage in attracting new investment, population and development.

Other states have clearly outpaced Ohio in development of multimodal transportation systems. Nineteen states have opted to partner with Amtrak in the joint funding of intercity passenger rail services, including our neighbors New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Indiana and Illinois. Federal funds made available coupled with state matches have improved track, upgraded stations or built new ones, and are

bringing new passenger cars and locomotives to intercity services. Travelers can now ride portions of the routes between Chicago and St. Louis and Chicago and Detroit at speeds up to 110 mph. By 2015 travel times will be significantly slashed on these routes. This benefits not only the major end point cities but intermediate stops as well. Bloomington/Normal and Springfield, IL and Kalamazoo, Jackson, Battle Creek, Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Pontiac, MI also receive better connections to other places. As travel times decrease, the frequency of train services grows and on time performances improve more and more riders will choose trains as their preferred travel mode.

It is important to note what is happening around the Midwest as other states move to improve passenger rail service by leveraging federal grants with state funds (Attachment B) The rail travel option is also enhanced by connecting intercity bus services marketed as Amtrak Thruway; one ticket covers both rail and bus travel. Older train stations are being upgraded or new ones built; many becoming multimodal transportation centers where trains and intercity buses are linked to local public transportation services.

The net result is that many more people are able to make public transportation trips using combinations of rail, intercity bus and local transit. Another benefit is the impact of better access on community growth and vitality. Train stations and multimodal transportation centers increasingly attract new commercial offices, retail stores and housing. This phenomenon is recognized in dozens of cities and towns across the U.S. Unfortunately this is not happening in Ohio. Lack of policy commitment which recognizes the importance of rail, intercity bus and local transit working together is a key flaw in the Access Ohio 2040 Draft. Even more distressing is the lack of state funding commitment to multimodal transportation solutions for Ohio problems. We fear this will come back to haunt the Buckeye State in the future.

All Aboard Ohio believes it is absolutely necessary for state government to step up to the plate and elevate the role of multimodal transportation to its proper place in state policy. We believe the lack of any state funding for rail passenger service, and the paltry amount contained in the proposed ODOT budget for public transportation, is more than disturbing; it is woefully inadequate. We all are aware of the constitutional restrictions on the use of gas tax money. It is time to start making a commitment out of State General Funds to move Ohio's transportation future in a more competitive direction. One only has to look at the economic prosperity of California, Washington, Texas, Utah, Colorado, Illinois, North Carolina, Florida, New York, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Massachusetts and other states to see the impact of multimodal transportation on economic vitality and livability. We strongly encourage you to take another look at this approach before finalizing Access Ohio 2040.

All Aboard Ohio has not been sitting by and idly ignoring the plight of intercity passenger rail and public transportation. We have developed a set of projects which we believe will help set Ohio on a more prosperous transportation future. These are not the end all of projects, but those we believe are essential first steps:

- Improve passenger service on the Chicago-Toledo-Cleveland-Buffalo-Albany-New York/Boston Lakeshore Limited route; and also on the Chicago-Toledo-Cleveland-Pittsburgh-Washington DC Capitol Limited route. The first steps are underway to improve stations in Ohio at Bryan, Toledo, Sandusky, Elyria and Cleveland. These improvements include structural work to stations and platforms and track and signal improvements. Amtrak has committed some funds to help undertake station improvements but this will require a state or local match. A second step is to secure an extension of one of the New York-Albany-Buffalo Empire Service trains west to Cleveland thus providing daylight service between Cleveland and points east in the Empire State. This will require a combination of Amtrak and state funding as happens in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and New York.

- Increase the frequency of the Chicago-Indianapolis-Cincinnati-Charleston-Washington DC Cardinal from tri-weekly to daily. This increase is planned by Amtrak but needs a nudge from Ohio and the other states the train serves to carry it out.
- Develop a new higher speed corridor (up to 110 mph as in the Chicago-St. Louis and Chicago-Detroit corridors) linking Chicago-Ft. Wayne-Lima-Columbus and intermediate points with multiple daily round trips by upgrading existing freight rail lines. All Aboard Ohio (AAO) and the Northeast Indiana Passenger Rail Association (NIPRA) are working together on this project which was conceived by NIPRA. NIPRA raised \$100,000 and carried out a preliminary feasibility study which identified costs and benefits of the project. The City of Ft. Wayne and others have contributed a further \$200,000+ to move ahead with preliminary Tier I EIS work. Implementation of this route would also benefit the goals of our subsidiary organization, the Ohio Higher Education Rail Network (OHERN), which focus on connecting college and university campuses which are in need of transportation alternatives. OHERN has proposed as its initial project passenger rail service linking Columbus (Ohio State and Capitol University), Findlay (University of Findlay), Bowling Green (BGSU), Toledo (University of Toledo), Sylvania (Lourdes University), and Ann Arbor (University of Michigan). The proposed OHERN route and the Chicago-Columbus service would share track between Columbus and Kenton.
- Extend the current Amtrak/Indiana funded Hoosier State from its eastern terminus in Indianapolis to Cincinnati providing daytime service linking Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Chicago.
- Develop Amtrak Thruway connecting bus services to better link intercity trains serving Toledo with Detroit, Dearborn and Ann Arbor and Amtrak/Michigan Wolverine trains serving central and western Michigan cities and towns.

Public Transportation needs much more attention than it has received in the Access Ohio 2040 Draft plan. It is very disappointing to see the minimal level of proposed state funding for public transportation assistance to our urban and rural communities.

Ohio has been an innovator in public transportation. In 1955 Cleveland opened the first postwar rapid transit system in the US. This system, currently known as the Red Line, also was the first rail transit system to directly serve an airport. Today, Red Line ridership has rebounded to its highest levels since the 1970s. Since 1965 over 40 US cities and metropolitan areas have added rail transit (commuter rail, rapid transit, light rail, streetcar) to their array of public transportation options. In every case transit ridership has grown significantly and related development around rail transit stations and stops has reached 10s of billions of dollars. Environmental benefits have also accrued as greenhouse gas emissions have declined as growing numbers of commuters switch from automobiles to public transportation. What began in Cleveland with the inauguration of rapid transit service to Hopkins International Airport has spread to 15 other metropolitan cities, some with multiple airports served by rail transit. Another three have rail access under-construction.

Public transportation ridership in the US has reached its highest level since the gasoline rationing years of World War II. The fastest growing segment of public transit ridership growth has been rail transit. Ohio lags behind other states now, in spite of being first out of the gate. A glimmer of hope can be seen in the Cincinnati Streetcar project which is a first step for rail transit in the Queen City. Cincinnati will join a dozen other cities which have built or extended streetcar lines in the past decade. Atlanta, Washington DC, Tucson and Seattle will all open new streetcar service in 2014. Michigan is moving to create a new regional transit agency for metropolitan Detroit and southeastern Michigan, and has an initial segment Detroit streetcar route under-construction.

Bus service remains the backbone of urban transit in Ohio cities and needs to be well maintained and expanded to further enhance the mobility of city residents. Neighboring states either provide state funds directly to transit agencies for capital or operating expenses, or allow greater flexibility in local funding. Ohio needs to do better in both areas.

We hope ODOT will give serious consideration to our concerns and recommendations. All Aboard Ohio is ready and willing to share our considerable expertise and knowledge with ODOT as we have with various MPOs and local transportation agencies around the state. It is essential we all work together to move the Buckeye State forward. We are committed to making rail and public transportation more available to Ohio citizens and visitors alike.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ronald C. Sheck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ronald" being the most prominent.

Ronald C. Sheck, Ph. D.  
Chairman, All Aboard Ohio

Attachments

