



OHIO ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

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*Mid-Ohio Regional Planning  
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**To: Representative Vernon Sykes, Chairman  
House Finance & Appropriations Committee**

**From: Robert E. Lawler, Secretary-Treasurer  
Ohio Association of Regional Councils (OARC)**

**Date: February 24, 2008**

**Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2 (Transportation Budget)**

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Finance & Appropriations Committee, my name is Bob Lawler and I am the Transportation Director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission which serves central Ohio. I am also the Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio Association of Regional Councils, the statewide association of Ohio's 21 regional councils, which serve 1,525 local governments representing over 10.5 million residents across Ohio. OARC's mission is to coordinate voices at a state and federal level; to strengthen the role and authority of regional councils; and to collaborate, coordinate and solve problems in the areas of transportation, environment, and land use planning within the framework of state policy. OARC has been in existence since 1977.

I appear before you today to offer OARC's support for HB 2, the biennial transportation budget. As you can imagine, OARC members have had a longstanding relationship with ODOT as we have advanced numerous transportation projects over the years. We are pleased and look forward to continuing this strong relationship with Director Jolene Molitoris and her staff in the coming years. Specifically, OARC would like to lend its support to the following items contained in HB 2:

1. **Primary Seat Belt Law** – At its September 9, 2008 meeting, OARC adopted a Resolution urging the state to adopt a primary seat belt law. This law is important to us because more than 50 percent of all fatal crashes involve drivers and passengers who are unbelted. Many of these lives could have been saved if they were wearing their seat belts. This law enjoys popular support. For example, studies from Miami University indicate that 2/3rds of Ohio residents greatly favor laws that require drivers and passengers to wear properly adjusted seat belts. Ohio now has the opportunity to join 26 other states that have similar laws, and as an added benefit to the lives saved and costs avoided, Ohio can receive at least \$26.7 million dollars in these tough economic times. We join with the Governor, ODOT, and many other groups in urging you to adopt this change as part of the transportation budget.



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2. **Rail Improvements** – Investing in improved rail transportation is a must for Ohio. OARC members support state funding for the 3-C corridor passenger rail startup and the first level of environmental analysis for the Ohio Hub plan. The Ohio Hub will improve capacity and safety in freight rail corridors, and provide for fast, frequent passenger trains linking Ohio’s cities. With moderate state funding, Ohio can be ready to access significant new federal dollars. A modern rail system will achieve many public benefits and generate significant local economic development activity.
3. **Other Economic Tools** – Although OARC members partner closely with ODOT for state and federal transportation dollars, too many times projects don’t move advance because local and/or private sector investment is lacking. ODOT has proposed some new tools that OARC members support that give regions more flexibility and opportunity to move projects forward. The first tool we support is the proposed Transportation Innovation Authority, or TIA. TIA’s will allow local governments to target local taxes, special assessments, and fees and redirect these funds to pay for the construction and operation of a public improvement. TIA’s would complement the existing TIF, TID, and JEDD’s that our local communities use to fund projects.

The second tool OARC supports is the ability to utilize tolling for new projects that add capacity to our current transportation system. Currently the Ohio Turnpike is the only entity that can utilize this funding stream, something commonly found in other states, and needed in Ohio for other transportation projects under the direction of ODOT. It is simply another tool to allow publicly supported projects to move forward.

The third tool OARC supports is the new generation of the State Infrastructure Bank. Having the ability to secure low interest loans from the SIB would be a useful mechanism to have to move local roadway, bridge, multi-modal and intercity rail projects forward.

As regional councils, among our duties of identifying, studying, planning, and facilitating local transportation projects, one of the most critical components is funding. Having these additional tools, as proposed in HB 2, would be beneficial to regional councils in performing our duties. We ask for your favorable consideration of these items.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee thank you for your time, and I’d be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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