

Opening Statement of Senator Brown  
**“Surface Transportation Reauthorization:  
Public Transportation Stakeholders’ Perspectives”**  
February 25, 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing. I look forward to working with you to develop a bipartisan transit title for a surface transportation bill.

Public transportation helps the people we serve reach better jobs, and spend less of their time and their hard-earned money commuting.

Hard work should pay off. But for most people, wages are flat, and the cost of everything is up – housing, health care, child care, and, yes, transportation.

We know how transportation can be a huge drain on families’ budgets and on their time. And it can limit their job choices, and make it harder to hold down jobs that are far from where they live.

The average American household spends 13 percent of their income on transportation – and low-income workers spend between 20 and 30 percent of their wages on commuting.

And we know how an unexpected car repair or a car accident can devastate families who rely on their cars to get to work – 40 percent of Americans don’t have the money to cover a \$400 expense in an emergency.

So what happens? They lose their job because they can't get to work, or they go to a payday lender and get trapped in a cycle of debt. Either way, people feel trapped. There's not much dignity in a job that you're one car breakdown away from losing.

A more balanced transportation system with high-quality transit service can give riders a quick and affordable trip to and from work, or school or a medical appointment.

It's pretty simple – when you have better, faster transit service, more people use it. In Columbus, the Central Ohio Transit Authority, better known as COTA, redesigned their bus routes and built a bus rapid transit line. What happened? Last year COTA had its highest ridership in 31 years. The C-MAX B-R-T, which I proudly supported, contributed to a 25 percent increase in ridership on the Cleveland Avenue corridor since it opened in early 2018.

When we build better public transportation, everyone wins. The Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber gets it. They are part of a broad coalition championing a ballot measure in March to fund high-frequency bus service and road improvements throughout Hamilton County.

In addition to connecting more workers to jobs, transit reduces highway congestion – again, it's pretty simple: when there are fewer people on the roads, those that do have to drive get to work faster.

And public transit reduces greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector, the fastest growing source of carbon pollution – we hear all the time about the supposed trade-offs between creating jobs and fighting climate change, but public transit does both. It reduces emissions while creating new jobs in manufacturing, and in operating buses and subways.

In 2015, the FAST Act provided record level of federal investment in public transportation, but it expires at the end of September, and the amount of backlogged repairs at the nation’s transit systems has continued to grow, peaking at \$99 billion in U.S. D-O-T’s most recent estimate.

What do those backlogs mean? More delays when rail cars and buses break down, longer commutes, and more crowded highways.

In Cleveland, the RTA operates a fleet of 74 rail cars: all of them are more than 34 years old and needed to be replaced years ago. Cities like Cleveland are facing sizable repairs that cannot be delayed any longer.

In addition to providing more funding for repairs, the next transportation bill needs record investment in the Bus and Bus Facilities program and the Low and No Emission Vehicle Program to help transit agencies replace aging vehicles and begin fully converting their fleets to zero-emission technology.

We must also ensure that FTA is processing applications under the Capital Investment Grants program fairly and efficiently, in accordance with the law, not adding extra requirements or delaying projects.

And every single one of these investments should be an investment in good-paying American jobs. We need to strengthen Buy America requirements, it's not complicated: American tax dollars should be spent on products made in America.

Safety is always a priority of this Committee, and Chairman Crapo and I have already developed legislation to improve rail inspections. We should also make sure our transit workers have the right training, and we should ensure they have a safe workplace. And we should not be outsourcing safety functions and essential services.

I look forward to hearing from the representatives of our nation's transit providers and the U.S. Chamber, which supports transit investment. I also look forward to hearing from Mr. Willis, who can speak to the transit workforce's needs.

To move the transportation bill forward, the Finance Committee will need to find new funds for the Highway Trust Fund. I will continue working to ensure that the Mass Transit Account receives 20 percent or more of any new revenue added to the Highway Trust Fund.

Finally, while I look forward to working on the transportation bill, housing is also critical infrastructure, and there is much for our Committee to do. There are health hazards in homes across this country, including lead, that we need to combat. We need to create more safe, affordable homes – and preserve the ones we’ve got. I hope the transportation bill can support opportunities for transit-oriented development, but we need comprehensive investment in this country’s infrastructure, and housing needs to be part of that investment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.