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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT  
(VICE RANKING MEMBER)  
HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE,  
AND TECHNOLOGY  
RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

June 14, 2024

Jack Marchbanks  
Director  
Ohio Department of Transportation  
1980 West Broad Street  
Columbus, OH 43223

Dear Director Marchbanks:

We, the undersigned members of Congress, write to express our strong support for the expansion of Amtrak service in the Akron-Canton Region. As elected representatives, we understand the significance of investing in our nation's passenger rail infrastructure to foster economic development and expand opportunities for our constituents. We respectfully request your full and fair consideration for our proposal that the Ohio Department of Transportation include a passenger rail service development plan for a stop in the Akron-Canton Regional Airport (CAK) or another location in the Akron-Canton area in the 2024 State of Ohio Transportation Plan. Additionally, we respectfully request your full and fair consideration that the Ohio Department of Transportation prepare a proposal in advance of the next Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program to secure funding for the study and planning of a passenger rail corridor that includes a stop at CAK or another location within the Akron-Canton area.

Ohio's infrastructure plays a vital role in the quality of life for the state's residents and visitors while enabling commerce for local businesses and freight. Ohio is located within a half day's drive of 60% of the population of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Ohio roadways and bridges carry the third highest freight volume in the United States and accommodate the sixth most vehicle miles traveled. There are 27 urban and 34 rural transit systems serving 83 of Ohio's 88 counties,<sup>2</sup> making the state an essential tool in the national economy. Ohio maintains one of the most extensive and heavily traveled roadway systems in the nation, consisting of over 8,000 miles of total road lanes and over 27,000 bridges. This places Ohio's system 2nd in the nation for number of bridges, 5th largest interstate system in the nation, and 6th largest in total vehicle miles traveled.<sup>3</sup> With so many travelers coming to and through the state, rail can serve as a much

<sup>1</sup>Ohio Department of Transportation. "Ohio Department of Transportation." 2023 Annual Report, <https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/about-us/odot-strategic-plan/annual-reports/annual-reports/> Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>2</sup>Ohio Council of Local Sections of the American Society of Civil Engineers. "Ohio Council of Local Sections of the American Society of Civil Engineers." Ohio's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card, [https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ASCE\\_Brochure%E2%80%94OH2021.pdf](https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ASCE_Brochure%E2%80%94OH2021.pdf) Accessed 8 May 2024

<sup>3</sup>Ohio Department of Transportation. "Ohio Department of Transportation." 2023 Annual Report, <https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/about-us/odot-strategic-plan/annual-reports/annual-reports/> Accessed 8 May 2024.

needed addition to the current transportation system to encourage economic development, job growth, and increasing connectivity throughout the state and country.

The announced 3-C+D and Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit Corridor plans do not adequately serve Eastern Ohio, leaving behind a significant population that could benefit from the inclusion of passenger rail. The Akron-Canton region is the fourth largest region in Ohio and the only large metropolitan area without a proposed rail line. The region offers travel connections through the Akron-Canton Regional Airport, higher education opportunities at five distinct institutions, several healthcare systems, countless manufacturing companies, and various attractions such as the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the Akron Art Museum, the Akron Zoo, and Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Furthermore, the business community, led by the Akron-Canton Advocacy Alliance, has united to advocate for the addition of an Amtrak service stop in the region, recognizing the economic benefits and increased connectivity it would bring to the area.

In addition to the significant population of potential riders and the local attractions, Eastern Ohio is a strong candidate for funding made available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Many communities in the Eastern Ohio region are defined as “Areas of Persistent Poverty,” which are defined as areas that have experienced over 20% of the population living in poverty in the 1990 census and 2000 census, and are represented in 2021’s Small Area Income Poverty Estimates.<sup>4</sup> When considering grant awards for the Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program, the Federal Railroad Administration evaluates projects based on whether the corridor would serve areas of persistent poverty, making Eastern Ohio a prime candidate for federal funding under the Corridor ID Program.<sup>5</sup>

Eastern Ohio consistently ranks among the most affordable places to live in the nation. The Akron Housing Market Area (HMA) has remained among the most affordable in the nation and the most affordable in the Northeast Ohio region. During the fourth quarter of 2021, the Akron HMA ranked as the 15th most affordable metropolitan area in the nation, with 221, or 90 percent, of the 246 ranked metropolitan areas in the nation being less affordable.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, in April 2024, Ohio was named the second<sup>7</sup> most affordable place to own a home, while Akron and Canton ranked in the top eight<sup>8</sup> housing markets nationally. In December 2023, Canton and Youngstown were ranked 2nd and 17th, respectively, as the most affordable places to buy a home in the country.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, Ohio’s population in nearly every county in Northeast and

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Transportation. “Department of Transportation.” Areas of Persistent Poverty & Historically Disadvantaged Communities, Grant Project Location Verification Tool, <https://maps.dot.gov/BTS/GrantProjectLocationVerification/> Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Registrar, Federal ResNotice of Solicitation of Corridor Proposals and Funding Opportunity for the Corridor Identification and Development Program (2024) <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/12/20/2022-27559/notice-of-solicitation-of-corridor-proposals-and-funding-opportunity-for-the-corridor-identification>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. (2022). Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis Akron, Ohio.

<sup>7</sup> Murphy, Chad. “See where Ohio ranks for affordable housing in the US.” Akron Beacon Journal, Akron Beacon Journal, 12 April 2024, <https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/news/2024/04/12/ohio-rank-affordable-housing-real-estate-income-home-owner/73204735007/>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Weiker, Jim. “Ohio cities land on Realtor.com's list of strongest housing markets.” The Columbus Dispatch, Columbus Dispatch, 30 April 2024, <https://www.dispatch.com/story/business/real-estate/2024/04/30/ohio-cities-land-on-realtor-coms-list-of-strongest-housing-markets/73511077007/>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Mentz, Zach. “5 Ohio towns among top 20 Most Affordable Cities to Buy a House, report says.” Cleveland.com, Cleveland.com, 14 December 2023, <https://www.cleveland.com/news/2023/12/5-ohio-towns-among-top-20-most-affordable-cities-to-buy-a-house-report-says.html>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

Eastern Ohio is expected to decline by 2050<sup>10</sup>; expanding rail services in this area will help maintain and attract residents to the state and ensure the progress of the region.

The City of Barberton in Summit County and the Counties of Trumbull, Mahoning, and Columbiana in Eastern Ohio are all considered Labor Surplus Areas by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Ohio Department of Development. This is defined as areas with an “average unemployment rate of the specified area for the two-year period January 2019 through December 2020 must be at least 7.03 percent.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the Cities of Akron and Canton in Summit and Stark Counties are considered Distressed Cities by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Ohio Department of Development. This is defined as “any county or city with a population of 50,000 or more if two of the three following criteria are met: unemployment must be 125% or greater of the U.S. 5-year average unemployment rate between 2016 and 2020; Per Capita Income must be at or below 80% of the 2020 U.S. per capita income; or poverty for counties is defined as a percentage of transfer payment income to total county income equal to or greater than 25% in 2020. Poverty for qualified cities is defined as 20% or greater of persons with incomes below the federal poverty level in 2020.”<sup>12</sup> As such, expanded rail services in the region would greatly benefit Eastern Ohioans, connecting them to job opportunities, like the multibillion-dollar project underway in Central Ohio, while also encouraging businesses, small and large, to make investments in these communities.

It is imperative that we acknowledge that the Eastern region of our State deserves, and stands to greatly benefit from, improved rail accessibility. Akron and Canton have always been deeply connected in respect to our shared airport, roadways, cultural assets, industry footprint, and commuter interchange rates. The region is a gateway to Ohio from the East Coast of the United States; an Amtrak stop would better connect the workers and families of Eastern Ohio to economic, educational, and healthcare opportunities across the state and the region. Failing to provide such infrastructure would undoubtedly result in adverse consequences for the economic development of the region.

In light of these considerations, we respectfully request your full and fair consideration for our proposal that the Ohio Department of Transportation include a passenger rail service development plan for a stop in the Akron-Canton Regional Airport (CAK) or another location in the Akron-Canton area in the 2024 State of Ohio Transportation Plan. Additionally, we respectfully request your full and fair consideration that the Ohio Department of Transportation prepare a proposal in advance of the next Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Federal Railroad Administration’s Corridor Identification and Development Program to secure funding for the study and planning of a passenger rail corridor that includes a stop at CAK or another location within the Akron-Canton area.

Thank you for your attention and careful consideration of this matter. We look forward to your favorable response and to the opportunity to collaborate on this critical issue.

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<sup>10</sup> Ohio Department of Development. “Ohio Department of Development.” Projected 2050 County Populations, <https://development.ohio.gov/about-us/research/population/population-projections/projected-2050-populations-map>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Ohio Department of Development. “Ohio Department of Development.” Priority Investment Areas, <https://development.ohio.gov/about-us/research/priority-investment>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

Sincerely,



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Emilia Strong Sykes  
Member of Congress



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Joyce Beatty  
Member of Congress



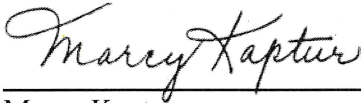
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Shontel M. Brown  
Member of Congress



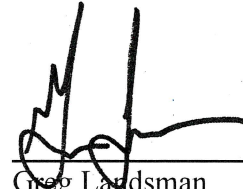
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David P. Joyce  
Member of Congress



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Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress



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Greg Landsman  
Member of Congress

cc:  
Governor Mike Dewine  
All Aboard Ohio  
Ohio Department of Development  
Northeast Ohio Coordinating Agency  
Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC)  
Amtrak