

EMILIA STRONG SYKES

13TH DISTRICT, OHIO

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1217 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-6265

DISTRICT OFFICE:
121 SOUTH MAIN STREET
SUITE 107
AKRON, OH 44308
(330) 400-5350

<https://sykes.house.gov>

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

August 14, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Colleagues:

I write to express my strong support for the expansion of Amtrak service in the Akron-Canton Region. Continued investment in our nation's passenger rail infrastructure is critical to fostering economic development and expand opportunity for Eastern Ohio and its surrounding communities. What is why I encourage the House and the Senate to increase FY25 Amtrak funding to help facilitate the development of an Amtrak route for Eastern Ohio that includes a stop at the Akron-Canton Airport (CAK) or another location in the Akron-Canton region when in conference on the FY25 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

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.¹ 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,² 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

¹Ohio 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.

²Ohio 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%9494OH2021.pdf Accessed 8 May 2024

traveled.³ With so many travelers coming to and through the state, rail can serve as a much 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.

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.⁴ Additionally, in April 2024, Ohio was named the second⁵ most affordable place to own a home, while Akron and Canton ranked in the top eight⁶ 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.⁷ Despite this, Ohio's population in nearly every county in Northeast and Eastern Ohio is expected to decline by 2050⁸; 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."⁹ Additionally, the Cities of Akron and Canton in Summit

³ 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.

⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. (2022). Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis Akron, Ohio.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Ohio Department of Development. "Ohio Department of Development." Priority Investment Areas, <https://development.ohio.gov/about-us/research/priority-investment>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

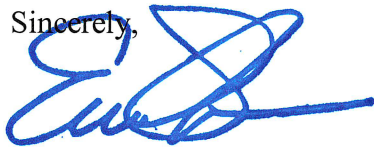
and Stark Counties are considered Distressed Cities by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Ohio Department of Development. This is defined as “any county or city with a population of 50,000 or more if two of the three following criteria are met: unemployment must be 125% or greater of the U.S. 5-year 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.”¹² 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.

Akron and Canton have always been deeply connected in respect to a 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, I encourage the House and the Senate to increase FY25 Amtrak funding to help facilitate the development of an Amtrak route for Eastern Ohio that includes a stop at the Akron-Canton Airport (CAK) or another location in the Akron-Canton region when in conference on the FY25 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

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

Sincerely,



Emilia Sykes
Member of Congress

cc:

House Appropriations Committee
Senator Sherrod Brown
Senator J.D. Vance