



The regional transit authority for Lake County

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Testimony of Donna P. McNamee, Trustee

LAKETRAN, Lake County, Ohio

Before the

Ohio House Transportation and Justice Subcommittee

State Representative Peter Ujvagi, Chairman

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Ohio House Transportation and Justice Subcommittee: my name is Donna McNamee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you regarding House Bill 1, and specifically the importance of increasing state funding for public transportation. I am before you today to help you understand the significant impact of the cumulative cuts to public transit funding – since 2001 – on the lives of people like me – people with disabilities and senior citizens – who daily depend upon public transportation just to survive.

First I want to share with you some background information about my credentials and the transit system I represent.

I am currently serving my third term as a member of the Laketrans Board of Trustees. During my tenure I have had the privilege of serving as the Board’s Vice President and also as its President.

Most importantly, I am a “user” of the Laketrans system. Like many other citizens, with Laketrans help, I have been able to independently navigate my way around Lake County to:

- pursue self-employment opportunities.
- safely access the medical services I need.
- be active in our community – including being a major party candidate for the Ohio State Senate.
- I have been able to play a critical role in working for the enactment of a law that expanded opportunities for people with disabilities to become gainfully employed without losing health care coverage. When I sat next to the President of the United States at the bill signing ceremony, I realized that every support system I rely on – Laketrans included – had a role in helping me make this landmark legislation a reality for the benefit of millions of people with disabilities nationwide.

The truth is I am like thousands of others in our community.

For people who daily confront physical challenges or cannot drive safely, Laketrans has been a Godsend. Laketrans has helped open doors of opportunity to many that otherwise would not have been possible.

Yet Laketrans is now at serious risk.

For small systems like Laketrans that provide demand response service, the state cuts since 2001 are approaching catastrophic levels. Currently, for the first time in Laketrans's 35 year history, we are preparing to significantly reduce service and increase fares.

Long before the ADA was enacted, Laketrans embraced not only what came to be the letter but also the spirit of the law. Laketrans successfully serves its customers with a standard of excellence envied by many public transit systems across our country. It is well recognized that Laketrans runs one of the most efficient, cost effective, and customer friendly Dial-a-Ride services in the nation. Rated in the top 10, it is the industry model for other small urban communities.

The benefits of public transit are daily witnessed in terms of increased freedom, choice, mobility and independence of senior citizens and people with disabilities who comprise 28% of Lake County's population and live independently in the community.

There are over 10,000 people in Laketrans's Dial-a-Ride database who rely on access to public transportation in order to survive: For example:

- Because of Laketrans, a 70 year old senior is able to work at McDonald's to supplement her meager social security.

- Because of Laketran, an 85 year old man is able to visit his dying wife at a hospice each day in the last three weeks of her life.
- Because of Laketran, for the first time in their marriage of many years, a couple – both wheelchair users – is able to celebrate a wedding anniversary outside of their home.
- Because of Laketran, a developmentally disabled man is able to visit his critically ill father in the hospital.
- Because of Laketran, senior citizens who would otherwise be transportation captives in their homes are able to stay active at senior citizen centers or work in the community.
- Because of Laketran, people suffering from kidney disease are able to access dialysis centers for treatment.
- Because of Laketran, a young woman who lives with a significant disability – who uses a wheelchair but cannot drive – attended law school and is now an attorney.

Without Laketran's Dial-a-Ride service, the ability of each of these individuals to live independently – to survive in the community – would be threatened.

It is our desire to continue to provide outstanding service to the Lake County community. But to do so we desperately need your help!

Already, some transit systems have reduced services and/or increased fares. The result is that Ohio's senior citizens and people with disabilities are getting hurt. These transit dependent populations are being forced to remain in their homes, and can no longer independently access

- jobs,

- health care services,

- schools,

- shopping
or
- recreation.

Why? Because they can no longer afford public transit services and/or paratransit service in their communities has been dramatically reduced.

Please help us help senior citizens and people with disabilities across Ohio. Our survival – and theirs – depends upon your action in significantly increasing the funding for state operating assistance currently proposed by Governor Strickland in the state's next biennium budget in the Urban Transit Program (UTP) and Elderly and Disabled Half-Fare Assistance line items.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today; I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.