

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

OF

**RAYMOND JURKOWSKI
GENERAL MANAGER**



BEFORE

**THE OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE'S
TRANSPORTATION AND JUSTICE SUBCOMMITTEE**

On

HOUSE BILL 1

March 18, 2009

Introduction

Good afternoon. Mr. Chairman, members of the House Transportation and Justice Subcommittee: my name is Raymond Jurkowski. I am the General Manager of Laketran – the regional public transit authority in Lake County, Ohio.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you regarding HB 1 and specifically about the importance of increasing state operating assistance for public transportation.

About Laketran

For those members of the Subcommittee who are unfamiliar with Lake County or Laketran, I would like to share with you, who we are.

Lake County is geographically the smallest of Ohio's 88 Counties and ranks 11th in population with more than 227,000 citizens. Lake County is comprised of twenty three communities and is within the Cleveland Urbanized Area. A few of the older, anchor communities were developed with central business districts and are pedestrian friendly, the remainder of the county is either rural or developed without sidewalks, making traditional public transit a challenge to provide.

For nearly thirty-five years, Laketran has served the people of Lake County. Today, we provide over one million rides annually, with a special emphasis on meeting the transportation needs of senior citizens and people with disabilities. With a fleet of 112 vehicles, Laketran operates three core services including ADA complimentary paratransit (Dial-a-Ride); local, in-county fixed route; and commuter express service to downtown Cleveland. Approximately 70% of Laketran's \$13.6 million operating budget is spent on providing nearly over 300,000 ADA complimentary Dial-a-Ride trips a year for our seniors and persons with disabilities. By providing access to jobs, health care, higher education, recreation and shopping for essential goods and services, Laketran is an important thread that knits Lake County together - particularly for those citizens for whom Laketran is their only means of transportation.

The Impact of State Cuts on Laketran

Since SFY 2001, state operating assistance to Laketran has decreased a dramatic 44% - from over \$1.1 million to less than \$650,000 in SFY 2009 while ridership increased 30%. Back in 2001, state operating assistance helped pay for about 11% of Laketran's operating expenses. Today, state operating assistance helps pay for less than 5% of Laketran's operating expenses.

In order to sustain existing levels-of-service, Laketran has instituted many cost containment measures, reduced in-house discretionary expenses, initiated incentive programs to reduce personnel costs, raised fares and transferred funds into the operating budget from the capital budget to cover operating deficits in anticipation that the state of Ohio would reverse its continual disinvestment in public transportation.

Faced operating deficits of over \$2 million in 2009, \$2.5 million in 2010 and \$3.3 million in 2011, Laketran does not have the financial resources to continue to provide service at the level which our passengers have become accustomed.

HB 1, as proposed, will exacerbate the problem by further reducing direct general revenue funding for public transportation from \$14.67 million in SFY 2009 to \$13.9 million in SFY 2010 and \$14.0 million in 2011.

While these reductions may seem small in the overall state budget, the impact on small and medium size urban and rural public transit systems will be catastrophic, leaving many of these systems no other choice than to further reduce service and/or increase fares thereby:

- Leaving more workers without access to jobs;
- Impacting student transportation to schools;
- Making it difficult for employers to retain workers and recruit new workers;
- Increasing traffic congestion;
- Negatively impacting air quality;

- Straining government based and non-profit health and human services organizations whose clients will be unable to access their programs;
- Reducing mobility for seniors and persons with disabilities;
- Increasing unemployment.

In addition to all of the above, reducing operating expenses by cutting services equals layoffs of transit employees.

While all the public transit operators recognize that Ohio is facing a difficult budget, we all hope that you will agree that public transit has, “kept its promise” in serving the daily needs of our citizens. Yet over the past eight years, Ohio’s transit systems have endured a disproportionate share of the burden in state budget cuts from its \$44 million investment in 2001 to what is contained in HB 1 today. We call on you now because we are at a critical juncture. We need your leadership and intervention to find a creative solution to increase operating assistance for our public transit systems. Ohio’s economy and the people we serve are depending upon it.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.