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Mass Transit that Works for Ohioans

Cheri, a bus driver from Cincinnati, was laid off two days after Christmas. A single mother, she and her daughter are doing the best they can to get by until the local transit agency receives enough funding to rehire her. Gregory is a transit worker from Cleveland who lost his job in April. At age 56 with two children in college, he too is hoping that he can get his old job back or find another one. Meanwhile, Ohioans from all walks of life who depend on public transportation – the services that Cheri and Gregory provided – are facing fewer options and steeper fares to get to work or find new work.

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Cheri and Gregory traveled to Washington a few months ago to share an all too familiar story: with severe budget short-falls, too many Ohio transit agencies have to choose between cutting services, raising fares, or laying-off workers. Over the past year, the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority has seen a 12 percent reduction in services and hundreds of layoffs. In November 2009, the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority announced its first-ever layoff – affecting more than 130 employees.

Regardless of these no-win choices, bus drivers and mechanics worry about losing their jobs; Ohioans who rely on public transit to get to work or school worry about losing the only means of transportation to provide for their family; Ohio's seniors worry about how they will get to the doctor's office or meet other basic needs.

To save and create transit jobs, prevent fare increases, and preserve our mass transit service, I introduced a piece of legislation to ease the financial burden facing Ohio's transit agencies.

Across our nation, states have been hit hard by a recession that drains tax revenues which fund public services ranging from law enforcement to education to public transit. Funding that would normally be available failed to materialize, hitting our transit agencies the hardest. In March, I [introduced a bill](#) that would give transit agencies the flexibility they need to use federal funds for operating assistance in addition to making capital improvements.

As it stands, transit agencies can use federal funds to make capital improvements to buy new buses, purchase essential radio equipment, or make important safety upgrades like new tires and brakes, or safer doors and windows. With this bill, transit agencies would also have the flexibility to use federal funds to cover operating expenses – ensuring fares are

not increased and routes are not disrupted.

I've heard positive stories from transit authorities around Ohio about the flexibility they were given under the Recovery Act to use up to 10 percent of recovery funds for operating assistance. They've told me that recovery funding helped keep jobs and preserve routes. This bill would provide greater flexibility by enabling transit agencies to set aside from 30-50 percent of their funds for operating assistance.

And just last week, I joined my colleagues to announce the introduction of the [Public Transportation Preservation Act of 2010](#). This legislation would provide emergency funding for Ohio's transit agencies to rehire workers and restore service routes. Ohio's 59 transit systems employ more than 5,200 people and serve large cities and small towns across Ohio, ranking our state 12th in the nation for public transit ridership. With this bill, urban and rural transit systems would receive critical funds to help shore up budgets.

Transit is about jobs and economic opportunity – not only for bus drivers like Cheri or transit workers like Gregory, but for all Ohioans who rely on public transit and who make our communities stronger and more prosperous.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown



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