

Thank you, Chairman Sheppard and Committee Members, for the opportunity to briefly speak to you today regarding this important legislation that will have a huge impact on Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties.

First, I would like to commend you all on discussing regional transit. The lack of an efficient, reliable transit system has been a frustration for southeast Michigan for decades. I am, however, concerned that our frustration leads us to taking the most expedient policy solution rather than the best policy solution. Regional transit is an issue that deserves our considered attention to reach an equitable, strategic solution. For background, I am pretty sure that I am the only suburban member of the House who has owned multiple properties in the city of Detroit and paid taxes on those properties. I built and maintained a business within the city that was focused solely on moving executives and business leaders into the city. Beginning in 2005, I was an active and involved in every pro-Detroit organization – the Detroit Chamber Fusion group, Detroit Synergy, The Detroit Orientation Institute, the list goes on -- so I have a unique understanding of the need for regional cooperation. Please hear me when I say I do not want to obstruct this legislation, but to improve it.

The first issue I've concerns with in HB 5550 is the difference process counties have in determining to opt into joining the RTA. We should have one, uniform process for each county. Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb all have executives. Washtenaw does not. Please consider removing the opt-in mechanism for the county executives to ensure it is consistent between all counties.

The next issue I would like to discuss is the lack of flexibility the RTA has in creating a strategic plan that conforms with their priorities that were updated less than a year ago. If we look at the map the RTA created for their plans through the year 2045, there are large areas that will receive absolutely no service. The RTA currently requires that all property owners within the service area are taxed at the same rate, regardless of whether or not services are provided. Handcuffing an RTA proposal in this way regurgitates the same issues we have faced in prior attempts to solve this problem: this is unfair taxation for our property owners that will never receive a benefit in their lifetime. This all-or-nothing approach creates animosity and mistrust in a region that desperately needs to find ways to work together. Allowing the RTA more flexibility to meet their long-term goals can create an equitable ballot proposal that will have greater appeal to voters.

HB 5550 doesn't adequately address these issues. We have a precedent for successfully solving generational policy issues in how we approached auto no-fault last year. Why are we not taking this same tactic in regional transit? Where are the public meetings where stakeholders can all come to the table with concerns? Why are we not considering best practices from other states and countries on how they fund their transportation? Why are we not asking for variable taxation models and allowing the RTA to draw their lines within a county border? Why aren't we discussing these approaches that we know will be more representative of the populations that actually are receiving service? I believe these questions need to be resolved before this bill moves forward to ensure our hometowns are being properly served by their legislators. I hope you all as a committee will take the necessary time and energy to research the best approach to regional transit and fully understand its impact as currently written.

Thank you.

