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Chairman Hite, Vice Chair Patterson and members of the Joint Education Oversight Committee, thank you for hearing our testimony today related to pupil transportation from the perspective of a combination rural and suburban school district in Northwest Ohio. My name is Dean Sandwisch and I am the Director of Business Affairs for Oregon City Schools in Oregon, Ohio; an Eastern suburb of Toledo.

Oregon City Schools is a district with 3700 students over an area covering 61 square miles ranging from the most suburban boarder of East Toledo with more populated neighborhoods to the most rural Jerusalem Township. In fact, more than 2/3 of our population is concentrated in the westernmost ¼ area of our district.

My purposes for addressing this committee today is simply to illustrate the challenges facing our district and other similar districts when it comes to transportation and then offer some potential action areas. Specifically, I will be pointing out the reality of operating transportation services in a district where little State help is afforded and how you may help.

First, some data that will help you understand Oregon City Schools' operation. Over the last five years our bus fleet has ranged from 27 busses to the high of 33 the last two years. We average 49 drivers including 36 full time and 13 substitute drivers who travel nearly 2,950 miles per day. Our overall cost to operate each bus is \$67,075, which is \$17,806 or 36% over the State average of \$49,269. These dollars spent in excess of the State average, we believe, is due to the sprawling nature of the majority of our district. It simply costs more the more the distance is between pick-ups. Last year we spent \$2,117,994 dollars on transporting our students.

Over the last five years, this picture has changed very little. Prior to that; however; tough decisions had to be made. In January, 2011, in response to a failed levy, high school bussing was reduced to only include 24 cluster bus stops; a number, which has steadily increased to over 50 currently. This reduction was a drastic effort to cut nearly \$900,000, or nearly 1/3 of the total \$2.8 million cuts needed to continue operations at that time. Ironically, the cut of high school transportation is not uncommon for districts looking to maintain educational programming while reducing expenses; even in the face of evidence proving the yellow school bus is the safest way possible for students to get to and from school.

ODE's own webpage states:

Sixty percent of Ohio's students ride on school buses each day and nearly 15,000 buses provide safe transportation for children in the state. National studies show school buses are the safest method for transportation young people – nearly 30 times safer than passenger cars.

This stance by our Department of Education really begs the question...If, indeed, the school bus is safer for the students in our State, then why don't we make more of an effort in increasing funding to make this a reality? That question haunts us and hopefully causes pause for this committee.



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At Oregon, the Permanent Improvement Fund provides the funds for replacing busses. In fact, \$240,000 is allocated annually to replace three busses. This \$240,000 represents 16% of the total annual Permanent Improvement dollars; funds, which certainly could be used to maintain the six campuses that comprise the Oregon City School district. The State ceased altogether its Bus subsidy in FY10 after drastically reducing this amount in FY04.

The decision by the State in FY03 to drastically cut the Bus Subsidy and then to eliminate that subsidy in FY10 effectively shifted the burden from the State to the local taxpayers. Oregon's Permanent Improvement Fund now shoulders the burden of replacing busses in a time where we attend to aging buildings, continuing curriculum adoptions and, most recently, the heavy addition of technology as students in grades five through 12 work with district-provided one-to-one technology. Much needed repairs are delayed further as a result of this prioritization and reallocation of funds. The reinstatement of the State Bus Subsidy would go a long way in freeing up valuable dollars for the dozens of "need" items in our district.

Permanent Improvement dollars are not the only dollars affected in our district; The General fund is also impacted. As I mentioned earlier, the reduction of high school bussing was a result of a failed levy and even though we have since passed an operating levy, high school bussing has not been restored to the 2011 levels. The district is forced to balance the need to pass levies with the responsibility and accountability of safely transporting students to and from school. Our community simply cannot or will not support additional millage to restore high school bussing or bussing, which goes beyond the State minimums.

So, what would be the ideal for Oregon City Schools?

1. Restore the Bus Purchase Subsidy to allow districts to use State dollars instead of local dollars to replace aging and inefficient busses. This would free Permanent Improvement dollars, in our case, to attend to other pressing items.
2. Re-examine the allocation of the motor fuel/excise tax to more accurately support the role of transporting student in this great State.
3. Take into account the varying cost and design of operations across the State; from rural to suburban to urban and include the input of transportation professionals from all types while constructing a funding formula we can all work within.

Thank you for your time. I have brought with me Oregon City Schools' Transportation Supervisor, Mrs. Terry Dellinger if there are any questions.

Thank you.