

## Testimony to the Senate Transportation Committee

*SB 909, SB 911, and SB 912*

Steven W. Baker

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Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. My name is Steve Baker and I am an elected member of City Council for the City of Berkley, Michigan. I serve on the steering committee that oversees the transit alternatives analysis study for the Woodward Avenue corridor, and I am a founding member of the transit oriented development task force that was commissioned by the Woodward Avenue Action Association in 2010.

### *Berkley has a Desirable Sense of Place*

It is my great pleasure to speak with you today on a topic of great importance to Berkley and to our region. Berkley's nearly 15,000 residents and over 200 businesses are beginning to see fragile yet encouraging signs of economic growth. Our proximity to institutions like Beaumont Hospital and the Detroit Zoo, our resurging downtown district, and our quality housing stock and beautiful tree-lined neighborhoods all contribute to Berkley's desirable sense of place.

### *Our Communities Deserve Connectivity*

Berkley is very walkable, with an average walk score index of 72, and Berkley was one of the first communities in Oakland County to establish a complete streets policy. As we continue to make progress in these initiatives, we recognize that Berkley's residents deserve greater access to jobs and recreation, our businesses deserve greater access to employees and customers, and our region deserves greater connectivity between its various communities.

### *Regional Transit will Benefit Us All*

Regional transit provides a crucial *means* to achieve our desired *ends* – enabling economic development, providing greater access to jobs and employees, boosting property values, filling vacant buildings, lowering traffic congestion, reducing the wear on public roads, minimizing the impact of fluctuating gas prices, and offering choices to our residents, businesses, and visitors that provide them with greater flexibility and freedom to go about their lives.

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### *The Region Needs a Transit Authority*

For regional transit in the Metro Detroit area to become a reality, we understand the value of – and support the call for – a regional transit authority. Best practices from across the country assure us that such an authority is a fundamental enabler to building and maintaining a high quality transit system, and it is also a foundational requirement to establishing the public, political, and financial support for such a system.

### *An RTA Would Serve the Broader Region*

A regional transit authority would coordinate transit projects and systems that support the residents and businesses in Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties. The authority would plan, fund, and operate a truly regional rolling rapid transit service along key avenues including Woodward and Gratiot, along with a much-needed link between the City of Detroit, Metro Airport, and Ann Arbor.

### *Let's Ensure the RTA is "Future Proof"*

Now is the time to ensure that the RTA and the services it will provide are "future proof." It is wise to begin with a rolling rapid transit service in the short term, and it would be wise to ensure light rail and other transit modes may be realistically evaluated and properly supported in the future. As currently written, the proposed legislation requires an exceedingly difficult hurdle to future transit growth; the requirement for unanimous approval should be softened.

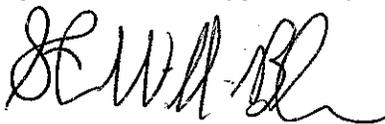
### *Support Transit Where it is Needed Most*

Over 150,000 people, including many Berkley residents and businesses, depend on existing bus service today. In the future they and others will rely on bus services to connect to the rapid transit systems. By adjusting the draft legislation to better represent those who have and will depend on transit the most, and by enabling the RTA to allocate its funds where they are most needed, we position the system to support its current users and also for the future.

### *We Are Poised to Take a Significant Step Forward*

The residents and business in Berkley, and those across Southeast Michigan, both need and deserve quality transit options. Placemaking and economic gardening begin here at home and this legislation, with minor adjustments, is a significant step forward. As we connect our residents to work, school, and recreation, we increase the region's competitiveness and its attractiveness to potential residents and businesses.

*Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you, and for your careful consideration, refinement, and approval of these important bills.*



Steven W. Baker