

## **Testimony for Senate Transportation Committee on Regional Transit Authority Legislation**

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Metropolitan Affairs Coalition President

Senator Casperson and members of the Committee, SEMCOG and our partner coalition of business, labor, government and education, Metropolitan Affairs Coalition or MAC, welcome you to Southeast Michigan and our offices. Our two organizations have long been strong advocates for public transportation. We applaud you for your leadership.

I speak on behalf of both organizations when I express strong support for SB 909, the Regional Transit Authority Legislation.

We have, for many years, emphatically stated that this region cannot move significantly forward to improve public transportation without two essential ingredients: first, a regional transit authority to coordinate existing service and build new service and second, the ability to generate local funding to match federal capital funding and to operate ongoing transit service. SB 909 enables both. Our inability to move forward in this region is not the result of a lack of planning or the lack of support by the region's residents. Our inability to move forward is due to the absence of a regional transit authority and lack of local funding. SB 909 helps address both needs.

To be sure, the devil is in the details. In fact, we discussed the legislation last Friday with SEMCOG's Executive Committee... a policy body of fifty local government leaders. There continue to be concerns about details surrounding the role of the county and City of Detroit legislative bodies in selecting RTA Board members, the ability of communities to "opt out" of transit, and the nature of taxes or fees to pay for improved transit. The end result of the conversation, however, was a nearly unanimous vote in support of the concepts in SB 909. More importantly, local officials, despite individual concerns, expressed the need to get off dead center, pass legislation and improve public transit.

There was also concern raised by SEMCOG's Executive Committee that local land use planning and local zoning ordinances do not apply to a public transit system or rolling rapid transit system created by the RTA. This is stronger than required to improve transit and should be amended.

In closing, our two organizations strongly believe that improved public transit is essential to our region's long term economic prosperity and high quality of life.

- It is good for attracting knowledge workers for our future economy.
- It is good for getting people to work, health care, education, shopping and other amenities.
- It is good for encouraging industrial, commercial and residential development.
- It is good to have innovative, cost effective options on the table including bus rapid transit to facilitate wise investment of transportation dollars. (Something SEMCOG and MAC have supported for decades.)
- And, it is good for the self-image and national image of our region.

We urge your prompt action to pass SB 909. We stand ready to do our part to move transit forward once that legislation is enacted.

Thank you.