February 25, 2015

Dear Representatives,

As members of the Michigan By Rail coalition—which works to advance passenger rail in our state—we recognize the important work the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) is doing to improve and expand Michigan's rail system. No one, including MDOT, wants to see money spent unwisely. We understand your concern over the rail car lease situation and hope that the department is able to resolve the situation favorably.

However, we believe the recent focus on MDOT's decision to lease and refurbish rail cars for developing commuter rail projects has overshadowed the value that commuter rail will add to our state. While you have an important fiscal oversight function, you also have just as important a role in setting overall transportation policy for the state. Michigan needs to develop a truly modern and comprehensive transportation system for the 21st century.

Unfortunately, Michigan, and Southeast Michigan in particular, is infamous for its lack of a strong, coordinated public transit system. Recently, the international spotlight on Detroit resident James Robertson's 21-mile-on-foot daily commute has reinforced that rhetoric, despite the work being done to change the region's transit reality.

As Rep. Rutledge pointed out at the House Transportation Committee meeting on Feb. 10, support of these commuter rail projects is an example of MDOT being "innovative" and "visionary" as they work toward a brighter future for our state's transportation system. We urge you to find ways to aid the Department and local agencies in making these projects a reality, rather than focusing on the delays—primarily caused by red tape at the federal level—that have led to unforeseen costs.

It's important to remember the dividends that both the Ann Arbor to Detroit Regional Rail Project and the North-South Commuter Rail (also known as WALLY) will pay to the communities that they will intersect. Commuter rail removes traffic from heavily congested corridors such as US-23 and I-94. WALLY is expected to take 1,300 vehicles off of US-23 each day, instead giving those workers an efficient, safe and low-stress commuting option. Commuter rail also stimulates real estate development along its nodes. A recent study commissioned by the National Association of Realtors found that real estate near fixed-rail transit outperformed other areas within the same metro area by more than 40 percent. These projects play a role in the Governor's efforts to attract and retain talent. A study commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation found that two-thirds of Millennials say access to public transportation is one of the top three criteria they would use to decide where to live.

We support MDOT's efforts to develop and bring on-line these important commuter rail projects, which will provide affordable, reliable, and much-needed transportation options to Southeast Michigan. We urge you to work with the Department in their efforts to find alternative uses for the rail cars until the commuter rail lines are up and running. More importantly, we urge your political support of these projects so that we can all reap their benefits sooner, rather than later.

Sincerely,

(see reverse)

Clark Charnetski, Interested Citizen

Freshwater Transit

John and Judy Langdon, Interested Citizens

Michael Lamb, Friends of Wally

Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

Michigan Environmental Council

Michigan Land Use Institute

Midwest High Speed Rail Association

Transportation for Michigan

Transportation Riders United

For questions, contact:

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