

LWVOA POSITION STATEMENT: PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICE (05/20/15)

The League of Women Voters of the Oberlin Area (LWVOA) believes that a healthy public transit service is a driver of the regional economy and a valuable community asset. In order for a healthy public transit system to exist in Lorain County, the LWVOA supports public transportation services that: (a) connect with major areas of employment, shopping, educational and medical facilities as well as cultural and other venues; (b) serve rural and urban areas; (c) promote public participation in the regional economy by crossing county lines to connect with other transit systems; and (d) extend paratransit demand services for vulnerable individuals beyond present boundaries to the degree financially feasible. Further, we support public transit services that promote ridership safety and minimize environmental pollution and energy consumption. Finally, we support public transportation services that are sustained by a dedicated permanent local tax such as a sales tax, and also supports exploring additional public/private funding synergies where possible.

BASIS FOR THIS POSITION

In 2013, the LWVOA formed a sub-committee to study public transportation in Lorain County and to conduct a county-wide transportation survey regarding attitudes towards public transportation. Lorain County Transit had significantly reduced service from 14 to 4 bus routes in the economic downturn of 2008-9 and currently remains a bare-bones operation. As scheduled bus routes diminished, so did paratransit services which by law exist only within a half-mile of scheduled routes. Currently, there is no dedicated, sustained revenue support for transit, and efforts to pass property taxes for transit funding have failed. The LWVOA Public Transportation survey was completed in the fall of 2013 and illustrated a profound dissatisfaction throughout the county with the status of current public transit services. The majority of respondents (87%) felt that Lorain County Transit needed to be improved or expanded.

Numerous sources (see references in the 2015 LWVOA Summary Report on Public Transit) have cited the economic advantages of public transit. Every dollar of local tax money invested in public transit generates \$3.00 in economic growth. Local money serves as seed money and attracts both State and Federal monies which may total a 4X multiple. Currently, Lorain County has no dedicated transit seed money and consequently cannot obtain any matching funds specifically for public transit from either State or Federal sources.

Targeted investments in public transit to connect regional population centers improve workforce mobility and promote local economies. Public transit investments also increase property values and promote development opportunities. All of these benefits of public transit translate into overall improved economic gain for the region.

Improving Lorain County Transit services will involve realistic planning for expanded scheduled routes and paratransit services that are financially feasible and supported by County residents. In addition, improved transit plans must be sufficient to generate public interest and buy-in for transit funding via a permanent tax. Of the two potential forms of taxation, property or sales, a sales tax will probably be the most likely to be palatable and would be consistent with neighboring counties. In the LWVOA public

transit survey mentioned above, 76.9% of responders agreed with the concept of a local sales tax to support public transit. Other Ohio counties, for example Stark County, have been successful in establishing viable transit systems with permanent funding. Stark County is similar to Lorain County with respect to population and extent of urban and rural areas, and has been cited as a model for Lorain County public transit planning. On April 11, 2015, the LWVOA held a consensus meeting which led to adoption of the current position statement on public transit services. (See Transportation Study Annual Report for more information.) The LWVOA hopes that efforts to expand public transit services in Lorain County will ultimately be successful.