

Thank you Senator Peters, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Amy O’Leary, and I serve as the Executive Director of SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. SEMCOG is a regional planning agency serving almost 5 million people in the seven-county area of Metro Detroit. We are a local government association with over 180 members that include counties, cities, villages, and townships.

As a Metropolitan Planning Organization, SEMCOG is responsible for ensuring data-driven, efficient use of transportation funds. This includes the development of our 2050 long-range transportation plan for our complex system of roads, bridges, transit, nonmotorized transportation, and freight and includes \$38 billion in transportation projects. We also develop and manage the current list of federally funded road projects, which for 2023-26 totals \$5.8 billion in federal funds.

Today I’ll group my comments into three buckets:

Bucket 1 -The impact of discretionary grants can be transformational.

One of the best examples of this are large projects, which exceed the scope of formula funding, including INFRA, RAISE, and the Railroad Crossing Elimination Program. For example, Innovate Mound in Macomb County received \$98 million through the INFRA Program to reconstruct 9 miles of roadway to support economic development as the State’s defense corridor.

A \$104-million INFRA grant will help to reconnect one of Detroit’s historically Black and economically strong neighborhoods, which was divided and devastated by the highway construction of I-375. The reconstruction will convert a sunken freeway to a lower-speed surface level boulevard.

A third project is the \$24 million Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program in the City of Monroe. This project will improve response times for emergency vehicles, ease congestion, and increase safety for pedestrians and motorists.

1001 Woodward Ave., Suite 1400 • Detroit, Michigan 48226 • (313) 961-4266 • Fax (313) 961-4869 • semcog.org

These projects are indeed transformational, and we strongly encourage these programs continue in reauthorization. The need is great. For example, we have over 1,000 at-grade crossings in Southeast Michigan. When a grade separation needs to occur, the cost is between \$20- and \$100 million. The good news is that partnerships are happening. Wayne County, in partnership with MDOT, Romulus, Huron Township, and CSX will be submitting for the separation on Pennsylvania Road with the State adding millions in local match.

Discretionary funds are also essential for emerging issues such as addressing flooding through the PROTECT program and addressing the devastating spike in fatalities on our roadways through the Safe Streets for All program. Safety is one of several issues best understood and addressed at the local level. We have one fatality a day in Southeast Michigan. Last year 100 of the people killed were pedestrians or bicyclists. In response, our region has aggressively pursued funding to tackle this challenge and we have received \$80 million in planning and construction funds.

Reauthorization of the program should recognize this national crisis and move Safe Streets for All to a formula program.

The second bucket is the critical role of formula funds.

The majority of Southeast Michigan's 25,000 miles of roads and almost 3,000 bridges rely on formula funds. This consistent funding source is essential for implementing advanced planning and data driven approaches. While discretionary funds have been transformational, time and financial resources – each in short supply for local governments – are needed to compete for discretionary funds. To more effectively allocate resources and enhance the nation's transportation systems, a more balanced approach is needed.

This balanced approach should increase formula funds. Our roads and bridges continue to be in disrepair despite significant investments in recent years. For example, depending on the ownership, our road conditions receiving a "Poor" rating range from 22 up to 47%. Local and county roads are by far in the worst

1001 Woodward Ave., Suite 1400 • Detroit, Michigan 48226 • (313) 961-4266 • Fax (313) 961-4869 • semcog.org

Mandy Grewal
Chairperson
Supervisor,
Pittsfield Township

Gwen Markham
First Vice Chair
Commissioner,
Oakland County

**Anne Marie
Graham-Hudak**
Vice Chairperson
Supervisor,
Canton Township

Laura Kropp
Vice Chairperson
Mayor,
City of Mount Clemens

**Diana McKnight-
Morton**
Vice Chairperson
Trustee,
Washtenaw
Community College

Michelle Nard
Vice Chairperson
Commissioner,
Macomb County

Pauline Repp
Immediate Past Chair
Mayor,
City of Port Huron

Amy O'Leary
Executive Director

condition, which threatens our economy as over 1,500 miles of these roads serve as freight and truck routes.

The third bucket is the critical role regions and MPOs play in the process.

Regions ensure a data-driven approach occurs, including project selection for formula-based funds with over \$1 billion annually coming through our program. This includes suballocated programs including the new Carbon Reduction Program as well as the highly successful Transportation Alternatives Program.

Second, we convene and support local communities to ensure they are taking advantage of the discretionary funding opportunities. Currently, we bring together the communities in our region which are predominantly fall into the Justice 40 designation to collaborate on project ideas and provide needed support. Regions also apply on behalf of local communities and then pass the funds through to our communities. This is what SEMCOG is doing with our \$10 million Safe Streets for All award.

Finally, regions are a voice for local communities and the public regarding their infrastructure concerns and frustrations. One frustration was the lack of financial and technical ability to apply for highly competitive funds. MDOT and the State of Michigan's Infrastructure Office have been strong partners for us locally. In fact, MIO has developed a program to write grant applications for communities through a regionally vetted process.

I would like conclude by thanking the members of the Committee for acknowledging the important role of regions and providing much needed funding that helps us do our job and improve the lives of our residents.