

## **Congressman Visclosky Testimony before the House Committee on the Budget FY 2018 priorities**

Thank you Chairwoman Black and Ranking Member Yarmuth. And I thank the committee for providing this opportunity to outline some of the budgetary priorities of Indiana's First Congressional District.

As a Member of the House Committee on Appropriations, I am very aware of the challenges involved in developing a budget blueprint that balances responsible fiscal policies with the need to make investments to support a strong economy and strengthen our national security. This task is made no less difficult by the announcement this week that the President will be submitting a budget request that proposes a \$54 billion cut to domestic programs.

In making your considerations, I am here today on behalf of my constituents in Northwest Indiana to advocate for a Fiscal Year 2018 budget that does not allow for significant reductions in federal funding for investments in infrastructure projects, and particularly public transit projects. Any such reductions would ultimately be counterproductive, undermining the job creation, economic development, and the demonstrated return on investment these transformational infrastructure projects provide for communities nationwide.

Public transportation has seen an increasing demand in recent years with Americans demonstrating a strong desire to live and work in walkable communities that offer transportation choices. According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), in 2014, Americans took 10.8 billion trips on public transportation, representing a 58-year high. This reflects a recognition of the personal benefits public transit affords, including shorter commutes, saved money on costs associated with automobiles, and easier access to job opportunities.

The perceived value of these benefits is reflected in increased property values near transit stations. A study prepared in coordination with the National Association of Realtors concluded that home values performed 42 percent better on average if they were located near public transportation with high-frequency service.

Further, public transit provides significant economic growth for surrounding communities. APTA estimates that every \$1 invested in public transportation generates approximately \$4 in economic returns. We can easily find examples of this return on investment in communities across the country. For instance, the Dallas Area Rapid Transit system has contributed to an economic boom in North Texas, with more than \$7 billion in economic impact from new or planned construction within a quarter mile of rail stations.

Recognizing these benefits, my district has been adamantly supporting the expansion and recapitalization of the commuter train system in Northwest Indiana, known as the South Shore Rail Line.

I have always believed that Northwest Indiana is the best place in the world to live, work, visit, and raise a family. Unfortunately, families have not been moving to or staying in Northwest Indiana. From 1970 to 2015, the number of school age children in Northwest Indiana has dropped by over 74,000 children. Further, the population of Lake County, Indiana, has decreased by 10 percent, and the median income, adjusted for inflation, has decreased by 12.5 percent.

The opposite is true for Lake County, Illinois. Both Lake Counties are on Lake Michigan and adjacent to Chicago. Yet in Illinois, the population of Lake County has increased by 83.9 percent, and the median income, adjusted for inflation, has increased by 17.7 percent.

Part of the reason for this discrepancy is that young people want to be a part of the economic vibrancy of Chicago, but do not want to drive the commute from Northwest Indiana. In Illinois, there are over 400 miles of commuter rail that emanate from the Chicago Loop. In Indiana, there are barely 35 miles.

Investing in the South Shore Rail Line will connect my constituents to Chicago's \$500 billion economy and nearly four million jobs. It will also allow us to begin to draw Chicago's economic vibrancy to our region as we attract not only new residents, but also new businesses that are seeking locations that offer quality educational, recreational, and transportation opportunities for their employees and their families.

Understanding these economic opportunities, 16 communities in Indiana's First Congressional District have come together to dedicate a portion of their local economic development tax revenue towards the expansion of the South Shore Rail Line in Northwest Indiana. Vice President Pence, in his role as Governor of Indiana, signed legislation into law providing for dedicated state funding to support this endeavor. These nonfederal dollars will match every federal dollar provided, multiplying the positive effects of the federal investment before we even begin to enumerate the economic development benefits to the region.

I am proud of the progress that our region has made to invest in our commuter rail system. But the successful extension and recapitalization of the South Shore Rail Line and associated economic benefits in Northwest Indiana, along with other projects in communities throughout our country, depend on the availability of strong federal funding levels to support transit projects. I encourage you to keep these real world examples in mind as you continue to craft a fiscal blueprint for the upcoming Fiscal Year.

Thank you for your time.