

TESTIMONY – House Bill 26 – Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee

Chairman LaRose, Vice Chair Kunze, Ranking Member Tavares, and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Ohio Rail Development Commission's items within 2018-2019 biennial transportation budget.

The Ohio Railroad Association is very supportive of the work done by the ORDC. We have several members who also operate freight railroads in other states, and they consistently place the ORDC staff and programs at or near the top of the list of state rail offices. As the freight rail industry has changed over the years since the ORDC was created in 1994, through good economic times and bad, the ORDC has been a dependable and constructive partner to both the state's freight railroad industry and the many businesses and local economic development offices around Ohio that are involved in the greater freight rail-dependent economy.

Specific to the bill before this committee, the ORDC's continuing efforts to improve public safety deserves special recognition. The ORDC shared with the committee a map of the grade crossing safety investments made over the last biennium. Those nearly 150 projects improved the warnings for drivers approaching highway-rail grade crossings. Ohio continues to make improvements in devices, signage, and technology at grade crossings, and over the past decade, the state has seen crash numbers drop from well over 100 per year to less than 80 in 2015. The troubling fact behind this trend is that crashes continue to occur more frequently at crossings with active warning devices (gates with lights, or with lights only). In 2015, approximately 84% of grade crossing crashes occurred at what are referred to as actively-warned grade crossings. In 2009, that percentage was 55%. Since then, Ohio has had never had a year where the percentage of crashes at active locations was less than 69%. Three times, including 2015, that number has exceeded 80%.

The safety investments made by the state in partnership with freight railroads have been effective in driving down the numbers of crashes over the years. However, driver behavior remains a stubborn problem. Just as recently reported highway crash statistics suggest is the case for highway crashes, driver inattention may be a significant part of this problem, along with speeding and reckless operation. Perhaps the technology advances in vehicle-infrastructure communications will one day address this subject directly. Certainly, it is a public safety subject that deserves attention.

The bill also provides a portion of the ORDC's funding for rail infrastructure improvements and expansions. Those type of investments are often directly related to jobs provided by the businesses utilizing rail service. The ORDC's efforts to enhance, create and retain jobs through investments in rail

infrastructure is a tremendous story. I call your attention to the other map provided by the ORDC that presented their project participation and the jobs affected. The ORDC estimates approximately 27,600 jobs were affected positively by their investments in rail infrastructure in FY 2015-2016. The public dollars (total \$8.7 million) leveraged another \$322.3 million, for a return on their investment of \$37 for every \$1 committed by the ORDC. Those were two very strong years, but the ORDC has consistently produced such returns on the funds provided by the General Assembly.

In closing, the members of the Ohio Railroad Association highly value the service rendered by the ORDC and encourage this committee to support the ORDC's budget request contained in House Bill 26.