



House Finance Committee
House Bill 74
Interested Party Testimony
February 18, 2021

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written interested party testimony regarding House Bill 74 (H.B. 74), the 2022-2023 state transportation budget.

Ohio's Regional Transportation Planning Organizations ("RTPO") provide transportation planning products and services to the non-metropolitan regions of Ohio, and work with both ODOT and local stakeholders to facilitate an integrated approach and support better informed transportation decision making in Ohio. RTPOs have established many successes within the current operational framework. Seven years into the program, RTPOs are trusted local partners and facilitators.

To build on the current success and momentum of the RTPO program, The Ohio Rural Development Alliance ("ORDA") requests the following funding and policy changes:

- **Add a construction project line item in the transportation budget in the amount of \$10 million per year, and distribute a portion of this total to each RTPO using the same formula ODOT currently uses to calculate each RTPO's planning allocation.**
- **Increased Planning Funding to effectively administer construction program and additional planning services.**
- **Expand the role of RTPOs to enhance local elected official consultation and cooperation in transportation planning process.**

For additional information on each request, please review the attached RTPOs Planning for Progress document. RTPOs are an asset and have key partnerships with ODOT and other stakeholders that puts focus on the transportation needs of rural Ohio, which enables rural Ohio's economy to grow.



By way of background, the ORDA is an organization of RTPOs and other entities dedicated to economic parity for Ohio's rural communities. ORDA's members advocate for policies that create sustainable and diverse economic growth and prosperity in their communities. One of our goals is to ensure that rural Ohio is positioned to capitalize on opportunities in the regional economy. ORDA believes the RTPOs provide unique solutions and perspectives on regional transportation issues and give great insight to the Ohio Department of Transportation when implementing statewide planning activities

Currently, six RTPOs exist and are serving their communities needs by planning. The six RTPOs are listed below.

- Buckeye Hills Regional Council (Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Perry, and Washington Counties)
- Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (Fairfield, Knox, Madison, Marion, Morrow, Pickaway and Union Counties)
- Logan-Union-Champaign Regional Planning Commission (Logan and Champaign Counties)
- Maumee Valley Planning Organization (Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Paulding, and Williams Counties)
- Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (Carroll, Columbiana, Coshocton, Guernsey, Harrison, Holmes, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas Counties)
- Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission (Adams, Brown, Fayette, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, part of Lawrence, Pike, Ross, Scioto, and Vinton Counties)

We encourage this committee to support the RTPO program by implementing the three priorities described above. Amending House Bill 74 to include these three priorities will enable the RTPOs to better serve their local communities and continue to work with ODOT and other stakeholders on important transportation needs for rural Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written interested party testimony on House Bill 74. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us via phone or e-mail.

Ohio Regional Transportation Planning Organizations

RTPOs

Planning for Progress

Policy Priorities October 2020



Cover photo of the Southern Ohio Veterans Memorial Highway Ohio State Route 823 by Rodney Hamilton.

RTPOs: Planning for Progress

Executive Summary

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) created the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) program to strengthen and formalize a rural consultation process that is followed when implementing statewide planning activities. RTPOs were initially charged with developing transportation expertise, regional transportation databases, public engagement policies, and long-range multimodal transportation plans for their region.



RTPOs provide transportation planning products and services to the non-metropolitan regions of Ohio, and work with both ODOT and local stakeholders to facilitate an integrated approach and support better informed transportation decision making in Ohio.

RTPOs have established many successes within the current operational framework. Seven years into the program, RTPOs are trusted local partners and facilitators. This document will outline the logical next steps to enhance the existing contributions of Ohio's RTPOs, and their potential to expand into new roles and responsibilities, growing to meet the demands of the people and communities they serve.

To better meet the needs of the rural regions of Ohio, the roles of the RTPOs need to be expanded to include:

- Construction Project Funding for RTPOs
- Increased Planning Funding to effectively administer construction program and additional planning services
- Expand the Role of RTPOs to enhance local elected official consultation and cooperation in the transportation planning process

History & Background

On July 1, 2013, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) began a two-year pilot program with five multi-county planning organizations (or councils of government) providing them with funding to conduct regional transportation planning in coordination with local stakeholders, Ohio Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and ODOT. Much of Ohio's non-metropolitan local official coordination occurs between ODOT and these organizations. ODOT created this program to strengthen and formalize the rural consultation process that is followed when carrying out statewide planning activities and construction projects.



ODOT created the RTPO program to strengthen and formalize the rural consultation process that is followed when carrying out statewide planning activities and construction projects.

On January 27, 2016, Governor John Kasich formally designated each of these five agencies as an Ohio Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO). These designations formalize the program that started as a pilot and helped spur better and more informed transportation decision making in Ohio.

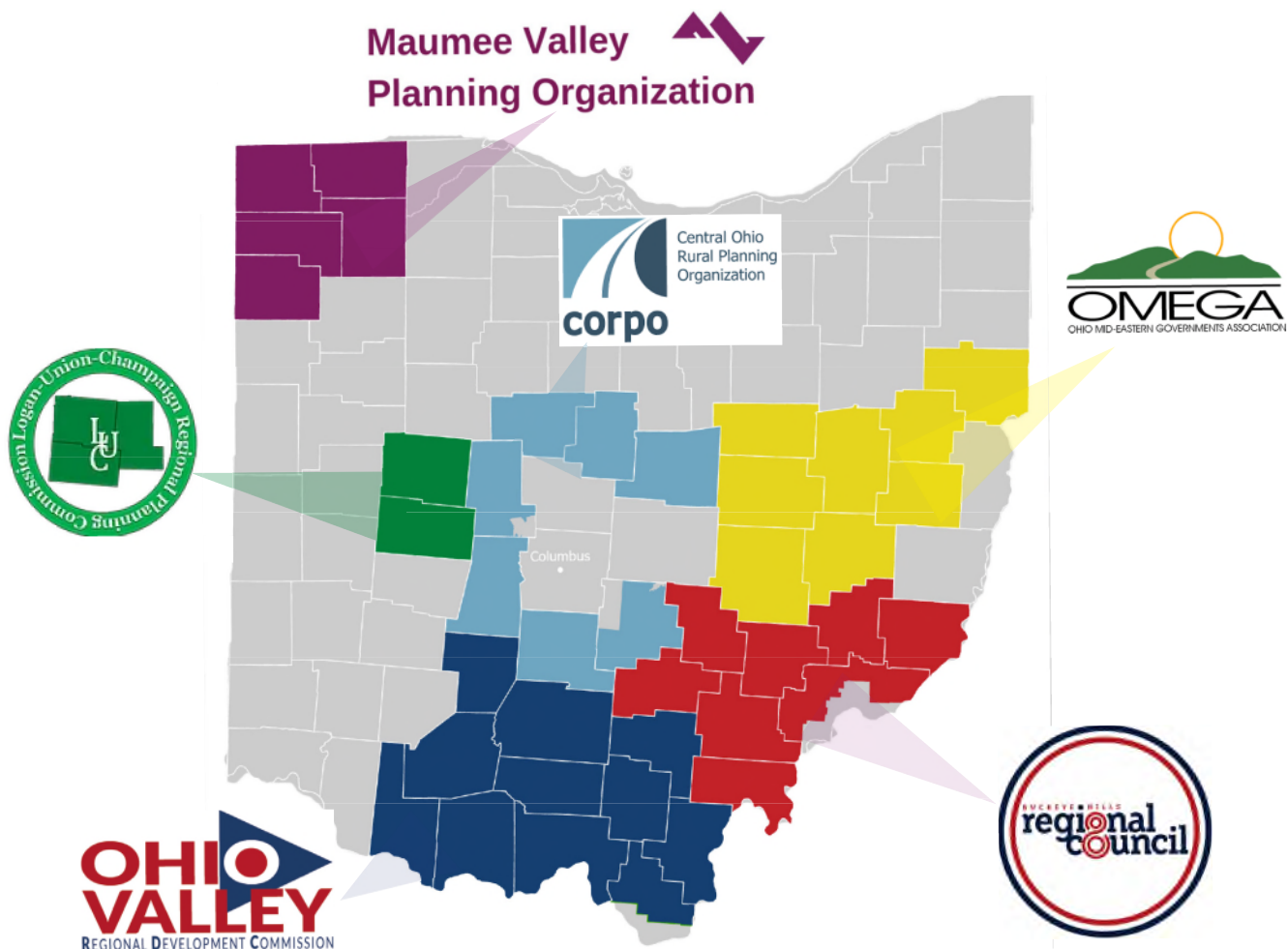


On October 9, 2019, Governor Mike DeWine formally designated the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO) as the sixth Ohio Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) in the State of Ohio.

Organizations and Areas Covered

The six RTPO organizations include:

- Buckeye Hills Regional Council (Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Perry, and Washington Counties)
- Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (Fairfield, Knox, Madison, Marion, Morrow, Pickaway and Union Counties)
- Logan-Union-Champaign Regional Planning Commission (Logan and Champaign Counties)
- Maumee Valley Planning Organization (Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Paulding, and Williams Counties)
- Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (Carroll, Columbiana, Coshocton, Guernsey, Harrison, Holmes, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas Counties)
- Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission (Adams, Brown, Fayette, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, part of Lawrence, Pike, Ross, Scioto, and Vinton Counties)



Background

What is an RTPO?

A designated Ohio Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO), in partnership with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), seeks to encourage local officials to have more input on transportation decisions within their region, because local participation is critical for allocating resources to make responsible transportation decisions with limited state and federal budgets.

The Ohio RTPOs work with ODOT to accomplish the following basic work items as part of a larger scope of work:

- The creation and adoption of a Public Participation Plan
- The creation and adoption of a regional Long-Range Transportation Plan
- The development and adoption of a Transportation Improvement Plan
- The moderation of an ongoing and inclusive public involvement and outreach process

RTPOs work on a wide range of projects, including data collection and analysis, traffic counts, inter-agency consultation and stakeholder outreach, transportation project planning, grant writing, and project funding research. The RTPO program allows rural areas to participate in transportation planning, somewhat mirroring the process that currently happens in major metropolitan areas through the designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) of Ohio. The RTPOs envision a transportation system in their respective regions that is connected, safe, well maintained, accessible to all users, environmentally sustainable and supportive of economic vitality.



At Issue

RTPOs serve a variety of transportation needs. Local communities are currently seeing benefits from projects with RTPOs, but ideas for improving the program presented here would see even bigger potential impacts on regional transportation projects and lay the groundwork to grow capacity.

To be effective, integral transportation planning organizations, RTPOs need the ability to better engage local elected officials and the general public in the selection of projects they believe make a direct impact within their region. Without this ability, there is little value or incentive for local governments to participate in the RTPO program. Without regional prioritization of program funding recommendations, rural communities are faced with competing with one another for resources, in addition to competing with the metropolitan areas of the State of Ohio. This puts rural projects at a disadvantage when competing for limited state and federal transportation grants and transit programs.

Policy Recommendations

Strategy 1: Add Construction Project Funding for RTPOs

- Create a funding source for transportation construction projects within each of the RTPO regions
- Add a construction project line item in the next state of Ohio transportation budget in the amount of \$10 million, and distribute a portion of this total to each RTPO and calculate using the same formula ODOT currently uses to calculate each RTPO's planning allocation
- Additional funding could create opportunities for:
 - ◇ Local construction project funds
 - ◇ Regional priority projects
 - ◇ Local match gap funding
 - ◇ Resiliency projects
 - ◇ Engineering and Environmental Services for federally funded projects such as TAP

Strategy 2: Increase Planning Funding for RTPOs

- Increase funding to each RTPO-to include administration of construction program, robust RTIP development, and expanded use of task order consultants for specific studies
- Additional funding could create opportunities for:
 - ◇ Conducting more local and regional planning studies through the RTPOs
 - ◇ Adding capacity through engaging specialty consultants to perform safety studies, traffic impact studies, signal warrant analysis, environmental, right-of-way, design and others for overflow requests that cannot be covered with in house staff, moving projects closer to their ultimate goal of construction
 - ◇ Make resiliency project planning a priority and provide funding to support the potential difference in increased upfront costs
 - ◇ Provide pilot funding for statewide local transportation planning efforts to develop an RTPO approach in areas of Ohio not currently served by the RTPO or an MPO

Strategy 3: Expand the Role of RTPOs to Enhance Local Elected Official Consultation and Cooperation in the Transportation Planning Process

- Create a greater/more meaningful rural cooperation/consultation process and priority project review process like the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in the state of Ohio
- Create a pilot program to give responsibility to the RTPOs to prioritize and recommend all projects in their regions for funding under the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program and the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)
- Expand the scope of RTPO-eligible projects to include township and county roads providing a broader rural project focus and addressing rural capacity concerns
- Include RTPOs in regular meetings with ODOT to coordinate priorities and to share local input and align to ODOT project plans
- Expand RTPO scope to include Mobility Management program

Support for Policy Recommendations

Strategy 1: Add Construction Project Funding for RTPOs

The creation of a construction project fund would give local stakeholders more input on transportation decisions within the region and help clear the backlog of unmet needs listed in each agency's RTIP document under the Unfunded Projects list.

RTPOs need construction project funds to assist projects that are in the best interest of the region. These funds would be programmed like the MPO discretionary funds and would enable projects to be added to the RTIP/STIP that might not otherwise be able to move forward. These funds would be subject to robust scoring criterion and would be voted on by the TAC, ensuring a fair outcome. RTPOs would be tasked with collecting project proposals and helping locals develop their purpose and need statements.

The single largest barrier to local governments submitting and being awarded much needed transportation projects is their inability to produce and provide the local funding match for the project award – this is particularly acute in rural areas.



As a change to RTPO policy, if ODOT would allow the RTPOs to govern a modest pool of funding, the RTPOs could then assess the specific need and value of all local transportation projects that cannot meet the local match and then utilize the pool of funds to award assistance and meet the funding gap.

This policy idea achieves two important goals of the RTPO program: it implements a solution to the local-match funding gaps that limit so many legitimate local transportation projects; and it allows local officials to have more input in transportation decisions within the region.



RTPOs believe support for resiliency planning is key to a competitive region. Rural communities have limited budgets and replacing existing infrastructure repeatedly drains their coffers and defers maintenance to the remainder of the system.

Strategy 2: Increase Planning Funding for RTPOs

Expanding the scope, collaboration/engagement model and planning dollars would allow the communities we serve to create a pipeline from the local level to the state level that better aligns to increase efficiency and foster more engagement with ODOT. With direct input from ODOT, RTPOs could align practices, procedures, goals, and initiatives ODOT wishes to implement to serve more people.

RTPOs cover a large geographic area and may have a significant number of viable projects, but limited capacity to handle all of them efficiently and effectively. Some RTPOs are currently using planning funds to retain prequalified consultants for specific task order planning services such as safety studies, traffic impact studies, signal warrants, and more. Additional planning funds would enable these currently limited services to be expanded to address the unmet planning needs in the regions. Many communities in our regions do not have the resources to proceed with these basic planning activities which is the first step in improving the transportation system.

In addition, the initial planning studies that are required to go after bigger grant dollars and projects can be initiated through RTPOs, but often are not because currently, there is no formal connection. By providing additional planning services, the RTPOs would be able to move projects closer to a construction/engineering phase and reduce the burden on communities. For example, Transportation Alternatives is a 95% | 5% grant for construction, but the applicant is responsible for design, right of way, and environmental at 100%. Assisting the community with those elements would enable more projects to compete for limited funds.

Due to the rural nature of RTPOs, resiliency planning is key to a competitive region. Current infrastructure is being tested by increased traffic and increased environmental stressors. Rural communities have limited budgets and replacing existing infrastructure repeatedly drains their coffers and defers maintenance to the remainder of the system. Using flexible funding options, RTPOs should assist communities in developing resilient, sustainable projects that will withstand increased stress. These projects often come with a higher upfront cost, but are cheaper when life cycle costs are considered. Using construction project funds to cover the increased upfront cost may allow rural communities to sustainably prepare for the future.

Strategy 3: Expand the Role of RTPOs to Enhance Local Elected Official Consultation and Cooperation in the Transportation Planning Process

Create a more meaningful rural cooperation/consultation process and priority project review process like the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in the state of Ohio by assigning responsibility to the RTPOs to prioritize and recommend all projects in their regions for funding under the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program and the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP).

Each RTPO could receive an allocation of Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) funds to program according to the priorities and strategies in their region's plan. The level of STBG funds each RTPO receives could be calculated based on the same formula ODOT uses to calculate each RTPO's planning allocation. The policy boards of RTPOs could opt to increase funding of planning activities from their regional STBG allocation, which would allow some regions to complete additional planning activities.

Logically, ODOT and the RTPO program has had a particular focus on large highway and state route transportation improvement projects. By default, that focus favors the needs urban and suburban areas over the needs of rural areas, who lack the density and total mileage of highway networks. Nevertheless, the rural areas have local transportation improvement and safety needs that are underserved and do not have the tax base to address those needs. The Ohio RTPOs would like to encourage a balancing of focus to recognize the need for supporting local projects and rural roadway safety improvements as opposed to such an intense focus on large highway and state route projects.

Within the RTPO program, ODOT is enormously generous with funding, administrative assistance, training, and support. Additionally, in administering the program ODOT has been very effective at providing high-level support to the RTPOs while maintaining the RTPOs autonomy to implement the program based upon the needs of that local region. That dynamic has been effective at maintaining the balance between State prerogatives and the local administration of the program and is deeply appreciated by the RTPOs. Nevertheless, the RTPOs would like to foster more engagement with ODOT to get their direct input on what practices, procedures, goals, and types of regional project initiatives ODOT feels are most important to implement so that the RTPOs can better serve and realize ODOT's vision of the program.

One Ohio RTPO was selected as one of two pilot regions in the state to prepare Regional Coordinated Public Transit/Human Services Transportation Plans and is currently in the process of plan implementation. The other Ohio RTPOs could be given the opportunity to develop Regional Coordinated Public Transit/Human Services Transportation Plans and identify and program rural transit funds in their RTIP. The plans could be updated every five years, and include a detailed inventory of services, vehicles, and needs.



In addition, the Ohio Mobility Management Program supports connections between transportation and human services, education, and employment. Transportation options for individuals can result in improved health conditions, reduced costs related to workplace absenteeism, and cost savings for medical providers attributed to missed appointments. The Mobility Management program, although relatively new, is becoming vital for supporting aging, disabled, military veteran, economically disadvantaged, and substance recovery populations. Demographic projections and continued cycles of economic upheaval indicate that the need for such a program is likely to grow in the coming years. RTPO programs could help expand the creation and fostering of the Mobility Management program in rural areas with additional administrative and funding support.

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Thank you for continued support of the Regional Transportation Planning Organization Program and for consideration of the proposed policy priorities.

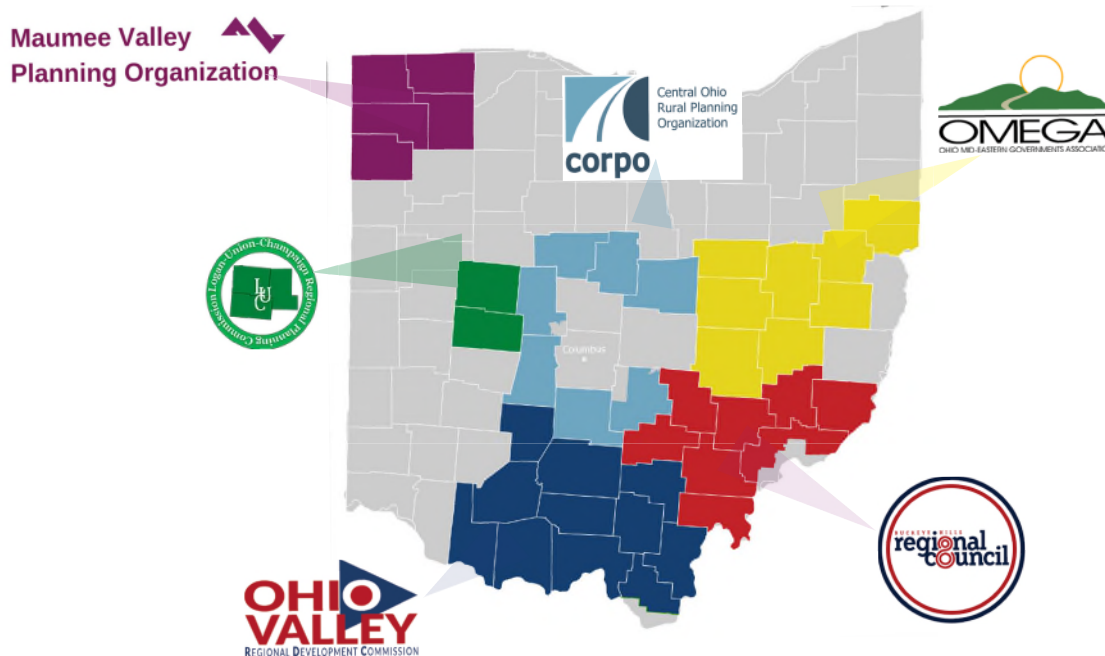
Ohio RTPO Guiding Principles for the Policy Priorities

In securing any funding from ODOT for RTPOs, the Ohio RTPOs are not limiting access to other ODOT programs that the RTPO member governments would normally be eligible.

In securing any funding from ODOT for RTPOs, the Ohio RTPOs do not support securing funding at the expense of Ohio Metropolitan Planning Organizations, the County Engineers Association of Ohio, or any other entities receiving ODOT funding.

Organizations in Support of the Policy Priorities

- Ohio Association of Regional Councils
- Buckeye Hills Regional Council
- Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO)
- Mid Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC)
- Logan-Union-Champaign (LUC) Regional Planning Commission
- Maumee Valley Planning Organization
- Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association
- Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission



Ohio's Regional Transportation Planning Organizations

Total Ohio Counties Served = 40 Counties

Total Population Served = 1.86 Million People

Total Square Miles Covered = 19,075 Square Miles



Since 2013, OMEGA has worked with the communities in the RTPPO region and various funding agencies to secure almost **\$4 million** in funding for **28** transportation projects for 25 communities. These projects meet the goals of **OMEGA's Regional Transportation & Development Plan, 2020-2045**.

PRESERVE REGIONAL ASSETS TO SUPPORT LOCAL ECONOMIES

- **\$1.12 Million** in funding secured leveraging over \$1.41 million in other funding
- 1 Bridge replaced
- 2.6 miles of roadway improved
- 135 l.f. storm sewer replaced
- 2.34 miles recreational trail improved
- 1 road slip repaired
- 6 bicycle counters & 5 infrared pedestrian counters purchased

INCREASE THE SAFETY OF REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- **\$1.49 Million** in funding secured leveraging over \$1.95 million in other funding
- 1,650 signs replaced
- 10 traffic signals to be replaced or removed
- 8,331 l.f. sidewalk

FACILITATE ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- **\$1.13 Million** in funding secured leveraging over \$1.96 million in other funding
- 5,296 l.f. sidewalk
- 1/3-mile paved recreational loop trail
- 1,080 l.f. of road reconstruction for industrial park access

SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANS

In addition to funding applications, OMEGA has also assisted **nine** communities complete Safe Routes to School Travel Plans, which unlocked an additional potential funding source. To date, OMEGA has completed (or will complete) School Travel Plans for:

Year	School District	County
2015	Brown Local Schools	Carroll
2016	Harrison Hills City Schools	Harrison
2017	Indian Valley Local Schools	Tuscarawas
2018	Dover City Schools	Tuscarawas
2018	Strasburg-Franklin Local Schools	Tuscarawas
2019	East Holmes Local Schools	Holmes
2019	West Holmes Local Schools	Holmes
2020*	Carrollton Exempted Village Schools	Carroll
2020*	Newcomerstown Exempted Village Schools	Tuscarawas

**Plans are drafted and will be completed by December 2020*

OMEGA has also worked with partners throughout the region, including ODOT Districts 4, 5, & 11, to develop low-cost solutions to transportation challenges. OMEGA worked with the City of Salem, ODOT Districts 4 & 11, and the Ohio State Highway Patrol to develop a Truck Route around the City using new signage along existing highways. Truck traffic through downtown was reduced approximately 4%.



SALEM, Ohio – Newly designated state routes for truck traffic are alleviating congestion in downtown Salem as they promote car and foot traffic to the businesses there.

OMEGA also worked with the Mobility Manager and Community Action Agency of Columbiana County to develop GIS-based route maps for a new deviated fixed-route shuttle. This shuttle offers low-fare rides to connect residents in East Liverpool to commercial employment and shopping opportunities in nearby Calcutta.

In addition, OMEGA developed General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) formatted maps to South East Area Transit as part of a larger effort to add fixed routes to Google Transit and a live bus tracker on the SEAT website.





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December 7, 2020
Ohio Department of Transportation
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CORPO Successes

Union County Transit Feasibility Study

CORPO assisted the Union County Health Department UCHD by helping them obtain OTP2 funding through an ODOT Office of Transit grant. These funds were then used to hire a consultant to conduct a transit feasibility study for Union County. CORPO staff joined the Steering Committee for the project and advised our stakeholders in Union County on their selection of a consultant, (we did not select the consultant for them or tell them what to do) by reading proposals and making edits to requests when needed. CORPO also provided data for this project when needed and at times facilitated the coordination between UCHD and other Union County Stakeholders and regional partners. This helped reduce the costs that could be incurred by the consultants. UCHD hired OHM Advisors and completed their Transit Feasibility Study in mid-year 2020 and have leftover funding to use for additional projects.

Centerburg Trailhead Design Prep

Stakeholders in Centerburg, OH reached out to CORPO after learning of Knox County's recent membership / involvement with CORPO and MORPC. They wanted to develop the design of a new trail extension from the Heart of Ohio trailhead into Downtown Centerburg for Economic Development purposes as well as to satisfy requests from users. Although MORPC / CORPO does not typically do design work, we wanted to be able limit the cost of a consultant's fee as much as possible for our members. To do this we utilized in-house safety and active transportation experts to "prep" a design plan as much as possible for the Village, so that when they hire a consultant they will know exactly what to ask for and reduce the size of the request since some work will already have been done for them. We provided data, mapping, needs assessments and many hours of guidance (including suggestions on how to conduct user surveys and pop up scenarios) on this and supplied them with a deliverable quickly. They will now begin looking into RFP's for the project. It is worth noting that this planning activity will potentially be replicated for stakeholders in Danville, who also are working on their trail needs. CORPO has previously assisted with research for OMEGA on a related project in that area. (Active transportation and safety are agreed upon items in the CORPO PWP.)

Madison County Thoroughfare Plan

Although not yet complete, CORPO has been working with elected officials in Madison County on a Thoroughfare / Access Management Plan for the county. This was a request brought by the County Engineer and Commissioners who were concerned that access management regulations need to be developed and better spelled out within the county. Like trail design, this is not something that CORPO commonly develop for members, but have assisted with and contributed to in the past. After extensive coordination between Madison County officials, MORPC staff and the Franklin County Engineer's Office, this will be a quickly delivered planning product that would otherwise been costly to obtain through a consultant.

Mark Forrest
Chair

Jeff Stauch
Vice Chair

Vacant
Sect I



Peer Exchanges and Workshops

CORPO staff have facilitated numerous meetings over the last three years but recently have included additional events such as workshops and peer exchanges. In conjunction with MORPC, CORPO staff co-hosted numerous Rural Member Workshops as well as peer exchanges ranging in topics from rural development, funding, mobility management, rural transit, safety and general information exchanges at the local, regional and national levels. Many special projects and collaborations have been borne out of these events.

In addition to the projects above, CORPO has successfully responded to many requests from our members with data, mapping, guidance, research, analysis, funding and planning guidance. Elements from some of our larger planning products such as the TIP and the CLRP have been used in other, local planning activities which is something that would also have incurred additional costs for our members to obtain.



Regional Transportation Planning Organization Success Stories

Upon designation from Governor John Kasich as a Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) in 2015, our team at Maumee Valley Planning (MVPO) got to work on planning, implementing, and executing transportation services for our region. Over the past 5+ years, we've secured over \$6million in funding for our 5-county region that has improved transportation infrastructure, created jobs, enhanced active transportation, and increased mobility for persons in our area. With the help of community leadership and the Department of Transportation, we've helped make Northwest Ohio a safer, more vibrant place to live, work, and play.

Below is a breakdown of our success stories over the last 5½ years:

- The Village of Pioneer was awarded \$1million from the Economic Development Administration Public Works Program for a new connector road into the village's industrial park that facilitated the creation of 50 new jobs.
- Defiance County was awarded \$1.8million for bike and pedestrian enhancements at County Road 424 and E. River Drive.
- MVPO secured \$984,920 for work on Transportation Improvement Districts
- Supported various communities on Safe Routes to School applications and secured \$824,311 to implement these projects; among them, the Village of Swanton and City of Bryan.
- Completed a Long Range Transportation Plan for the region and in the process of an update cycle.
- Assisted communities with completing Safety Study's that have resulted in \$143,000 of safety funding.
- Started a Mobility Management program for the region and hired an individual to run the program and coordinate transportation services. 3 of the 5 counties in the MVPO region have a Coordinated Transportation Plan in place.
- A regional Safety Report was completed in 2016 and is in the process of an update cycle.
- MVPO has conducted multiple traffic counts for the region. In 2019, new counters were purchased that are able to pull different levels of data such as vehicle length and speed.
- Every year, MVPO works with communities to compile a list of projects to accomplish for our region. The projects are ranked to reflect importance or, rather, urgency.
- The RTPO team regularly participates in area Safe Communities Coalitions and District Safety Review Teams to keep up to date on crashes, and community safety initiatives. MVPO provides traffic and crash data, creates maps, and assists in safety studies.
- Over \$2million of funding was secured through the Transportation Alternatives Program for the Wabash-Cannonball trail repaving.
- The Village of Delta received \$482,000 through the ODOT Municipal Bridge program for the Wilson Street Bridge replacement.
- Williams County received Safety funding in the amount of \$143,000 for SR 107 Bike and Pedestrian Improvements.
- Received funding from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Clean Ohio Trails fund in the amount of \$145,571 for a trail extension to connect Liberty Center to the Wabash Cannonball Trail.
- Milford Township in Defiance County received \$75,000 in funding from ODOT Jobs and Commerce and aid in the application for \$475,000 in grant and loan funds from the Ohio Public Works Commission for the reconstruction of Kramer Road to encourage an expansion of Weber Stone and Gravel and facilitate the creation of 16 new jobs.



Since becoming part of the RTPO pilot program in 2013, OVRDC has endeavored to find the best way to serve the region as a Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO). We completed our inaugural Long-Range Transportation Plan in 2015, and our first Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) in 2017. Then in 2018, we initiated our Transportation Related Safety/Feasibility Study Program. With each passing year we are increasing our contribution as an asset to the region's transportation network.

In the first 3 years of the Transportation Related Safety/Feasibility Study Program, OVRDC has completed 10 studies directly as a result of the program. We have utilized consultants, ODOT safety assistance, and college students to complete these studies. The program has leveraged over \$1.6 million in funding for the region and that is just the beginning. The program is growing each year and not only are we assisting locals, but we are also developing expertise within our organization with each study completed.

OVRDC's Highland County Transit Study assisted FRS Transportation in applying for and receiving over \$1.2 million in new grant funds. These new funds will provide low cost public transit to all residents of Highland County. "It is great that the county has a partner like OVRDC that can assist us in bringing projects like this online [which will] eventually allow more freedom to move about and to increase economic development in Highland County. At the very least, it will allow for residents to have a choice concerning how they want to get around the county. It may also open more employment opportunities for many residents. We expect this grant to have a great impact on Highland County" said Highland Mobility Manager, Joseph Adray.

OVRDC has also worked to support our member's projects. ODOT's Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC) approved total funding of \$61.2 million in right of way and construction costs for improvements along a two-mile section of State Route 32 in Clermont County. For the proposal, we gathered letters of support from all the counties east of Clermont along the Opportunity Corridor to show not only collaboration, but coordination. OVRDC's member counties recognize the value of this for our region. Working together on projects like this will reduce drivetime to a major market and stimulate economic growth for everyone. Staff spoke in support of the project at the TRAC meeting.

In November of 2016, OVRDC entered into a service contract to serve as the public sponsor on a Diesel Emission Reduction Grant (DERG) for Superior Marine, Inc. Superior Marine, Inc., a Lawrence County full service marine support company, successfully applied for a DERG in the amount of \$728,535 to repower four 1980s-era diesel propulsion engines and four auxiliary engines in two tow boats, the Stephen T and R.H. Beymer, with two Tier 3 EPA certified power units. OVRDC recently completed the final inspection and report on this project and will continue to monitor this project for 5 years.

Statewide planning activities, such as participation in the Walk.Bike.Ohio Steering Committee and Ohio Association of Regional Councils (OARC) Transportation Committee, allow staff to bring attention to the issues of Southern Ohio as well as learn from other areas of the state. Staff also works closely with the ODOT Districts. Participation in District Safety Review Team (DSRT) meetings keep staff in the know on what is going on in the region and helps them to assist in coordination between local communities and ODOT staff.

Above are just a few of the highlights of the OVRDC RTPO Program. OVRDC is continually looking for ways to serve the region and establish itself as a valuable transportation asset to local communities. We value our position as an RTPO and look forward to growing and becoming an even larger part of the transportation community.



December 8, 2020
Ohio Department of Transportation
1980 W. Broad St.
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Buckeye Hills RTPO Success Stories

Regional Roundabout Advancement

Overall Community Engagement: the region has been gaining additional roundabouts from ODOT sponsored intersection improvement projects. Over the past five years, it has been imperative for Buckeye Hills to conduct community engagement in the region to educate, address public concerns, promote roundabouts, develop roundabout projects and generally smooth out rural community adoption and acceptance of roundabout infrastructure.

Roundabout Project Development:

- In 2017, Buckeye Hills partnered with the Athens Economic Development Council, and ODOT District 10 to develop and implement the \$1.2M Stimson Avenue Roundabout project. Activity included conducting public participation/engagement, applying for and being awarded \$500,000 through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and project development assistance. As part of an initiative to redevelop commercial areas, the project now provides greater access to the City of Athens via US 33 & 50 for tractor-trailer access while cyclists and pedestrians make use of the shared use paths and sidewalks.
- In 2019, Buckeye Hills partnered with Morgan County and ODOT District 10 to develop and implement a \$3.2M Malta-McConnelsville Intersection Improvement Project. Activity included conducting public participation/engagement, project pamphlet development, and project development assistance. Completed in 2020, the project installed two roundabouts at each end of the 7th Street bridge over the Muskingum River between Malta and McConnelsville critically relieving traffic pressure from a deficient and deteriorating legacy bridge.

Roundabout Rodeo Event: In the Fall of 2019, Buckeye Hills partnered with ODOT District 10 and Central office to organize and conduct a Roundabout Rodeo event. The purpose of the all-day event held at Malta State Park in Morgan County was to give local motorists an opportunity to safely drive their own vehicles through a roundabout simulation course and practice roundabout vehicle navigation ahead of the opening of Morgan County's first roundabout installation. Due to the success of the community engagement event, Buckeye Hills will seek to organize and implement such events in the future.

Regional Active Transportation Plan Development

Buckeye Hills has worked directly with Athens, Meigs, and Perry counties as part of Technical Advisory Committees to develop Active Transportation Plans. The Meigs and Perry County plans have been adopted by their Boards of Commissioners and have moved forward with identified improvement project development. The Athens plan was adopted by the Nelsonville City Council and proposed to the Athens City Council and Athens County Commissioners awaiting adoption.

Maritime Statistical Port Development

A 216-mile segment of the Ohio River on the eastern boundary of the state is significantly underutilized as a mode of transportation and commerce. Beginning in late 2017, Buckeye Hills in conjunction with other regional councils along the Ohio River in Ohio and West Virginia began coordinating with ODOT and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) to create a statistical port district for areas not currently represented by the Pittsburgh or Huntington Army Corp Districts. The Ohio counties affected are Meigs, Athens, Washington, Monroe, Belmont, Jefferson, and Columbiana. This designated area would extend from Columbiana County to Meigs County and will be titled the Mid-Ohio Valley Port District (MOVDPD). The data generated from this statistical port will be extremely important in the efforts of economic development. Data provided would include types of cargo shipped, tons of cargo, origins, destinations, as well as monetary value of that cargo.

In 2020, letters and/or resolutions from all OH and WV counties, 4 US Senators, 2 US Congressmen, both OH and WV DOT directors were approved with robust support from many other state and local officials, and from the private sector. The request for

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designation was submitted to USACE and approved by the Huntington District in the Fall of 2020, and forwarded by the District Commander to the Great Lakes and Ohio River Division (LRD) in Cincinnati. After approval by LRD, the request will move to the Institute for Water Resources (IWR) in Alexandria, Virginia, which reviews and determines whether to grant final approval. Notification of approval is expected in Q1 or Q2 of 2021.

Regional Transit Support

Buckeye Hills RTPO staff has served as a Technical Advisory Committee member for Athens, Hocking, and Perry counties to successfully develop Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans, while also being the lead agency for the Washington County Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan 2020 re-write and implementation.

Additionally, in 2020 Buckeye Hills has been an integral team member securing award of a Federal Transit Authority (FTA) HOPE grant for Athens County regarding a Regional Coordination of Medical Transit project. Buckeye Hills RTPO supported the grant proposal with a Letter of Support, as well as contributing to the grant application, and will be a primary contributor to the project tasks. The goal of the project is to improve access to healthcare and jobs for Athens County, Ohio. The three parts of the project address this goal in different ways, and include: Regional Medicaid Transportation Scheduling Assessment, Advanced Fare Payment, and Electric Bus Planning. If the model developed in Athens County is successful, the intent will be to expand the model into other parts of the Buckeye Hills region with future grant opportunities.

Access Ohio 2045 Support

Buckeye Hills was represented on the AccessOhio 2045 Steering Committee. This participation allowed transportation issues for rural communities to be brought to the forefront of statewide conversation, and appropriately recognized in the resulting planning documents. Buckeye Hills also hosted an AccessOhio 2045 public outreach meeting in Marietta on May 10, 2018.

In addition to the initiatives and projects above, Buckeye Hills has successfully responded to many requests from our regional members with traffic count data collection, data analysis, GIS mapping, public engagement, funding program navigation and application submission, and planning consultation services.



Logan-Union-Champaign regional planning commission

Director: Bradley J. Bodenmiller

December 8, 2020

Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT)
1980 West Broad Street
Columbus, OH 43223

RE: RTPO Dollars Leveraged & Successes
Logan-Union-Champaign Regional Planning Commission (LUC)

To Whom It May Concern:

When I first heard about ODOT's RTPO pilot program, I was excited about it. In part because transportation planning dollars are a regional need, but also because **strong relationships and land use/transportation planning have played important roles in the orderly and efficient development of our region**. Suffice to say, I am glad to share some of our RTPO success stories.

The LUC RTPO contracts with the Clark County-Springfield MPO, TCC, for transportation planning services. TCC is a single-county MPO and has been a tremendous resource to our organization since 2017. Prior to 2017, we partnered with MVPRC as a mentor agency to help us launch our RTPO. One of the great successes of the RTPO program has been the lasting relationships formed with TCC and MVRPC. **As you well know, the world of transportation planning is complex and both TCC and MVRPC have helped us navigate and better understand those complexities.**

LUC has a strong partnership with ODOT District 7 and District 6. In fact, a representative from each district participate in and attend our monthly meetings. Since becoming an RTPO, we have also strengthened ties with ODOT agencies at the State-level, such as Statewide Planning & Research. **The RTPO program has only strengthened our existing ODOT relationships.**

The LUC RTPO has completed several corridor and intersection studies. **In Champaign County, the City of Urbana was recently awarded \$3.1 million in Federal funds from ODOT for the South High Street corridor.** The corridor study was completed in 2019 and focused on pedestrian and vehicular safety improvements, as well as drainage and pavement improvements. The City's partnership with the RTPO has also produced planning studies for the Simon Kenton Trail multi-use path crossings on US36 and US68, improved curve signage on SR54 near Oakdale Cemetery, and speed zone and signal improvements at the Urbana City Schools K-12 site on US68. The City has been able to implement identified improvements in-house, except for the trail crossings which will be a future ODOT Safety program request.

In Logan County, the RTPO has provided technical resources to local jurisdictions on speeding, vehicular safety, and intersection operational issues in the Villages of Zanesfield and Quincy, the Indian Lake region Villages of Russells Point and Lakeview, and the City of Bellefontaine. The RTPO has also supported ODOT District 7 planning efforts, including the recently programmed \$2.2 million roundabout project at SR235 and SR47 and potential safety improvements at the US33 and SR274 intersection. **Additional long-range corridor planning along the US33 corridor, headed by ODOT Central Office, has also remained a priority of the RTPO; planning efforts have included cooperation from both the LUC and CORPO RTPOs.**

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In addition to these site-specific studies, the RTPPO also provides local jurisdictions with mechanical traffic counts where requested utilizing Miovision Scout units. Seasonal trail counts along the Simon Kenton Trail in both counties are collected and provided annually by the RTPPO. **These vehicle and multi-use trail counts can be used to prioritize crossing upgrades by trail traffic, or by local agencies for economic development data.** And finally, the RTPPO provides a forum for public transportation coordination between counties and regional coordination councils.

For convenience, I've provided a bulleted list of the information provided in the preceding paragraphs:

- Corridor and intersection studies
- The City of Urbana was awarded \$3.1 million in Federal funds from ODOT for South High Street corridor
- Planning studies for the Simon Kenton multi-use path crossings on US36 and US68
- Improved curve signage on SR54
- Speed zone and signal improvements at Urbana City Schools K-12 site on US68
- Technical resources to local jurisdictions on speeding, vehicular safety, and intersection operational issues in Villages of Zanesfield and Quincy, Indian Lake Region Villages of Russells Point and Lakeview, and City of Bellefontaine
- Supported ODOT District 7 planning efforts, including \$2.2 million roundabout project at SR235 and SR47
- Supported ODOT District 7 potential safety improvements at US33 and SR274 intersection
- Supported ODOT Central Office long-range corridor planning along the US33 corridor
- Provided local jurisdictions with mechanical traffic counts utilizing Miovision Scout units
- Provided seasonal trail counts along the Simon Kenton Trail
- Forum for public transportation coordination between counties and regional coordination councils

I appreciate the opportunity to share how we have leveraged dollars and some of our successes. I would be happy to elaborate on any of this information and can be reached at (937) 666-3431.

Respectfully,

Bradley Bodenmiller
Director | LUC Regional Planning Commission

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