



Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen Ohio State Legislative Board

A Division of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Rail Conference

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Ohio House – Finance Committee February 19, 2025 Meeting Testimony of John Esterly

Good afternoon, Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee. My name is John Esterly, and I am the State Legislative Board Chairman for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, a division of the Ohio Teamsters Rail Conference. Collectively, we represent over 5,000 active and retired rail employees, including freight, passenger, and yard operating crews as well as track and facilities maintenance. I am here today to register our support for several rail initiatives included in HB54 – the Transportation Budget.

First, this budget revises the “one size fits all” statute passed last year to recognize the differences in size, operations, and finances in the smaller Class 2 and Class 3 railroads in Ohio. Our organization worked closely with a coalition of these smaller railroads to develop this language in a way that preserves the legislative intent of the original bill. Ohio will still be the pinnacle of rail safety – after full implementation of the mandate, even with the revisions proposed, Ohio will have more wayside detection centers than any other state in the country. The current statute will remain unchanged for the larger Class 1 railroads such as CSX, Norfolk Southern, and Canadian National.

HB54 **does not** do away with the requirement for wayside defect detectors. Instead, it adjusts the spacing between detection centers on Class 2 and Class 3 railroads to more appropriately match their operations. These railroads are often responsible for first- and last-mile service for shippers, partnering with Class 1 railroads for longer distance service. Because of this, railcars will pass over numerous detectors before or after interchange.

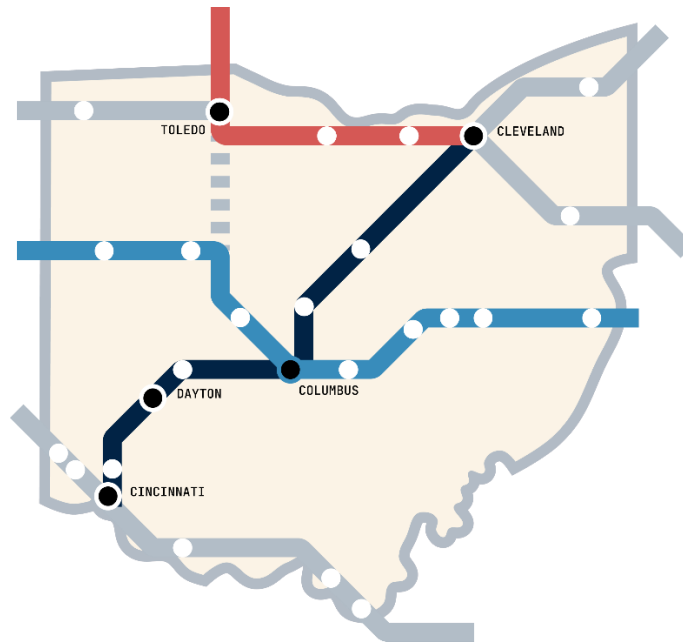
HB54 also proposes improvements to the current law. If a Class 2 or Class 3 railroad wants a variance to the spacing requirement, they would need to submit their reasoning to PUCO in writing. This written justification would prevent the railroads from taking advantage of the variance to increase the distance between detector site even further.

We also support the measure to rejoin the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission, or MIPRC. MIPRC is a subdivision of the Midwest Council of State Governments, and is the body responsible for managing the Midwest Passenger Rail Plan. Rejoining MIPRC Ohio a crucial seat at the table with respect to planning operations on routes that pass through our state.

Ohio currently has three passenger routes passing through our state: the Lakeshore Limited and the Floridian across the northern portion of the state, and the Cardinal with a stop in

Cincinnati and several others along the Ohio River. Unfortunately, these routes suffer from inconvenient, middle-of-the-night schedules and in the case of the Cardinal, lack daily service. Increased frequencies and better scheduling are the easiest, most economical ways to improve transportation service, and Ohio's delegation to MIPRC will have the opportunity to advocate directly for these adjustments.

In addition to this existing service, Ohio is studying three additional, state-sponsored passenger rail routes. The "3C&D," Cleveland – Toledo – Detroit, and "Midwest Connect" routes would offer robust connectivity across our state, and working with MIPRC will be critical to ensuring that these potential routes connect in a meaningful way to existing service in Ohio and beyond (see map below).



From All Aboard Ohio: Current and Proposed Passenger Rail in Ohio

Chair Stewart and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to testify on behalf of the Transportation Budget. I am happy to answer any questions or address any concerns that the Committee may have.