



MID-OHIO REGIONAL
MORPC
PLANNING COMMISSION

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State Transportation Budget (FY 2026 - 2027)

Interested Party Testimony

February 19, 2025

House Finance Committee

William Murdock, Executive Director, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the transportation budget bill for fiscal years 2026 and 2027. My name is William Murdock, I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC).

We are Central Ohio's regional council representing 90 local governments and partner organizations across a 15-county region. Our communities span urban, suburban, and rural areas, comprising a broad cross-section of Ohioans. In addition to sharing their needs with State leaders, we also provide a variety of programs and services related to transportation, land use, data, sustainability, and economic development.

MORPC plays a pivotal role in transportation planning for our region. As a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), we are specially designated by the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) to carry out transportation planning for the Columbus urbanized area. We also house the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO), which is a designated Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) as recognized by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). Further, we work directly with our communities to help them access transportation and infrastructure programs and funding from the Ohio Public Works Commission, Ohio Department of Development, and others.

Our local government members and our dedicated staff are entering 2025 with enthusiasm and excitement at the opportunities that lie ahead for our region, especially in three key areas: passenger rail connectivity, rural transportation development, and roadway safety.

Connecting Ohio with Passenger Rail

As you have already heard in this committee, Ohio has a unique opportunity to restore and improve passenger rail service to its residents and businesses. Using infrastructure already in place, passenger rail service could operate at competitive travel times on existing track, with multiple daily trips as early as the beginning of the next decade. Recently, the Federal Rail Administration approved and funded applications for its Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) program, including four routes in Ohio. The 3C+D (Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati) and Midwest Connect (Chicago, Lima, Columbus, Pittsburgh) corridors criss-cross the state, connecting urban, rural, and suburban communities to each other and creating a viable new transportation option for millions of Ohioans along the routes. Meanwhile, the Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit route would provide more direct service to and from Detroit, and improvements to the Cardinal Line running through Cincinnati would further enhance connectivity.


Local governments and business leaders view this as an economic development tool that attracts and supports the workforce and more. Imagine the convenience and benefits of taking a train to sporting events or concerts. For in-state business trips become easier and more productive. Frequent service could even buy more work time and avoid traffic on your commute to the Statehouse. It would benefit your neighbors or family members who can't drive. Whatever the reason may be, the benefits of passenger rail service are wide-ranging, impacting not just those living in

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Vice Chair

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Secretary



major cities, but especially those in rural and Appalachian areas along the routes. Communities like Lima, Springfield, Delaware, and Crestline are already being considered as potential stops on 3C+D; and on Midwest Connect, places like Kenton, Marysville, and Newark are lining up as well. Providing this additional transportation option is well within reach for Ohio – and it’s an option people want!

In a 2023 survey of Central Ohio residents across our 15-county region conducted by MORPC in collaboration with The Ohio State University and the Columbus Dispatch, passenger rail was the top-ranked transportation investment that residents would like to see. 74 percent of respondents believed passenger rail would be “very or extremely helpful”; and those benefits aren’t just for riders!

According to All Aboard Ohio’s economic impact study of the 3C+D corridor, it is estimated that statewide, the new service on that route alone could create up to 1,200 jobs and generate up to \$47 million in annual state GDP. When looking at the national network as a whole, every dollar invested produces four times that in national GDP. This is why business leaders from the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the Columbus Partnership, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, and the Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce are all raising their hands in support. Communities across Ohio can reap these benefits if we act now to restore service.

The Corridor ID program consists of three steps. In step 1, awardees develop a scope and cost schedule for step 2. As part of this process, MORPC and our counterparts in Fort Wayne, Indiana and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania are laying the groundwork for the Midwest Connect corridor. We have established a Central Ohio Passenger Rail Committee led by Marysville City Manager Terry Emery, and consisting of government and transportation leaders across Delaware, Franklin, Logan, Licking, and Union Counties. Simultaneously, our partners at the Ohio Rail Development Commission are doing similar work for the 3C+D corridor and Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit improvements. The Cardinal Line improvements are being conducted directly by Amtrak.

Step 2 involves preparing a service development plan and determining exact routes, station locations, service frequency, needed upgrades, and creating a comprehensive financial plan. In step 3, the engineering, environmental review, and capital improvements (if necessary) are completed.

To complete step 2, a match is required – which is why MORPC joins All Aboard Ohio, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the Columbus Partnership, the Ohio Association of Regional Councils, and a host of other community partners in requesting a **\$5 million GRF appropriation in the forthcoming state operating budget**. This would provide for required match across the state as well as ample funding to the Ohio Rail Development Commission for step 2 and create an Office of Passenger Rail to develop and support this as an economic development investment. **We also strongly support re-joining the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC).**


For more information on the program and our partners, see the attachments at the end of this document.

Preserving Rural Transportation Funding

Supporting the transportation needs of rural communities in Central Ohio is a core part of our work at MORPC. MORPC staffs the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO), which provides transportation planning services for Fairfield, Knox, Madison, Marion, Morrow, Pickaway, and Union Counties. CORPO is designated by the Ohio Department of Transportation as a Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO), which receives a set-aside of federal highway block grant funds from ODOT.

In the last transportation budget, RTPOs were provided \$5 million per year of federal block grant funding via the Ohio Department of Transportation. This was a substantial increase from fiscal years 2022 to 2023, and has had a significant impact in the rural counties they serve.

According to ODOT’s 2024 RTPO Impact Report, more than \$45 million has been invested in this program for 35 different projects across the state. However, more than 180 requests remain unfunded, worth over \$112 million. Expansion of this program has allowed us to approve more funding for our rural communities, including 8 in Central



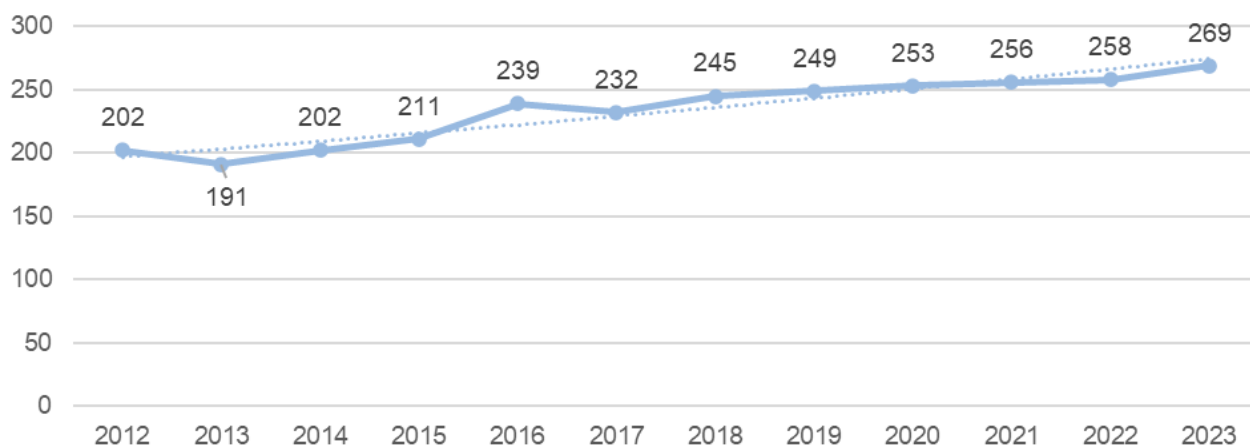
Ohio during the last two fiscal years. Further, we are aware that additional RTPOs are in the process of forming, creating even more needs for the program to meet.

We are urging members of the General Assembly to **continue this \$5 million per year appropriation for Regional Transportation Planning Organizations** as needs continue to grow in rural areas. For more information on the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization and our projects, visit morpc.org/corpo.

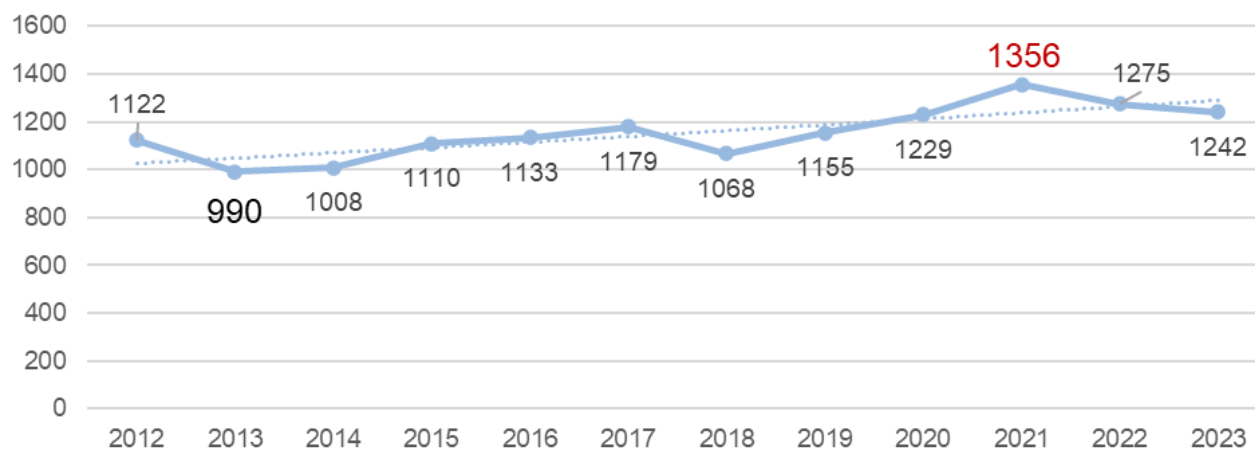
Improving Safety on Ohio's Streets and Roadways

Communities in Central Ohio are also focused on keeping our families and friends safe on our roads. MORPC focuses on this in our daily work and even host a regional conference on transportation safety each fall. In testimony for the last transportation budget, we highlighted the urgent need to invest in road safety. It's an investment that will save lives. Every year since 2014, over 1,000 lives have been taken on Ohio roadways. While traffic fatalities statewide are down from their peak in 2021, they remain on an upward trajectory over time. Additionally, fatalities in MORPC's 15-county region reached an all-time high in 2023 at a total of 269. These aren't just numbers, they're our loved ones. In fact, two members of MORPC's board have lost their lives in crashes in recent years.

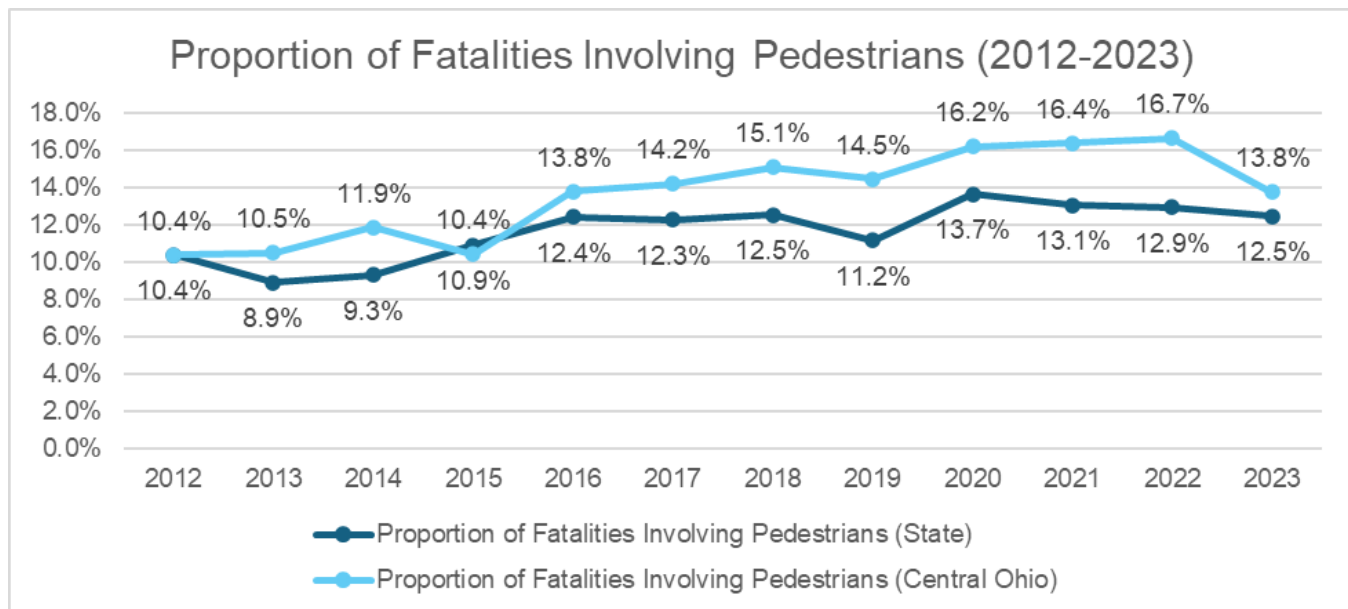
Traffic Fatalities in Central Ohio (2012-2023)



Traffic Fatalities in Ohio (2012-2023)



Additionally, people killed while walking continue to represent a disproportionate percentage of all fatalities on our roadways – an average of 13.5% for both the state and Central Ohio alike.



Motor vehicle crashes are common, but preventable. As we have observed over time, roadway design has a considerable impact on motor vehicle speed, which is the most significant determinant of the severity of crashes. Simple structural changes like diagonal parking in downtowns, sidewalk bumpouts at intersections, dedicated bike lanes, traffic circles, and high-visibility crosswalks can have significant impacts on speed and safety for motorists and pedestrians alike.

Recent increases in state funding for the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) have enabled ODOT to provide increased support to local agencies that directly impacts their ability to implement critical safety improvements. The Governor's proposal **included \$380 million for targeted safety upgrades** over the course of the biennium. The Governor's proposed budget also **included a \$3 million per year increase for the Safe Routes to Schools program**, which provides assistance and project funding to serve students who walk or bike to their schools. Continuing these efforts and engaging local partners to make our streets and roads safer for all who use them will undoubtedly save lives. **We urge you to support or further enhance these investments as you are considering amendments to the bill.**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify on the transportation budget bill for fiscal years 2026 and 2027. If you have any questions related to this testimony, please do not hesitate to contact me at wmurdock@morpc.org or (614) 233-4101.

APPENDIX

The below listed entities provided letters of support for Corridor ID program applications:

Federal	Non-Profit, Advocacy, Other
Sen. Sherrod Brown	Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio
Sen. JD Vance	All Aboard Ohio
Rep. Joyce Beatty	Capital Crossroads and Discovery SIDs
Rep. Mike Carey	Catholic Social Services
Rep. Brad Wenstrup	CelebrateOne
Regional	Center for Healthy Families
Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission	Central Community House
Licking County Area Transportation Study (LCATS)	Columbus Downtown Development Corp. & Capitol South
Lima/Allen County Regional Planning Commission	Columbus State Community College
Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (OMEGA)	Community Shelter Board
Columbus Partnership	Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI)
Columbus Region Coalition	Franklin County Convention and Facilities Authority
Columbus Regional Airport Authority	Franklin Park Conservatory
COTA	Greater Columbus Arts Council
Lancaster-Fairfield Public Transit	Huckleberry House
One Columbus	Jewish Family Services
Smart Columbus	Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce
Local, Township, County	National Alliance on Mental Health - Ohio
Franklin County Commissioners	Nationwide Children's
Franklin County Recorder	Ohio Mayors Alliance
Marion City/County RPC	Ohio Municipal League
Morrow County	Ohio State University
City of Bellefontaine	Short North Arts District
City of Columbus - Mayor's Office	Transportation Research Center (TRC)
City of Columbus - City Council	United Way of Central Ohio
City of Chillicothe	Visit Westerville
City of Delaware	Workforce Development Board of Central Ohio
City of Dublin	YWCA
City of Grove City	Private
City of Hilliard	American Council of Engineering Companies of Ohio (ACEC)
City of Lima	Battelle
City of Marysville	Cardinal Health
City of New Albany	Columbus Blue Jackets
City of Newark	Columbus Chamber of Commerce
City of Reynoldsburg	Columbus Region Logistics Council
City of Westerville	Daimler
City of Whitehall	DHDC Engineering
Village of Lockbourne	Dynotec
Clinton Township	EMH&T
Hamilton Township	Flaherty & Collins
Hamilton Township Fire Department	Fortner Upholstering
Prairie Township	Franklinton Board of Trade
Lancaster Port Authority	Glass Manufacturing Industry Council
	Huntington Bank



	Mannik and Smith Group
	MKSK
	MoodyNolan
	MurphyEpson
	NAI Ohio Equities
	Nationwide
	NBBJ
	OhioHealth
	Parsons Area Merchants Association
	Resource International
	Rev1 Ventures
	Ribway Engineering
	Southeast Healthcare
	Steelton Rising
	Steiner + Associates
	Thrive Companies
	Worthington Industries



FRA Corridor Identification and Development Program

Initial Federal Award: \$500,000 per route; no match required

The Corridor ID Program coordinates planning and development activities for potential new or enhanced passenger rail service across the nation. It has three steps to usher a passenger rail corridor towards implementation:



Once a grantee is in the program, they no longer compete for subsequent Steps.

Step 2 and Step 3 funding is awarded following satisfactory completion of the previous step (as determined by FRA). Corridors which complete Step 3 will have their capital projects placed in a project pipeline, which establishes the Federal priority for funding construction and implementation. Other, existing FRA and USDOT programs are available to assist in construction and service introduction.

Corridors in Central Ohio:

Cincinnati-Dayton-Columbus-Cleveland (3C&D)

- Led by the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC)
- Current CID Program Step: 1

Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus-Pittsburgh (Midwest Connect)

- Led by the City of Fort Wayne, IN with MORPC as a co-sponsor
- Current CID Program Step: 1

Corridor ID Program Passenger Rail Awards in Ohio



3C&D Corridor ORDC

- Nearly \$130 million estimated annual economic impact
- 400,000-800,000 annual ridership (3-5 daily round trips)
- One of the best ridership-to-cost ratios in Amtrak ConnectsUS plan

Midwest Connect MORPC/Ft Wayne

- 200,000-400,000 annual ridership (six daily round trips)
- Initial planning under Rapid Speed Transportation Initiative (RSTI)

Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit ORDC

- Direct service from Cleveland to Detroit via Toledo
- Connections with existing routes in Michigan and Ontario

Daily Cardinal Service Amtrak

- Improved long-distance service along existing Amtrak route
- Increased frequency to daily service along entire Chicago-NYC corridor