



## 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 March 13, 2025 Meeting Testimony of John Esterly

Good morning, 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. Today I ask for your support to increase the appropriation for the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC).

The mission and priorities of the ORDC directly align with the Ohio Teamsters Rail Conference. With respect to rail safety, one of ORDC's primary objectives is railroad grade crossing improvements. This can be as simple as upgrading passive crossbucks to lighted signage or gates, but ORDC also manages the Grade Crossing Elimination Fund<sup>1</sup> and supports the development and funding of these projects. As Ohio continues to grow, this work is critical to ensure the safe interaction between rail activity and vehicular traffic.

ORDC projects support businesses that utilize rail service for raw materials, finished products, or both. ORDC is an economic engine for growth in Ohio – since 2019, ORDC supported projects have **created 1,900 jobs, retained 4,200 jobs, and supported an additional 16,300 jobs**. Their efforts have drawn tens of millions of dollars in federal funding and private equity investments – they leverage **\$21 in investment for every \$1 allocated in the budget**<sup>2</sup>. ORDC's projects are only limited by their funding from the legislature.

Finally, ORDC is the local administrator for the Ohio-sponsored FRA Corridor ID passenger rail routes. While still early in the planning process, passenger rail expansion would be an economic boon for the state. An October 2023 study by Scioto Analysis<sup>3</sup> projects that the construction of just one of these routes – the 3C&D Corridor – would generate over **\$100 million in gross state product** and contribute **\$25 – 47 million in gross state product per year** from the economic impact of ridership. Construction would yield over **1,000 jobs**, and ongoing operations would support over **300 jobs each year**. These figures include only primary economic impact, none of the secondary development around station sites, or increased revenue from business

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<sup>1</sup> 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, H.B. 33 - \$100 million Rail Safety Crossing Match Fund

<sup>2</sup> February 6, 2025 testimony of Matthew Dietrich, ORDC Executive Director, in the House Transportation Committee

<sup>3</sup> Full study available upon request.

travel and tourism. The three routes being studied would pass through **54 of the 99 Ohio House Districts**, including nearly every member of this committee.

To this end, several amendments are being drafted to fully support ORDC in their efforts to improve rail safety, attract rail-supported businesses to Ohio, and to complete the Corridor ID process for three passenger rail routes: 3C&D; Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit; and Midwest Connect. I can confidently say that that ORDC is one of the best investments this body can make in Ohio's growth and safety, and ask that the members of this committee support increasing their funding level to support their activities.

Chair Stewart and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.