



MID-OHIO REGIONAL
MORPC
PLANNING COMMISSION

111 Liberty St., Suite 100
Columbus, Ohio 43215
www.morpc.org

**House Bill 96
Interested Party Testimony
March 13, 2025
Ohio 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 today on the state operating budget. My name is William Murdock, and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC).

MORPC represents 90 distinct local governments and partner organizations across a 15-county region, encompassing urban, suburban, and rural communities alike. Our work is at the intersection of jobs and transportation. Our team works side by side with communities, their businesses and residents to plan for economic development, environment, land use, and more.

Our community members view 2025 as a year of opportunity. Today, I will focus on three critical opportunities that will shape Ohio's future for generations: expanding passenger rail service, continuing vital work on brownfield remediation, and equipping communities with the tools to expand housing supply.

Connecting Ohio's Communities and Businesses to Passenger Rail

Just a few short weeks ago, I shared this opportunity with this committee during testimony on the transportation budget. As I noted then, this initiative is better suited for the operating budget, and we remain strongly supportive of enhanced funding for the Ohio Rail Development Commission to make this plan a reality by working hand-in-hand with leaders in both the public and private sectors.


This General Assembly has a unique opportunity to restore and expand passenger rail service within the next decade. Passenger rail is more than just a transportation investment—it's a catalyst for economic development, workforce mobility, and quality of life. The Federal Rail Administration (FRA) has already approved four key corridors in Ohio, including the 3C+D line (Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati) and the Midwest Connect (Chicago, Lima, Columbus, Pittsburgh). These routes will connect our communities—rural and urban alike—creating new

William Murdock, AICP
Executive Director

Chris Amorose Groomes
Chair

Michelle Crandall
Vice Chair

Ben Kessler
Secretary



economic and travel opportunities for millions of Ohioans, all while leveraging existing infrastructure to protect and enhance our important freight and logistics sector.

The potential economic benefits are undeniable. A study by All Aboard Ohio estimates that the 3C+D corridor alone could generate up to \$47 million in annual GDP and create as many as 1,200 jobs. Nationally, every dollar invested in rail returns four dollars in economic benefits. That's why business leaders from the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the Columbus Partnership, and regional chambers across the state are standing with us.


Ohioans want this investment. A 2023 MORPC survey found that passenger rail was the top-ranked transportation priority for residents across our 15-county region, with an overwhelming 74% saying it would be “very or extremely helpful.”

Imagine being able to take a train to a Bengals game or travel to South Bend to watch the Fighting Irish play the Buckeyes—without the hassle of traffic. Think of the business opportunities—being able to work on your laptop while hearing at the Statehouse. Or consider those who cannot drive or who don't want to fly—passenger rail would give them a reliable and safe option to travel across our state.

This is also a unique opportunity for mid-sized towns from economic development to workforce and even tourism. Lima, Springfield, Kenton, and Newark are not waiting for development—they are already planning for the opportunities passenger rail could bring. Local governments are stepping up: Central Ohio communities—urban, suburban, and rural—have already verbally committed \$350,000 in matching funds.

We urge this committee to plan for a future with passenger rail that serves Ohioans across the state. To move forward, we ask you to support a \$2 million general revenue appropriation offered by Representative Mathews to provide local matching funds for Step 2 of the Service Development Planning Study. This investment would unlock federal dollars and advance us to the next stage of development. We also support a separate amendment from Representative Blasdel that would appropriate \$3 million in GRF over the biennium to establish a Passenger Rail Office at the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC). This office would allow the state to more effectively and thoroughly study, coordinate, and meet the needs of our business community and evaluate all the options that could serve Ohio.

Finally, we thank the House for its leadership in reinstating Ohio's membership in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission through House Bill 54—a crucial step toward regional coordination and growth. The commission's expertise will be invaluable as we work to expand and enhance passenger rail service across the state.





Continuing Progress on Brownfield Remediation

In another key opportunity that's about economic development in communities of all sizes, Ohio has made significant progress in brownfield remediation in recent years. In 2021, the Brownfield Remediation Program was created at the Ohio Department of Development with a \$350 million investment, followed by another \$350 million in the next budget. With over 600 brownfield sites across Ohio benefiting from this program, the need for remediation is clear—but the work is far from finished.

Nearly half of the funded projects have focused on assessment rather than cleanup, and with over 9,000 sites statewide, the need for this program persists. In Central Ohio, MORPC has facilitated assessments funded by the USEPA, identifying 13 sites in need of remediation. For a few of these sites, we were even able to help them access funding from the state program to complete the subsequent remediation work. With increasing development and rising property values in our region, ensuring these sites are suitable for redevelopment will help keep Ohio communities accessible and attractive to investors.

We urge this committee to continue funding the Brownfield Remediation Program for at least the next two years, with a minimum investment of \$100 million per year. This program unlocks new economic opportunities and protects valuable agricultural land by removing harmful environmental contaminants.


Providing Communities with Tools for Housing Growth


And finally, one of the biggest issues facing Ohioans is availability of housing. In the last General Assembly, House Bill 315 provided \$1.5 million for a new Housing Technical Assistance Grant—one of several recommendations from the Ohio Senate Select Committee on Housing. These grants help political subdivisions with planning, zoning code reform, and other technical expenses related to improving housing supply.

To help communities move quickly and work to address the need for housing while preserving their community's character, MORPC created and operates a planner pool program that allows communities of all sizes to tap into our staff for assistance with these activities. For smaller communities with limited revenues, hiring consultants and planning firms independently can be cost-prohibitive. Yet, these are the communities under the most pressure as property values rise and zoning practices must adapt to support new development. This program also streamlines procurement of private sector assistance to allow communities to engage needed help faster.

By funding a Housing Technical Assistance Program, communities and regional councils like MORPC will have the tools they need to adjust local regulations that may inhibit economic growth. Most importantly, this approach preserves local decision-making, allowing each community to adapt to economic conditions in ways that best suit their needs.

We are requesting that the Housing Technical Assistance Program be funded at \$1.5 million per year for FY26 and FY27 in addition to FY25.





Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today on the state operating budget. I welcome any questions you may have.

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



Ohio General Assembly Districts with Proposed Passenger Rail

- 3C&D
- Midwest Connect
- Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit
- + + Existing Amtrak
- Daily Cardinal Service



The information shown on this map is compiled from various sources available to us which we believe to be reliable.
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Ohio General Assembly Districts with Proposed Passenger Rail

Ohio Senate

3C&D

District	Name
3	Michele Reynolds
4	George Lang
5	Stephen Huffman
6	Willis Blackshear
7	Steve Wilson
8	Louis Blessing
9	Catherine Ingram
10	Kyle Koehler
13	Nathan Manning
15	Hearcel Craig
16	Beth Liston
19	Andrew Brenner
22	Mark Romanchuk
23	Nicki Antonio
24	Tom Patton
25	Bill DeMora
26	Bill Reineke

Midwest Connect

District	Name
1	Rob McColley
3	Michele Reynolds
12	Susan Manchester
15	Hearcel Craig
16	Beth Liston
19	Andrew Brenner
20	Tim Schaffer
25	Bill DeMora
26	Bill Reineke
30	Brian Chavez
31	Al Landis
33	Al Cutrona

Existing Amtrak

District	Name
1	Rob McColley
2	Theresa Gavarone
4	George Lang
7	Steve Wilson
8	Louis Blessing
9	Catherine Ingram
11	Paula Hicks-Hudson
13	Nathan Manning
18	Jerry Cirino
21	Kent Smith
23	Nicki Antonio
24	Tom Patton
27	Kristina Roegner
28	Casey Weinstein
29	Jane Timken
32	Sandra O'Brien
33	Al Cutrona

Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit

District	Name
2	Theresa Gavarone
11	Paula Hicks-Hudson
13	Nathan Manning
23	Nicki Antonio
24	Tom Patton

Daily Cardinal Service

District	Name
4	George Lang
7	Steve Wilson
8	Louis Blessing
9	Catherine Ingram

Ohio House

3C&D

District	Name
1	Dontavius Jarrells
3	Ismail Mohamed
6	Christine Cockley
7	Allison Russo
8	Anita Somani
9	Munira Abdullahi
12	Brian Stewart
13	Tristan Rader
15	Chris Glassburn
16	Bride Rose Sweeney
17	Mike Dovilla
20	Terrence Upchurch
24	Dani Isaacsohn
25	Cecil Thomas
27	Rachel Baker
28	Karen Brownlee
36	Andrea White
37	Tom Young
38	Desiree Tims
40	Rodney Creech
45	Jennifer Gross
46	Thomas Hall
54	Kellie Deeter
55	Michelle Teska
60	Brian Lorenz
61	Beth Lear
70	Brian Lampton
71	Levi Dean
74	Bernard Willis
76	Marilyn John
87	Riordan McClain

Midwest Connect

District	Name
1	Dontavius Jarrells
2	Latyna Humphrey
4	Beryl Brown Piccolantonio
6	Christine Cockley
7	Allison Russo
11	Crystal Lett
12	Brian Stewart
51	Jodi Salvo
68	Thad Claggett
69	Kevin Miller
78	Matt Huffman
79	Monica Robb Blasdel
82	Roy Klopfenstein
83	Ty Mathews
85	Tim Barhorst
86	Tracy Richardson
95	Don Jones
96	Ron Ferguson
97	Adam Holmes
98	Mark Hiner

Existing Amtrak

District	Name
13	Tristan Rader
15	Chris Glassburn
16	Bride Rose Sweeney
17	Mike Dovilla
19	Phillip Robinson
20	Terrence Upchurch
21	Eric Synenberg
22	Darnell Brewer
23	Daniel Troy
24	Dani Isaacsohn
25	Cecil Thomas
27	Rachel Baker
28	Karen Brownlee
29	Cindy Abrams
34	Derrick Hall
35	Steve Demetriou
41	Erika White
42	Elgin Rogers
43	Michele Grim
44	Josh Williams
45	Jennifer Gross
47	Diane Mullins
48	Scott Oelslager
52	Gayle Manning
53	Joe Miller
54	Kellie Deeter
57	Jamie Callender
59	Tex Fischer
65	David Thomas
72	Heidi Workman
75	Haraz Ghanbari
79	Monica Robb Blasdel
81	James Hoops
89	D.J. Swearingen
99	Sarah Fowler Arthur

Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit

District	Name
13	Tristan Rader
15	Chris Glassburn
16	Bride Rose Sweeney
17	Mike Dovilla
20	Terrence Upchurch
42	Elgin Rogers
43	Michele Grim
44	Josh Williams
52	Gayle Manning
53	Joe Miller
54	Kellie Deeter
75	Haraz Ghanbari
89	D.J. Swearingen

Daily Cardinal Service

District	Name
24	Dani Isaacsohn
25	Cecil Thomas
27	Rachel Baker
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29	Cindy Abrams
45	Jennifer Gross
47	Diane Mullins



MORPC

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