



## 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 Senate – Finance Committee May 27, 2025 Meeting Testimony of John Esterly

Good morning, Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate 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 you to maintain the rail provisions in the House-passed Operating Budget, specifically funding for the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) and language to rejoin the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC).

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. I can confidently say 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 their current funding level to support their activities.

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.

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**

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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.

**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 travel and tourism. The three routes being studied would pass through **31 of the 33 Ohio Senate Districts**, including nearly every member of this committee. Additionally, rejoining MIPRC allows Ohio to leverage their resources to coordinate activities with other states, develop local rail plans, and advocate for daytime service on existing corridors that pass through our state.

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