



Dublin City Council

5555 Perimeter Drive
Dublin, Ohio 43017
Phone: 614.410.4400

**Interested Party Testimony of Mayor Chris Amorose Groomes
City of Dublin
Am. Sub. H.B. 96 Senate Finance Committee – May 29, 2025**

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Chris Amorose Groomes, and I serve as Mayor of Dublin, Ohio—a dynamic, growing city at the heart of one of the Midwest’s fastest-emerging economic regions.

In Dublin, we understand that infrastructure is about more than just movement—it’s about momentum. That’s why I’m here to express strong support for a strategic investment in Ohio’s future: restoring and expanding passenger rail service through the development of the Midwest Connect Corridor.

This is more than a transportation initiative—it is a powerful economic development opportunity. The Federal Railroad Administration has already designated four high-potential corridors in Ohio. These routes will better connect rural communities, improve access to jobs, support tourism, and strengthen regional mobility—all by leveraging existing infrastructure in a cost-effective, forward-looking manner.

Dublin is not only supportive of this effort—we are actively preparing for it. Our city recently completed a 17-month feasibility and land use study to assess a proposed multi-modal passenger rail station in West Dublin, on city-owned land near Houchard Road and State Route 161.

As Chair of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), I have also helped lead a regional coalition of public- and private-sector partners who are united in our vision: securing federal investment and ensuring Central Ohio is ready to compete and thrive.

On behalf of the City of Dublin and MORPC, I respectfully urge your support for a \$750,000 appropriation in the state operating budget to fund a Service Development Plan for the Midwest Connect Corridor—linking Chicago, Fort Wayne, Lima, Columbus, and Pittsburgh.

This one-time planning investment will unlock significant federal matching funds and pave the way for future private-sector investment—without committing Ohio to long-term operations or obligations.

Let me be clear: this is not a blank check. It is a strategic first step—an opportunity to gather data, assess feasibility, and make informed, evidence-based decisions. It will help answer key questions such as:

- Where should stations be located to maximize regional benefit?
- What kind of economic returns can Ohio expect?
- How can this infrastructure be tailored to best serve our communities and businesses?

This opportunity is fundamentally different from past efforts for four key reasons:

1. No Long-Term Obligation

This planning step offers maximum flexibility. It opens doors to federal dollars and potential private partnerships—without locking Ohio into future commitments.

2. Broad Private Sector Support

Ohio's business community understands the economic value of reliable, modern transportation. Organizations like the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the Columbus Partnership, and local chambers across the state support this effort as a tool for workforce mobility and economic growth.

3. Statewide and Regional Buy-In

This is not just about the 3Cs. Cities like Lima, Springfield, Marysville, Delaware, and Dublin—along with others across Central Ohio—have already committed more than \$300,000 in local matching funds. Communities of all sizes are stepping up and preparing for the future.

4. Proven Economic Return

A recent study projects that a single route could generate up to \$47 million annually in GDP and support over 1,200 new jobs. Nationally, every \$1 invested in passenger rail returns \$4 in economic benefits.

We are not interested in repeating the missteps seen in states like California. Instead, we are focused on what works—projects that are efficient, business-driven, and built for long-term success. That's why a group of Ohio thought leaders has been traveling to states like Texas and Florida—places where modern passenger rail is being implemented effectively. We've met with civic and business leaders, along with industry innovators such as Brightline and Herzog, to study real-world examples of successful public-private partnerships that are delivering measurable value and results.

With a \$750,000 planning investment over the next two years, Ohio can take a bold yet measured step toward realizing a smarter, more connected future. This is pragmatic, bipartisan leadership— with a history of support from leaders across the spectrum, including then-Senator and now Vice President J.D. Vance and Congresswoman Joyce Beatty.

Chair Cirino and members of the committee, thank you again for your time and thoughtful consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



OHIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Senator Bill Reineke
Senate Building
1 Capital Square
Second Floor, Room 220
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Honorable Senator Reineke:

On behalf of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to express our support for an amendment to House Bill 96 for funding to complete a Service Development Plan for the proposed Midwest Connect passenger rail line, linking Pittsburgh, Columbus, and Chicago.

Funding would enable Ohio to complete Step 2 of the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development (ID) Program. The result will be a detailed Service Development Plan that answers essential questions about station locations, ridership, travel times, and projected costs. This plan is necessary to evaluate passenger rail as an opportunity for Ohio.

This planning investment does not obligate the state to fund construction or future phases. Rather, it positions Ohio to unlock hundreds of millions in federal support and private-sector investment—leveraging an opportunity that didn't exist 15 years ago. Importantly, any future capital expenditures would require new legislative action, not before 2027.

Attached is a our spending priorities for the state of Ohio's operating budget for the 136th general assembly. Within this list we have included "ADD: Funding to complete a Service Development Plan for the proposed Midwest Connect passenger rail line, linking Pittsburgh, Columbus, and Chicago."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt MacLaren".

Matt MacLaren, Esq.
Director of Travel and Tourism Policy
Ohio Chamber of Commerce



OHIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

SPENDING PRIORITIES – STATE OPERATING BUDGET 136TH OHIO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ADD: WorkLearnOHIO

- Creation of a statewide work-based learning platform for college students to more readily connect with Ohio-based employers while in school, and to identify job opportunities in Ohio post-graduation
- \$20M – one-time funding, no recurring transfers from GRF
- Competitively-bid grant program to be awarded to a public-private partnership
- Applicants must demonstrate a capacity to grow sustainably to financial self-sufficiency over time

ADD: Ohio Manufacturing Technologies Assistance Program

- \$6M each FY (50% of funds reserved for manufacturers 1-50 employees, 50% for 51-500 employees)
- Grant program to help small and medium-sized manufacturers modernize machinery and facilities, overcoming financial and technological barriers

Expand Access to Affordable Child Care

- **RETAIN:** Governor's Child Care Choice Voucher Program at 200% FPL eligibility for publicly funded child care
- **RETAIN:** House language creating the Child Care Recruitment and Mentorship Grant Program at \$3.2M/FY26
- **RETAIN:** Continue modernizing Ohio's regulatory system for child care
- **RETAIN:** Implement Child Care Cred Program (Public-Private Cost Sharing Partnership) at \$10M/FY26
- **ADD:** Provision of child care scholarships to early childhood workers (Sens. Blessing/Timken SB 177)
- **ADD:** Incentives to convert dormant facilities and spaces into child care classrooms (Reps. White/Roemer HB 41)
- **ADD:** State funding matches to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood OHIO and POWER Ohio Programs
- **ADD:** Continued provision of Child Care Access Grants
- **ADD:** Cover costs associated with CDA credentialing fees and renewals

Promote Computer Science Offerings in K-12

- **RETAIN:** Governor's renewal of the Teach CS program for \$8M/biennium
- **RETAIN:** Provision of computer science teacher licensure waiver
- **ADD:** Enact a computer science graduation requirement
- **ADD:** Fund a CS District Playbook at \$300,000 in FY26

Bolster Efforts to Market Ohio as a Premier Destination to Visit, Live, and Work

- **RETAIN:** Increased line-item for TourismOhio from \$7.5M each FY to \$10M/FY26, \$12M/FY27 (surrounding states average \$25M annually), to market Ohio as *"The Heart of It All"*
- **RETAIN:** \$7.75M appropriation for America 250 Ohio

- **SUPPORT:** Transformational Sports Mixed-Use Development District
- **AVOID:** Any tax increase on sports wagering
- **AVOID:** Applying sales tax to short-term housing rentals

Increase Ohio's Housing Availability

- **RETAIN:** Support reauthorization of Ohio's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program
- **RETAIN:** Extension of Transformational Mixed-Use Development Program (TMUD)
- **RETAIN:** Creation of the "Housing Accelerator" housing development incentive program at \$2.5M/each FY
- **ADD:** Restoration of existing statewide version of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund

Taxation

- **RETAIN:** TAXCD92 - CRA agreements and exemptions
- **AVOID:** Remove TAXCD75 - County sales tax refunds
- **AVOID:** Remove TAXCD14 - Sales and use tax refund interest: direct pay permits
- **ADD:** Simplify municipal income tax complexity:
 - Centralization of Municipal Income tax
 - Elimination of Municipal Net Profits Tax
- **ADD:** Provide property tax relief through a tax deferral program
- **ADD:** Municipal net profits confidentiality of proforma inquiries

Miscellaneous

- Ohio's Unemployment Insurance System
 - Construct an Unemployment Insurance Technology and Customer Service Fee that is appropriate for expenses but does not overcollect from Ohio employers
 - **RETAIN:** Makes individuals ineligible for UI if suitable work is available to person, but individual fails to contact employer to inquire about work assignments
 - **RETAIN:** Authorize ODJFS, without conducting an investigation and holding a hearing, to determine employment is not seasonal
- **RETAIN:** Allow credit union and bank "student branch" programs to qualify for financial literacy graduation requirement
- **RETAIN:** Changes to ORC that allow the Ohio Department of Administrative Services to cut procurement red tape and expand Ohio's supplier base:
 - Consolidate the three codes governing the Biobased Product Preference Program into a single statute
 - Consolidate the twelve codes governing the Community Rehabilitation Program into a single statute
 - Update requirements in competitive selection statutes for consistency to standardize the use of the OhioBuys electronic procurement system
- **AVOID:** Remove House increase of the NextGen 911 fee from \$0.40 to \$0.60 cents
- **AVOID:** Remove House provision mandating a dispensing fee on every prescription filled in Ohio
- **AVOID:** Remove House restriction language surrounding SNAP purchases
- **AVOID:** Constraining the choice of higher education institution options available to Governor's Merit Scholarship recipients
- **ADD:** Preserve at least \$350M of the All Ohio Future Fund to ensure completion of site projects already in queue
- **ADD:** Funding to complete a Service Development Plan for the proposed Midwest Connect passenger rail line, linking Pittsburgh, Columbus, and Chicago
- **ADD:** Authorizing security guards at nuclear power plants to receive Ohio security guard license

May 12, 2025

President Rob McColley
The Ohio Senate
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear President McColley,

As the mayors and city managers of communities along the proposed Midwest Connect Passenger Rail Corridor, we write together to express our united and enthusiastic support for a \$750,000 state appropriation to complete a Service Development Plan—Step 2 of the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) Corridor ID Program.

The Midwest Connect Corridor—linking Chicago, Fort Wayne, Lima, Columbus, and Pittsburgh—offers an unprecedented opportunity for public-private partnership that will enhance mobility, strengthen economic competitiveness, and connect Ohioans across rural, suburban, and urban communities. By leveraging existing infrastructure, this corridor promotes not only modern passenger mobility, but also improvements to freight rail safety, expanded tourism, and workforce accessibility.

This moment is unlike any we've seen before. The corridor has already been accepted into the FRA's national planning framework, with federal funding covering 90% of the cost for this planning phase. The state's modest contribution would unlock that support, positioning Ohio as a leader in the Heartland's rail renaissance.

This effort is backed by a growing coalition—spanning political lines and geographic boundaries. From Vice President J.D. Vance to Congresswoman Joyce Beatty, from the Ohio Chamber of Commerce to local chambers across the state, and from major employers to small-town leaders, there is broad consensus that this is the right project at the right time.

Here's why we believe now is the time for Ohio to take this critical next step:

1. **No Long-Term Commitment Required** – This appropriation funds analysis, not construction. It empowers Ohio with actionable data and a clearer understanding of the opportunity—without binding the state to future obligations.
2. **Private Sector Engagement** – Ohio's business community recognizes the economic upside. The Ohio Chamber of Commerce, Columbus Partnership, and other regional leaders see rail as a tool to address workforce needs and unlock future private investment.
3. **Grassroots, Local Match** – Communities large and small—from Lima to Springfield to Marysville—have already stepped up with \$350,000 in local funds, showing how deeply invested we are in making this corridor a reality.
4. **Strong Return on Investment** – National models estimate every \$1 invested in rail yields \$4 in economic benefits. A recent study of Ohio's 3C+D corridor projected up to \$47 million annually in GDP growth and 1,200 new jobs. Midwest Connect offers similar, scalable impact.

Ohio cannot afford to sit on the sidelines. Without state action, federal funds may flow elsewhere—missed not just by our cities, but by our residents, our workforce, and our future economy.

Together, we urge you and your colleagues to seize this opportunity and join with local governments, the business community, and bipartisan champions in supporting the \$750,000 appropriation for Step 2 of the Midwest Connect Passenger Rail Corridor.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration. We welcome the chance to discuss this further and stand ready to assist however we can.

Sincerely,



Chris Amorose Groomes
Mayor, City of Dublin



Jerry Barilla
Mayor, City of Steubenville



Michelle Crandall
City Manager, City of Hilliard



Terry Emery
City Manager, City of
Marysville



Andrew J. Ginther
Mayor, City of Columbus



Jeff Hall
Mayor, City of Newark



Sharetta Smith
Mayor, City of Lima



James Zucal
Mayor, City of Uhrichsville

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

Secretary Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

March 24, 2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

I am writing to express my support for the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's application for the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program in support of the Midwest Connect project.

The Corridor ID program is an opportunity to address the planning and prioritization issues critical in defining a long-term investment program for nationally significant corridors. This process will allow for the assessment of safety, economic, and sustainability benefits, and I believe that this project will bring significant positive impacts to our region.

With an anticipated annual ridership of 200,000 - 400,000 passengers, the transportation infrastructure in the region will undergo a substantial transformation as a result of the Midwest Connect project. The initial planning under the Rapid Speed Transportation Initiative (RSTI) demonstrates a forward-thinking approach to transportation planning and an understanding of the needs of the communities that will be served by this project.

In addition, this project will have a substantial impact on the economy. By providing swift, dependable, and accessible transportation connections between cities, it will enhance the efficiency of business, personal, and tourist travel and boost economic competitiveness along the corridors. The benefits will extend beyond the major urban areas, as priority will be given to accessibility to and from rural areas, strengthening tourism and connections to regional economies.

I encourage you to strongly consider the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's application for the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program in support of the Midwest Connect project. Please contact my office if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



JD Vance
Senator

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