



## 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 – Transportation Committee March 14, 2025 Meeting Testimony of John Esterly**

Good morning, Chair Patton, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Ohio Senate Transportation 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. I am here today to discuss provisions included in the House-passed version of the Transportation Budget – specifically language and an allocation for Ohio to rejoin the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission, or MIPRC.

MIPRC is a multi-state body that operates under the umbrella of the Midwest Council of State Governments (CSG). Like CSG, MIPRC exists to coordinate interaction among Midwestern state officials, and between the public and private sector at all levels – federal, state, and local. MIPRC was formed by compact agreement in 2000, and currently includes eight of the twelve eligible states – Ohio is the only state east of the Chicago hub that is absent<sup>1</sup>. Since 2021, MIPRC has partnered with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to develop and implement the Midwest Regional Rail Plan<sup>2</sup>, which is a long-term, multi-step vision of better service in MIPRC's jurisdiction with new connections and increased frequencies on existing routes.

MIPRC facilitates communication between all the stakeholders involved in long-distance service (defined as routes longer than 750 miles that are federally supported). The Midwest Regional Rail Plan was developed with input from the DOTs from all 12 states in the MIPRC jurisdiction, Amtrak, Class I railroads, metropolitan planning organizations, advocacy groups and chambers of commerce. These entities continue to be included in ongoing planning and decision making.

It should be noted that MIPRC does not have any statutory control or authority over state-sponsored routes. For example, the Wolverine route from Detroit to Chicago is primarily governed by MDOT in Michigan with strategic support from InDOT and IDOT, not by MIPRC – even though all three states are members and fall within MIPRC's jurisdiction. MIPRC may work with states to ensure that state-sponsored and long-distance routes meet in a meaningful way for travelers, but this is not a requirement.

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<sup>1</sup> Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota are also non-members and eligible to join.

<sup>2</sup> The Midwest Regional Rail Plan is a 40-year incremental improvement plan that works to connect major population centers in the Midwest, including many of Ohio's cities.

The language included in the House-passed version of the Transportation Budget does two things. First, it creates the mechanism in the revised code for the Governor to appoint the four Commissioners that would serve Ohio on MIPRC: a commissioner from each chamber of our legislature, the Governor or their designee, and a commissioner from the private sector. Second, the language provides an annual allocation of \$25,000 to fund Ohio's membership in MIPRC.

Chair Patton and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.