



Senate Transportation Committee  
House Bill 23  
Interested Party Testimony  
March 15, 2023

Chair Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, and Ranking Member Antonio, and members of Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written interested party testimony regarding House Bill 23 (H.B. 23), the state transportation budget.

By way of background, the Ohio Rural Development Alliance (ORDA) is an organization of regional transportation planning organizations (“RTPOs”) and other entities dedicated to economic parity for Ohio’s rural communities. ORDA’s members advocate for policies that create sustainable and diverse economic growth and prosperity in their communities. ORDA believes the RTPOs provide unique solutions and perspectives on regional transportation issues and give great insight to the Ohio Department of Transportation when implementing statewide planning activities. Ohio’s RTPOs provide transportation planning products and services to the non-metropolitan regions of Ohio, and work with both ODOT and local stakeholders to facilitate an integrated approach and support better informed transportation decision making in Ohio. RTPOs have established many successes within the current operational framework. Seven years into the program, RTPOs are trusted local partners and facilitators.

Ohio’s six RTPOs serve their local communities by providing critical transportation planning. The six RTPOs are listed below.

- Buckeye Hills Regional Council (Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Perry, and Washington Counties)
- Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (Fairfield, Knox, Madison, Marion, Morrow, Pickaway and Union Counties)
- Logan-Union-Champaign Regional Planning Commission (Logan and Champaign Counties)
- Maumee Valley Planning Organization (Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Paulding, and Williams Counties)
- Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (Carroll, Columbiana, Coshocton, Guernsey, Harrison, Holmes, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas Counties)
- Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission (Adams, Brown, Fayette, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, part of Lawrence, Pike, Ross, Scioto, and Vinton Counties)

To better meet the needs of the rural regions of Ohio, the RTPOs received additional funding in a grant program, the rural transportation planning grant program, in the 134<sup>th</sup> General



Assembly's transportation budget, House Bill 74. The grant program required each RTPO to develop a process for receiving and reviewing project applications. The pilot program was funded at \$2.6 million in each year of the biennium. With guidance from their technical advisory committees, each RTPO successfully developed guidelines, project applications and scoring criteria needed to fairly and effectively select projects for funding. Many local projects are hard to fund, as they just do not fit into any of the current programs. The pilot program allowed these projects to move forward and continuation of this funding into the future is vital to improving the local transportation networks across the state. All funds from H.B. 74 were obligated to projects. For additional information on the type of projects funded through the grant program, please find attached the RTPOs Planning for Program- Impact Report 2022.

In the as passed House version of H.B. 23, the rural transportation planning grant program received an increase from \$2.6 million to \$10 million per fiscal year (DOTCD5: Section 203.45). To continue the success and build on the momentum of the previous rural transportation planning grant program, ORDA believes additional funds are needed. ORDA is grateful for the increase of funding and asks the Senate to support the House version of H.B. 23. Each RTPO has experienced growing demand for funding opportunities from their local communities and local projects, and the additional funding would provide additional funds to each RTPO to support their local projects identified by local leaders.

We encourage this committee to support the rural transportation planning grant program and maintain the earmark of \$10 million per fiscal year. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written interested party testimony on House Bill 23. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us via phone or e-mail.

Ohio Regional Transportation Planning Organizations

**RTPOs**

**Planning for Progress**

Impact Report 2022



# RTPOs: Impact Update 2022

## Executive Summary

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) created the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) program to strengthen and formalize a rural consultation process that is followed when implementing statewide planning activities. RTPOs were initially charged with developing transportation expertise, regional transportation databases, public engagement policies, and long-range multimodal transportation plans for their region.

RTPOs provide transportation planning products and services to the non-metropolitan regions of Ohio and work with both ODOT and local stakeholders to facilitate an integrated approach, and support better informed transportation decision making in Ohio.

With the allocation from House Bill 74 of the 134th Ohio General Assembly, each RTPO was tasked with developing a process for receiving and reviewing project applications. The flexibility that was given to RTPOs by ODOT in developing these programs speaks volumes to the quality of work that RTPOs have presented since their inception. With guidance from their technical advisory committees, each RTPO developed the guidelines, project applications, and scoring criteria needed to fairly and effectively select projects for funding. The programs that were developed are specific to the needs of each region. Final approval of the policies as well as final project funding rests in the hands of each RTPO's policy committee.

Many local projects are hard to fund as they just don't fit into any of the current programs. The RTPO allocation of funds is helping many of these projects move forward. Continuation of this funding into the future is vital to improving the local transportation networks across the state.

RTPOs have established many successes within the current operational framework, and nine years into the program RTPOs are trusted local partners and facilitators. This document will outline the existing contributions of Ohio's RTPOs and their efforts to expand with new roles and responsibilities, growing to meet the demands of the people and communities they serve.

## How the RTPOs were established

On July 1, 2013, ODOT began a two-year pilot program with five multi-county planning organizations (or councils of government) providing them with funding to conduct regional transportation planning in coordination with local stakeholders, Ohio Metropolitan Planning



ODOT created the RTPO program to strengthen and formalize the rural consultation process that is followed when carrying out statewide planning activities and construction projects.

Cover photo of the Oakley C. Collins Bridge over the Ohio River in Ironton, Ohio by Marty Conley, Lawrence County Convention & Visitor's Bureau.

Organizations (MPOs), and ODOT. Much of Ohio's non-metropolitan local official coordination occurs between ODOT and these organizations. ODOT created this program to strengthen and formalize the rural consultation process that is followed when carrying out statewide planning activities and construction projects.

On January 27, 2016, former Governor John Kasich formally designated each of these five agencies as an RTPO. These designations formalize the program that started as a pilot and helped spur better and more informed transportation decision making in Ohio. On October 9, 2019, Governor Mike DeWine formally designated the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO) as the sixth RTPO in the State of Ohio.

## Background

### What is an RTPO?

A designated Ohio RTPO, in partnership with ODOT, seeks to encourage local officials to have more input on transportation decisions within their region, because local participation is critical for allocating resources to make responsible transportation decisions with limited state and federal budgets.

The Ohio RTPOs work with ODOT to accomplish the following basic work items as part of a larger scope of work:

- The creation and adoption of a Public Participation Plan
- The creation and adoption of a regional Long-Range Transportation Plan
- The development and adoption of a Transportation Improvement Plan
- The moderation of an ongoing and inclusive public involvement and outreach process

RTPOs work on a wide range of projects, including data collection and analysis, traffic counts, inter-agency consultation and stakeholder outreach, transportation project planning, grant writing, and project funding research. The RTPO program allows rural areas to participate in transportation planning, somewhat mirroring the process that currently happens in major metropolitan areas through the designated MPO's of Ohio. The RTPOs envision a transportation system in their respective regions that is connected, safe, well maintained, accessible to all users, environmentally sustainable, and supportive of economic vitality.



## RTPOs and Area Served

Total Ohio Counties Served = 41 Counties

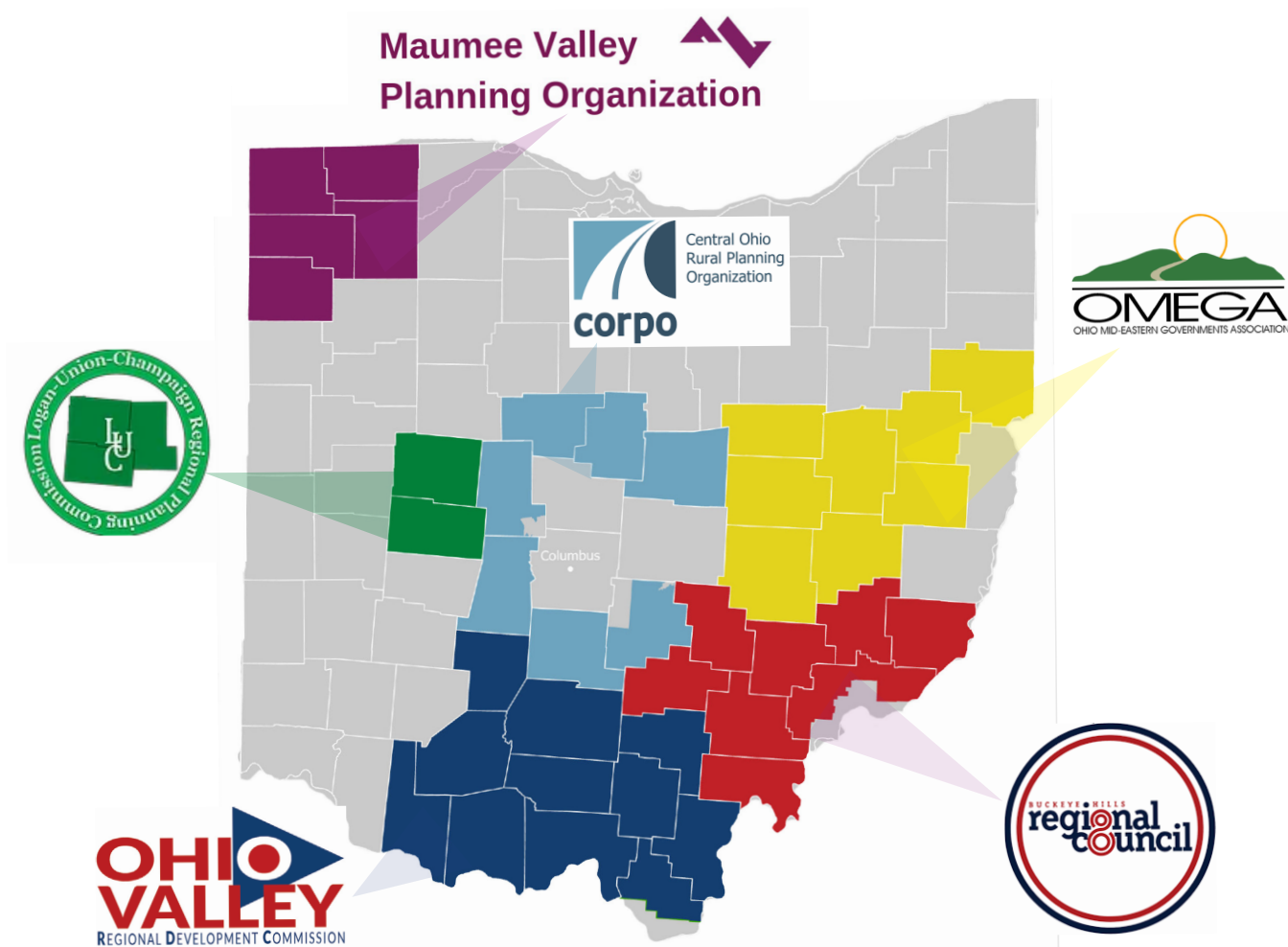
Total Population Served = 1.86 Million People

Total Square Miles Covered = 19,075 Square Miles

### Organizations and Service Areas they Cover

The six RTPO organizations include:

- Buckeye Hills Regional Council - Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Perry and Washington Counties
- Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization - Fairfield, Knox, Madison, Marion, Morrow, Pickaway and Union Counties
- Logan-Union-Champaign Regional Planning Commission - Logan and Champaign Counties
- Maumee Valley Planning Organization - Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Paulding and Williams Counties)
- Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association - Carroll, Columbiana, Coshocton, Guernsey, Harrison, Holmes, Muskingum and Tuscarawas Counties
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# Buckeye Hills Regional Council RTPO Project Profiles



## Regional Medical Transportation Scheduling Assessment Hocking Athens Perry Community Action HOPE Grant

Total Project Cost – \$136,710

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – Hocking Athens Perry Community Action, CALStart and Buckeye Hills Regional Council

The goal of the Athens County Helping Obtain Prosperity for Everyone (HOPE) grant is to improve access to health care and other essential services in rural and low-income areas in Athens County. The grant is helping Athens Public Transit explore three topics:

- Regionalized Medicaid Transportation - Looking at a regional system to better help Medicaid recipients access medical treatment.
- Advanced Fare Systems - Investigate innovative technologies for an integrated, advanced fare payment system.
- Electric Bus Planning - Explore if and how an electric fleet could operate in the Athens area. The study would look at infrastructure needs, types of EV available, and EV route modeling.

This planning project is currently ongoing, but it has strengthened ties between Athens Public Transit and the RTPO, and has already allowed the transit providers to better identify the sources of transportation demand over the past few years.

## Supporting Mobility Options in Meigs County, Ohio

Total Project Cost – \$135,000

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – NADO

The purpose of this project is to provide technical assistance with organizing mobility, economic resilience, and substance use disorder workshops. The project is assisting with forming a mobility management program, inventorying transportation assets, identifying methods to conduct outreach to disadvantaged transportation stakeholders, and gathering feedback from employers and other economic development stakeholders. Supporting substance abuse prevention and recovery is a significant concern in Meigs County, and the work will also include identifying mobility considerations for residents with substance abuse issues to access transportation to treatment, work, and other destinations.

## Monroe Oil and Shale, Monroe County

Total Project Cost – \$500,000

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – BHRC provided the traffic counts and supplementary mapping exhibits for Monroe county engineer for use in upcoming applications.

Ohio Revised Code requires that the Oil and Gas Companies enter into a Road Use and Maintenance Agreement (RUMA) with any governmental entity that will be impacted before drilling permits can be issued by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). Unfortunately, this requirement does not extend to state routes passing through small rural villages or municipalities, nor does it include local roads impacted by truck traffic associated with injection wells. Located in Ohio's Utica Shale region, this project improved several stretches of road for the safety of Monroe County residents.



# Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization RTPO Project Profiles



## Rosette Way to Healthy Food Project Village of Richwood, Union County

Total Project Cost – Estimated \$57,000

Total RTPO Funds in Project – \$47,500

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – Village of Richwood

The Village of Richwood's proposed plan of installing a much needed ADA compliant multi-use path will improve accessibility and mobility options for all users. This added multi-use path will not only expand the bicycle and pedestrian network but will greatly improve access to food options and services in the village. Richwood has a large elderly population and residents who struggle with health disparities, including mobility impairments and disabilities. Access to healthy food has become a barrier to these residents and the village is considered a food desert. The only access to healthy food options is by navigating a treacherous path alongside State Route 47 to access stores in the village. Although this project did not initially score high compared to other proposed regional transportation projects, other applicants came together and offered to forfeit some of their committed funding to assist the Village with their project. It was an excellent example of regional collaboration.



## Madison County Access Management Regulations and Thoroughfare Plan

Total Leveraged Investment in Project – Made possible through planning dollars and membership

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – Madison County Engineer, Madison County Board of Commissioners, Madison County Planning and Zoning

Madison County, like many counties in Central Ohio, is working to be better prepared for the consistent growth in the region. To aid in this preparation, specifically regarding transportation, Madison County officials tasked CORPO with the development of Access Management Regulations and a Thoroughfare Plan. CORPO, with the coordinated guidance from the Madison County and Franklin County officials, has nearly completed these items which are set to be adopted this summer.

## Centerburg Trail Access Study, Village of Centerburg and Knox County

Total Leveraged Investment in Project – Made possible through planning dollars and membership

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – Knox County Officials, Village of Centerburg, Creating Healthy Communities  
CORPO staff assisted stakeholders from Knox County, Creating Healthy Communities and the Village of Centerburg, in determining how to create a connection between the Heart of Ohio Trail and a future Welcome Center to uptown Centerburg. The Heart of Ohio Trail currently connects the City of Mt. Vernon and



the Village of Centerburg. It is a key segment of the regionally and statewide significant Ohio to Erie Trail. CORPO staff provided technical assistance, design ideas, general planning assistance and other tools to the Village of Centerburg. The Village will now be better prepared when considering a design consultant, seeking funding, or conducting public outreach events related to this project.

## Logan-Union-Champaign Regional Planning Commission RTPO Project Profiles



### City of Urbana South High Street Corridor Study

South High Street from SR 55 (south) to US 36 (north)

Total Cost of Project – \$26,000

Total RTPO Funds in Project – \$2,600

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – City of Urbana & Clark County Springfield TCC

This feasibility study was done to develop a more inviting corridor for residents, specifically focusing on bicycle and pedestrian improvements, drainage improvements, intersection safety, and parking improvements. The study became even more critical after the sudden closure of Urbana University, which is located along the corridor. After the study was completed, the City of Urbana was able to apply to ODOT for design/construction funding to implement the feasibility study. The RTPO planning dollars played a critical role in this project's development.

### St. Paris Trail Feasibility Study, Champaign County

Miami/Champaign County line (west) to Urbana (east)

Total Cost of Project – \$42,000.00

Total RTPO Funds in Project – \$4,200.00

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – Village of St. Paris, City of Urbana, Simon Kenton Pathfinders, Clark County Springfield TCC

The St. Paris Trail Feasibility study identified potential options for an east/west multi-use trail alignment that will hopefully connect Piqua to Urbana one day. The project was completed in early 2022. St. Paris took the feasibility study and has begun applying for detailed design and construction funding for the trail portion within the Village of St. Paris limits.

The Logan-Union-Champaign Planning Commission has benefitted greatly from the RTPO program. The two projects above are just a couple of examples of how they have used planning funds to benefit their region. The RTPO has also conducted numerous safety studies, collected traffic data at numerous locations and conducted several other planning studies that have resulted in construction projects. The first step in many of these projects is the initial planning study. The RTPO program has been extremely important in the development of these projects.



# Maumee Valley Planning Organization RTPO Project Profiles

## Maumee Valley Planning Organization

### Bryan Safe Routes to School Non Infrastructure Project, Bryan, Ohio

Total Cost of Project – \$12,367.30

Total Leveraged Investment in Project – All paid for through ODOT's Safe Routes To School program

Total RTPO Funds in Project – estimated \$5,000 in RTPO staff hours

Project Partners and/or Collaborators Maumee Valley Planning Organization, Bryan Local School District, ODOT, The City of Bryan



This project brought awareness to active transportation and safety. Students learned the importance of staying alert when walking and biking. It has also encouraged children to walk and bike more. This project is highly beneficial to both students and the community.

### Antwerp Transportation Alternatives Program Applications, Antwerp, Ohio

Total Cost of Project – Engineers Cost Estimate: 77,949.85

Total Leveraged Investment in Project – \$3,897.00

Total RTPO Funds in Project – An estimated \$2,000.00. Staff hours were the only RTPO funds directly spent on this project. The Village and TAP program is funding the implementation of this project.

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – Maumee Valley Planning Organization, The Village of Antwerp, ODOT



MVPO's RTPO staff submitted a TAP application for the Village of Antwerp this year which was recently funded. This is important work because without our RTPO the Village of Antwerp would have no one to write and submit the grant application. Upon completion this new sidewalk will improve safety and provide citizens with the necessary infrastructure. This sidewalk leads to a gas station and Dollar General. The addition of a sidewalk will ensure a safe route for non drivers to and from the only grocery facility in the village. A sidewalk will allow pedestrians to move off the roadway shoulder onto a paved, dedicated sidewalk. Doing so will provide distance between pedestrians and vehicles, thus reducing the likelihood of any collisions. Because it is close to a school zone, many new drivers use this road which increases the likelihood of pedestrians or bikers being struck. Time and time again, data reveals sidewalks are a key factor in the prevention of pedestrian related fatalities.

### Traffic Count Data Collection and Analysis Data Collection and Analysis Program, Paulding, Defiance, Williams, Fulton, and Henry Counties

Total Cost of Project – Estimated \$5,000.00

Total RTPO Funds in Project – An estimated \$5,000.00. Staff hours were the only RTPO funds directly spent on this program

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – Maumee Valley Planning Organization, County Engineers, City Officials

Every summer and fall, Maumee Valley Planning Organization conducts a traffic count data collection and analysis program. City officials and County Engineers provide locations where they would like our staff to complete traffic counts. Upon gathering this data, it is analyzed and reviewed with the community. This program is extremely helpful because it helps our staff identify areas of concern and potential projects for grants. Without our fieldwork, identifying areas of concern and potential grant projects would be extremely difficult. In 2021, our staff completed over eighty

different traffic counts throughout the region.

The Maumee Valley Planning Organization RTPO selected three unique projects to depict the broad spectrum of services our RTPO staff provides to the region. The Bryan Safe Routes to School noninfrastructure program highlights the project implementation assistance we provide to our communities. The TAP program application project shows the importance of our grant writing services. Lastly, our traffic count project highlights the value of our hands on, field planning services. The compilation of these projects shows the holistic planning approach that our RTPO staff takes to advance transportation throughout the region.

## Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association RTPO Project Profiles



### CR 62 Bridge Replacement, TUS CR 62-00.70, PID 114260, Tuscarawas County

Total Cost of Project: \$6,915,790

Total Leveraged Investment in Project: \$5,000,000 ODOT and \$1,915,790 Tuscarawas County

Total RTPO Funds in Project: \$250,000 for preliminary and detailed design

Project Partners and/or Collaborators: Tuscarawas County, ODOT, OMEGA

This bridge is a major access route to the Village of Tuscarawas and to SR 416 from US 36 with an ADT of 5,755. By the end of 2022, the County Engineer anticipates that the bridge will become load limited for EV-2 and EV-3 emergency vehicles. The bridge and adjoining roadway will also be re-aligned to address a continuing accident problem. The existing bridge is only 24 ft. wide between trusses, and there have been numerous minor side-swipe accidents on the bridge as well as several accidents on the adjoining roadway. The realignment is done to address the deteriorating bridge condition as well as the adjacent roadway. In addition, the project will include sidewalk access for numerous pedestrians that currently use the 24 ft. wide bridge to access commercial establishments and trails.



### Mohican Valley Trail, Phase 1, PID 115429, Holmes County

Total Cost of Project: \$1,577,113

Total Leveraged Investment in Project: \$677,350 ODOT and \$649,763 Holmes County

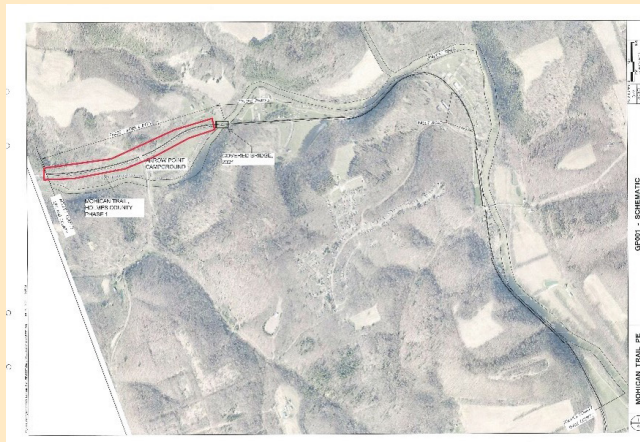
Total RTPO Funds in Project: \$250,000 construction

Project Partners and/or Collaborators: Holmes County, ODOT, OMEGA

Spanning the southeast corner of Ashland County, the west end of Holmes County, and the eastern third of Knox County, and in the heart of Amish Country, the Wally Road Scenic Byway and the Mohican Scenic River Valley serve as the gateway to up to 1 million visits per year from regional, national, and international tourists. Touted by the Friends of the Mohican Watershed as Ohio's Largest Outdoor Recreational Complex, the Mohican Scenic River Valley is a highly popular and growing destination for camping, river-related activities, ziplining, cycling, and hiking. These increasing visits generate millions of dollars for the local economy each year. Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, however, has

not evolved with the increased visits, resulting in unsafe conditions on Wally Road. These conditions include lack of safe access for visitors and residents to walk and bike between local destinations.

In 2019, the Engineer's Offices of Ashland, Holmes, and Knox Counties sponsored the Mohican Valley Concept Plan (see [www.mohicangreenway.com](http://www.mohicangreenway.com)). This study set out to determine the feasibility for and to gauge stakeholders' and the public's desire for an all-purpose trail that would connect the Mohican State Park area and the Wally Road corridor to the Ohio to Erie Trail System (which connects Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati). Goals included to create safer multi-modal transportation options along the corridor, better leverage visitors' purchasing power, and provide local citizens more opportunity for employment commuting and a healthy, active lifestyle. The Mohican Valley Concept Plan outlined recommendations for improving safety and the resident, business-owner, and visitor experience in the scenic river valley, including the implementation of a bicycle and pedestrian facility along the 15-mile-long corridor.



The Mohican Valley Trail - Holmes County, Phase 1 project is the first step toward building the entire 15-mile facility. Phase 1 is located in the northwest corner of Holmes County, and will begin at the northern county border, run parallel to Wally Road, and end at the Holmes County Engineer's future covered bridge. Phase 1 will be approximately 0.7 miles, 10 feet wide, and will connect Arrow Point Campgrounds users to the soon-to-be-tourist-attraction covered bridge. It will provide a safe multi-use trail parallel with County Road 23 (Wally Road).

## CR 12 New Bedford Buggy Lane, Holmes and Coshocton Counties

Location of Project, PID 115919

Total Cost of Project: \$155,000

Total Leveraged Investment in Project: \$125,000

Total RTPO Funds in Project: \$30,000 for preliminary and detailed design

Project Partners and/or Collaborators: Coshocton County, Holmes County, ODOT, OMEGA

This project will complete the New Bedford Buggy Lane along CR 12 connecting the completed buggy lane from Holmes County to SR 643 in Coshocton County. The buggy lane will be 300 feet long and nine feet wide. This project was identified in the OMEGA Local Roadway Safety Plan as the highest ranked systemic improvement in Coshocton County. This plan identified the 50 worst crash locations in each of the OMEGA RTPO counties as well as the top locations where systemic improvements, such as buggy lanes, are needed to prevent or reduce crashes. This buggy lane will provide safety for the growing Amish population for travel along this windy, hilly section of CR 12.



# Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission RTPO Project Profiles



## Portsmouth Bike Route Expansion Project City of Portsmouth

Total Cost of Project – \$50,591.00

Total Leveraged Investment in Project – \$12,647.75

Total RTPO Funds in Project – \$37,943.25

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – City of Portsmouth/OVRDC



This project resulted from money invested by OVRDC and ODOT in 2019 for a Scioto County Active Transportation Plan. When OVRDC announced the new RTPO dedicated STBG funding made available through the SFY22/23 Biennium Budget, the city was already positioned with projects ready to move forward as a result of the completed AT Plan. While this is a generally small project, it is a very important step to making Portsmouth a healthier, happier, more bike friendly city. The funding will supply 79 traffic signs and 37 pavement markings to alert vehicular traffic that they will be sharing the road with cyclists. Having this RTPO dedicated funding for projects, helps turn our planning dollars into reality.

## Ross County Rural Transit Feasibility Study, Rural Ross County

Total Cost of Project – \$20,000.00

Total Leveraged Investment in Project – pending

Total RTPO Funds in Project – Planning funds - \$20,000.00

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – OVRDC, City of Chillicothe, Ross County, local villages

Chillicothe Transit System (CTS) took the recommendations from the feasibility study and expanded their County service in CY2022. Previously, CTA had not served the west side of the county. From the findings, Kingston area was highlighted as an area in need of service, so CTS updated their county service to serve each quadrant in the county. They also utilized the findings from the survey about frequency of service to help determine a schedule that was feasible to maintain while meeting the needs. CTS landed on serving each quadrant in the county once per week, but with three options during the day to come and go. Providing transit services to rural areas is a crucial need in the OVRDC region.

## Highland County Coordinated Transit Plan Update, Highland County

Total Cost of Project – \$19,950.00

Total Leveraged Investment in Project – \$1,420,677.00

Total RTPO Funds in Project – \$19,950.00

Project Partners and/or Collaborators – FRS Transportation, Highland County

The transit agencies in our region lack the personnel and expertise to complete the required updates to their county coordinated transit plans in order to be eligible for continued transit funding. Providing assistance to these agencies insures that crucially needed transit remains an option for underserved populations. Using planning dollars to leverage grant funds for our region is a great way for OVRDC to be a valuable asset to our stakeholders.



# Contributors



Chasity Schmelzenbach, Executive Director  
Sam Miller, Development Director  
Buckeye Hills Regional Council  
1400 Pike Street | Marietta, OH 45750  
740-374-9436 | [www.buckeyehills.org](http://www.buckeyehills.org)



William Murdock, Executive Director  
Thea Walsh Ewing, Chief Regional Development Officer and  
Senior Director of Programming  
Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO)  
c/o Mid Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC)  
111 Liberty Street (Suite 100) | Columbus, OH 43215  
614.228.2663 | [www.morpc.org](http://www.morpc.org)



Brad Bodenmiller, Director  
LUC Regional Planning Commission  
P.O. Box 219 | 10820 State Route 347 | East Liberty, Ohio 43319  
(937) 666-3431 | [www.lucplanning.com](http://www.lucplanning.com)



Dennis Miller, Executive Director  
Christina Deehr, Regional Planner  
Maumee Valley Planning Organization  
1300 East Second Street, Suite 200 | Defiance, OH 43512  
(419) 784-3882 | [www.mvpo.org](http://www.mvpo.org)



Jeannette M. Wierzbicki, P.E., Executive Director  
Josh Sliker, Transportation Planner  
Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association  
326 Highland Avenue, Suite B | Cambridge, OH 43725  
(740) 439-4471 | [www.omegadistrict.org](http://www.omegadistrict.org)



John Hemmings, Executive Director  
Stephanie Gilbert, Transportation Planning Coordinator  
Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission  
73 Progress Drive | Waverly, OH 45690  
(740) 947-2853 | [www.ovrdc.org](http://www.ovrdc.org)

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