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# OHIO HUB PASSENGER & FREIGHT RAIL STUDY

## Public and Agency Involvement Report

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### I. Executive Summary

The Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) spent September 2004 through May 2005 seeking input on the Ohio Hub Plan to upgrade existing freight rail service and introduce passenger rail on routes connecting Ohio to the surrounding states. In that time, ORDC and regional planning commissions and metropolitan planning organizations hosted 22 technical and/or public meetings in 10 Ohio cities attended by over 700 citizens, elected officials, business and community leaders and technical experts. Approximately 1,000 additional citizens and legislators heard about the plan at presentations and one-on-one briefings. News stories and opinion pieces appeared in at least 15 local newspapers, and news stories and interviews were broadcast on at least 13 local television and radio stations. Ten organizations wrote resolutions and letters of support.

#### **Almost Universal Support for Rail**

In every city, the reactions were nearly universally supportive. Participants particularly liked:

- Creating the Ohio Hub as part of a national rail network.
- The jobs, economic development and increased freight capacity that would be created by investing in freight and passenger rail.
- The connections to international airports in the Midwest and major universities in Ohio.
- That 22 million people in several states would be connected, providing riders numerous destinations and resulting in more fare revenues, which would eventually pay for the operation of the system.
- That a federal rail funding program be put in place that would allow money currently being spent on transportation investments in Ohio to be leveraged to attract more federal funds.

#### **Concerns About Politics and Funding**

These concerns were heard consistently throughout the state:

- There is an urgent need for this. Build it now!
- The proposed rail system and freight improvements can't be built without a federal funding program for rail infrastructure investments, similar to the federal highway, transit and



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aviation funding programs. Additionally, don't seek tax levies to fund the operation of a start-up system. (NOTE: There is now a trio of bills in Congress that would answer this concern. Cong. Steve LaTourette (R-OH) has introduced HR-1630 and HR-1631, which address long-term funding and reform of Amtrak (1630) and establish a federal rail infrastructure development fund (1631). In the Senate, Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss) has introduced S-1516, which is similar in its aims to the LaTourette legislation. Both of these legislative efforts would be favorable for the development of the Ohio Hub System.)

- Gain political will by showing legislators extensive public support and sample state-supported passenger rail systems in California, Washington, Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin.
- Inter-modal connections at each station stop (local bus, taxis, walkable destinations, etc.) are important.
- Promote the system's energy and air quality benefits.

### **Issues in Each City**

- **Toledo** wanted to emphasize the connections to the Detroit Airport. Connections to Chicago and Cleveland were also important. Some citizens wanted to see a rail connection to the local Toledo airport; others asked that rural areas be connected via bus service. (105 attendees total at three meetings, plus 350 attendees at a transportation open house.)
- **Lima** sought a link between Pittsburgh-Columbus-Lima-Chicago. They wanted the passenger line to stop in Lima, and to be sure that freight traffic continues to move efficiently. (42 attendees at two meetings.)
- **Cincinnati** wanted to be sure this didn't require a local levy, and liked the concept of leveraging local expenditures for additional federal funds. The city has started to identify possible station locations. Participants recognized that congestion and freight traffic will grow – one city engineer said “the crisis is here – we needed this yesterday.” (140 attendees at three meetings.)
- **Springfield/Clark County** residents wanted assurances that the passenger line will stop in their area. They have already identified possible station locations. (52 attendees at two meetings.)
- **Dayton** policy-makers and technical experts advised that Dayton should be included in plans as ORDC moves forward. (75 attendees at two meetings.)
- **Columbus** sought the addition of the Pittsburgh-Columbus-Lima-Chicago line. Technical experts advised ORDC to pursue adding this to the state's air quality plan, and to work with rail stakeholders to get through the narrow freight rail corridor in downtown



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Columbus. (73 attendees at three meetings, plus 150 attendees at a presentation to the Columbus Metropolitan Club.)

- **Mansfield/Galion** residents were supportive of a passenger rail line that would enhance their economic development and revitalization efforts. They see tourism playing a key role in the success of both their cities and the rail line. Additionally, they have historically had a lot of freight rail go through their towns, and they are supportive of that continuing. (40 attendees at two meetings.)
- **Youngstown** was concerned about the need for additional jobs and economic development in their area. Their highest priority is commuter rail service between Pittsburgh, Youngstown and Cleveland. They liked the linkage between University students and their residences throughout Ohio. (70 attendees at two meetings.)
- **Cleveland** thought connections with local transit, taxis and buses would be critical in the future. They were also interested in the jobs and economic development aspects, particularly as they related to the Cleveland Lakefront redevelopment. It is important that rail freight companies partner in this plan. One local mayor said “this is the answer for the rust belt.” The city, ODOT and ORDC agreed to coordinate on plans for the Lakefront/ODOT concepts for the 26<sup>th</sup> St. Rail Yard. (105 attendees at three meetings.)
- **Akron** appreciated being informed of the plan, even though they would not be directly on the proposed routes. They wanted to know where connections would be on the east side of Akron, closer to Youngstown, Ravenna and Alliance. (6 attendees at one meeting.)

Written comment forms, e-mails, letters and resolutions of support echoed these same themes. In response to this extensive public input, ORDC is pursuing three additional phases of study in the near-term. These include: 1) a feasibility analysis of additional rail lines from Toledo to Columbus and from Pittsburgh-Columbus-Lima-Chicago, 2) a detailed economic impact analysis and 3) a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement to further identify alignments, station locations and environmental impacts.

Throughout the nine-month public involvement effort, ORDC recorded the specific issues and questions raised by each community. These will be reviewed at the onset of the Environmental Impact Phase so that study efforts can be focused accordingly.

In summary, the overwhelming response was “move ahead!” While it anticipated receiving insights on issues of importance to the public, ORDC did not anticipate the wide breadth of support and sense of urgency among community leaders and members of the general public.

