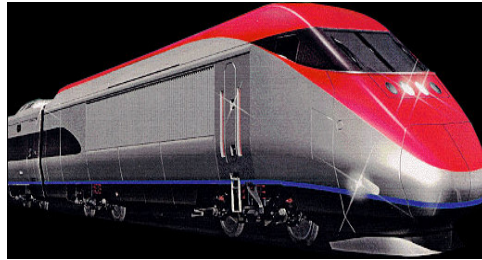


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# OHIO HUB PASSENGER & FREIGHT RAIL STUDY

## Public and Agency Involvement Report

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***“Build it now!”***

*– Toledo Citizen*

***“The crisis is here; we needed this yesterday ...”***

*– Hamilton County Engineer*

***“This is the answer for the Rust Belt.”***

*– University Heights Mayor*

Prepared for the Ohio Rail Development Commission

By ENGAGE Communications

August, 2005



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# OHIO HUB PASSENGER & FREIGHT RAIL STUDY

## Public and Agency Involvement Report

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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.



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## II. Introduction: The Public And Their Leaders Are Invited Aboard

### A. Background

Identifying a growing need to move people and goods faster and more efficiently, in 2001 the Ohio Rail Development Commission kicked off the "Ohio & Lake Erie Regional Rail Cleveland Hub Study", later re-named the "Ohio Hub Passenger and Freight Rail Study." This effort was designed to assess potential passenger rail markets and associated freight railroad improvements in the following corridors: Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati; Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit; Cleveland-Pittsburgh; and Cleveland-Buffalo-Niagara Falls-Toronto.

The draft Ohio Hub report summarizes the findings of the passenger and freight rail feasibility study. The findings on potential riders, costs, travel times, train operations and economic benefits of the four above-mentioned rail corridors are fully documented in the draft study. These results greatly expand on the findings from a conceptual Cincinnati-Columbus-Cleveland "3C" study completed in July 2001. A key difference between the 3C study and the Ohio Hub is that the more recent ORDC planning effort broadens the study area and involves many more study partners, including the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), Amtrak, Canada's VIA Rail, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), and the CSX and Norfolk-Southern freight railroad companies. From the outset, ORDC recognized the importance of railroad participation and encouraged the Class I freight railroads to contribute to the study. As a result, the study's technical analysis and conceptual capital plan have benefited from significant railroad input. It has also served to address and answer most of the railroads' concerns and issues.

Additional input was sought from local stakeholders during the course of the study, and some representatives from local government attended the study meetings. As the study wound down, however, it became evident that the study findings would need to be shared with a larger cross-section of Ohio's key planning agencies, business and community leaders, elected officials and the general public living within the service areas of the proposed passenger rail corridors. As these stakeholders would be affected by the costs and benefits of such an undertaking -- and would potentially ride and/or promote the service -- it was critical they understood its implications and have a voice in how passenger and freight rail moves forward in Ohio.

The following report summarizes how ORDC reached out to the local stakeholders, what ORDC heard from the various groups attending the meetings and how the public and stakeholder comments have influenced how ORDC moves forward with the development of the Ohio Hub passenger and improved freight rail service.



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## **B. Public & Agency Involvement Objectives**

ORDC's public and agency involvement program was to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Increase the public's understanding of the Ohio Hub Study's assessment of introducing passenger rail and improved freight rail service in Ohio.
2. Leverage existing communication channels to seek extensive feedback on the results of the Ohio Hub Study, a major study milestone, and make adjustments accordingly as appropriate.
3. Use the feedback from the public and agency involvement effort to determine the public's willingness to move into developing the Federal Railroad Administration's First Tier Environmental Impact Statement, a requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act when seeking federal funds for major infrastructure projects.

## **C. Overview of Public Involvement Strategies**

To accomplish these objectives, the following strategies were used:

1. Technical and communication input and sponsorships were sought and secured with eight metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and regional planning commissions (RPCs) throughout the state.
2. Eight technical meetings were held with transportation agency and local officials in seven locations throughout the state.
3. Fourteen public and community leader meetings were co-hosted at nine locations throughout Ohio.
4. One-on-one meetings were held and presentations given to about 1,000 individuals and members of community groups and grassroots organizations.
5. Publicity efforts that included: news releases to all area media and resulting print and broadcast news stories, letters of invitation to area leaders and stakeholder groups, Web site meeting listings, e-mail notifications and updates to grassroots leaders and previous meeting attendees, who were asked to notify others.
6. Written comment forms provided to public meeting attendees.
7. Other feedback mechanisms such as phone calls, e-mails, letters and resolutions of support.



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### III. Public and Agency Feedback: High Marks for Innovative, Multi-State, Jobs-Oriented Approach

#### A. Metropolitan/Regional Planning Organizations Sponsor Meetings

ORDC addressed the Ohio Association of Regional Commissions (OARC) in September, 2004 to update them on the Ohio Hub feasibility study results and to seek their sponsorship of a series of technical and public meetings to be held throughout the state. Sponsorship included co-hosting the meeting in their respective locations and assisting with the logistics (e.g. stakeholder identification and invitations, meeting locations, etc.) and publicity for each meeting. Association members, consisting of the executive leadership of MPOs and RPCs from around Ohio, in some cases were not yet prepared to endorse the Ohio Hub Plan until more was known and public input was sought. All, however, enthusiastically agreed to host a community dialogue on the proposed passenger system and freight rail improvements.



Sponsors included Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG), Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA), the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI), Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC), Clark County/Springfield Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC), Richland County Regional Planning Commission (RCRPC), Eastgate

Regional Council of Governments (ERC) and Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS). Later, the cities of Lima, Galion and Youngstown also hosted or co-hosted meetings for community leaders and the public, as did Youngstown State University and the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce.

Sponsors suggested that their technical staffs and other area transportation experts (e.g. transit planners, city and county planners and engineers, etc.) meet with ORDC staff in advance of the public meetings. The meeting purpose was to seek their expertise on community, technical and funding issues that could affect the Ohio Hub initiative and to finalize logistics for the public meetings.

Through the course of the involvement effort, ORDC worked with individual OARC members to plan individual meetings but also briefed the Association on overall efforts in February and May, 2005.

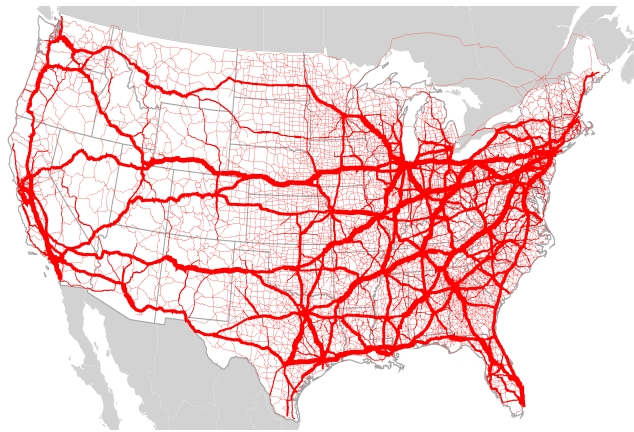


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## B. Technical Meetings with Transportation Agency and Local Officials Identify Key Issues

Akron, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown each hosted technical meetings and invited technical experts from their respective geographical areas to participate. Meetings ranged from small gatherings in Akron and Columbus, where 10 or fewer people attended, to large meetings in Cincinnati and Dayton, where more than 50 attended. Representatives typically included city and county engineers and planners, transit professionals, engineering firms and MPO staff.

In most cases, the participants were welcomed by the local meeting host – typically the MPO – and the meetings were then turned over to the meeting facilitator. Once the meeting purpose was reviewed and self-introductions were made, the facilitator introduced an ORDC representative who presented the study needs, goals and findings in a 45-minute PowerPoint presentation and two-minute video. The facilitator then led the discussion among the meeting participants. The meetings were completed in one and one half to two hours.



*The red lines on this US map illustrate the current flow of freight traffic, which is expected to increase as much as 79 percent in Ohio by 2020. – Ohio Department of Transportation*

### 1. Technical Staff Reaction to Ohio Hub

Many of Ohio's technical experts and transportation professionals expressed enthusiasm that the Ohio Hub service went beyond the Cincinnati-Columbus-Cleveland corridor, and would serve a multi-state travel market population of 22 million. For some, their only



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disappointment was that the Ohio Hub couldn't be put in place sooner. Others felt that capacity improvements would help address some of the freight congestion issues in Ohio's heavily traveled corridors.



Participants liked that the freight railroads were partners in the plan, had provided input and that freight movement would improve when the Ohio Hub infrastructure is in place. The potential for achieving a state funding match for federal funds using existing expenditures to grade-separate railroad crossings from roadways in the designated high-speed rail corridors was thought to be attractive and innovative. This financing could eliminate the need for a local funding match, which historically

has meant a tax or bond levy. The technical experts appreciated the urgent need to preserve freight railroad rights-of-way and in some cases they identified specific local projects where railroad preservation had become an issue.

Understandably, project financing was recognized as the primary challenge to project implementation. Everyone acknowledged that project financing was primarily a federal issue, and agreed that the state of Ohio would not likely develop this project without a federal partner. While it was recognized that there is a need to secure a federal funding program, many expressed concern whether this would happen in the near-term. Many were eager to see a change in national transportation policy that would encourage more investment in freight and passenger railroad improvement projects. *(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.)*

Transportation professionals representing a wide variety of local government and transit organizations were concerned about the funding of start-up operation costs. They also had questions and comments relating to: ridership forecasts, market share of competing transportation modes, the cooperation of the Class 1 freight railroads, sharing of railroad tracks and right-of-way, Amtrak involvement, route alignment and priority, potential station locations, feeder bus operations, other inter-modal connections, rail operating and



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maintenance costs, funding mechanisms and revenue sources, ticket cost, economic benefits and similar concerns. In turn, ORDC sought insights on local community issues and how to navigate the region's transportation planning process. ORDC explained that during this feasibility stage, exact route alignments and station locations were not yet determined. More detailed analysis on these and conceptual engineering issues would be addressed during the environmental impact study phase; a more detailed economic impact analysis would answer questions regarding who would benefit – and how much -- when a statewide rail service is built and operated.

In all cases, MPO representatives welcomed the dialogue and urged ORDC staff to continue to coordinate with the regional planning commissions to ensure the Ohio Hub moves forward in each region's Transportation Improvement Program process.

The following summarizes input unique to regions in Ohio that would be served by the Ohio Hub:

**a. Northwest Ohio Technical Feedback**

In **Toledo** 30 participants met in October, 2004 to discuss the plan, including staff from TMACOG, the Toledo Port Authority, the cities of Toledo and Lima, Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Southeast Michigan Area Council of Governments (SEMCOG) and several citizens from the Ohio Association of Rail Passengers. Several people asked that ORDC rail planners "think beyond the state line" and make the route from Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit International Airport a high priority. It was noted that a separate railroad track would likely need to be built in this corridor's limited railroad right-of-way, which is already heavily traveled by the freight railroads.

Participants said the Detroit airport is a major destination for Toledo residents, and that marketing efforts should recognize this with a "Toledo/Detroit Express" directly to the Detroit airport. The Toledo Port Authority asked that a station at the Toledo airport also be considered. The ORDC consultant responded that this had been looked at, but ridership appeared low. A passenger rail station at the Toledo airport would more likely be built as part of the service between Cleveland, Toledo and Chicago, as the Norfolk Southern railroad passes near the airport. ORDC said this option would continue to be considered in future analyses during the project development process.

Several participants urged that service be convenient and reliable so that passengers would not have a long wait between trains, which has been a problem with Amtrak service in Toledo. Others expressed interest, and some felt it was critical that ORDC pursue, a direct route from Toledo to Columbus as well as a line from Columbus to Lima and Chicago. There was support for pursuing a more detailed economic impact analysis.



MDOT officials at the meeting expressed support for making the Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati route the first priority, but reiterated their interest in the Toledo-Detroit passenger rail segment. They referenced a study on commuter rail from Detroit to Ann Arbor that would use some of the proposed Ohio Hub rail corridor, saying it would be a good source of information. TMACOG staff suggested that providing maintenance on the freight rail right-of-way may qualify the project for tax credits. TMACOG also offered to write a resolution in support of the Ohio Hub, and to coordinate efforts to communicate the plan's benefits with northwest Ohio elected officials.



**Toledo Union Station, 1954**

**Figure II.B.1.a. Northwest Ohio Technical Meetings**

Date	Location/Attendance	Key Issues Raised
Oct. 25, 2004	TMACOG, Toledo (30 attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit a high priority in the plan. May need to build new track in this corridor</li> <li>▪ Discuss in more detail connections to Detroit International Airport and Toledo airport</li> <li>▪ Determine the feasibility of a rail line from Toledo to Columbus and from Pittsburgh-Columbus-Lima-Chicago</li> <li>▪ Pursue detailed economic benefits study</li> </ul>

**b. Southwest Ohio Technical Feedback**

There were three meetings held in Southwest Ohio seeking technical feedback, including one in Cincinnati and two in Dayton. The technical meeting at OKI in **Cincinnati**, held October, 2004, was attended by 55 people, including representatives from OKI, the cities of Cincinnati, Middletown and Hamilton, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KTC), Clark County-Springfield TCC, MVRPC, Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, Southeast Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) and several engineering firms.

During the presentation the city of Cincinnati summarized its study (*the Intercity Passenger Rail Station Study for Cincinnati, Ohio was issued June, 2005*) on potential station locations. It was reiterated that the Ohio Hub is a conceptual plan and routes



and station locations would not be finalized until the environmental and project development phases of the study were completed. However, there was much interest in the potential Cincinnati station locations, which include the Crossett and Longworth Hall sites near the Cincinnati riverfront and the existing Cincinnati Union Terminal.

OKI officials said they would review the funding plan before determining when and if it would be appropriate to include the Ohio Hub in the OKI Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Several others agreed including the project in the TIP was the best approach for leveraging federal funds and coordinating with local transportation efforts. While the organization is supportive of rail in principle, it is not interested in committing local tax dollars to the rail effort. There is some precedent to committing local funds to improve local railroad crossings, which may be able to be used to leverage more state and federal funds.

The transit representatives noted that stops in either Middletown or Northern Cincinnati would encourage commuters to use the train service to jobs in Cincinnati, and asked that park and ride lots be considered in future planning efforts. They expressed their desire to stay involved in the Ohio Hub effort.

In **Dayton**, technical presentations were made to the MVRPC Transportation Committee in December, 2004 and its Board of Trustees in January, 2005. In both cases the meeting format did not allow for much discussion, but the attending public officials expressed a desire to continue to be informed and involved in the project development process.

**Figure II.B.1.b. Southwest Ohio Technical Meetings**

Date	Location/Attendance	Key Issues Raised
Oct. 29, 2004	OKI, Cincinnati (55 attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Don't seek local taxpayer funds for plan</li> <li>▪ Once state and federal financing plan confirmed, Ohio Hub Plan on regional long range transportation and short-term improvement plans to ensure coordination/leverage for potential federal funds, particularly at high speed railroad crossings</li> <li>▪ Plan for commuters from outlying suburbs who will take the train to downtown Cincinnati</li> </ul>
Dec. 13, 2004	MVRPC Transportation Committee, Dayton (25 attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Keep MVRPC and Dayton area residents involved</li> </ul>
Jan. 6, 2005	MVRPC Board of Trustees, Dayton (50 attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ While MVRPC is not interested in hosting a public meeting at this time, please keep them updated as plans move forward</li> </ul>



**c. Central Ohio Technical Feedback**

Ten participants including MORPC staff and representatives from the City of Galion, Galion Main Streets and Richland County RPC met in **Columbus** in November, 2004 to discuss the technical aspects of the Ohio Hub. It was recommended that ORDC pursue more detailed analysis of air quality impacts and congestion relief so the Ohio Hub could be considered as part of the state’s Air Quality Strategy, due to be adopted by the Ohio Legislature in 2007.

Galion participants also stressed the role rail can play in attracting tourism and revitalizing its historic downtown as well as other small towns along the proposed line. Galion has already secured over \$1 million in state funds to restore its historic rail depot. Meeting participants were interested in seeking economic impact data on small towns along the proposed rail corridors, as well as more analysis on the benefits of moving more freight by rail.



*Restored Galion train station*

**Figure II.B.1.c. Central Ohio Technical Meetings**

Date	Location/Attendance	Key Issues Raised
Nov. 2, 2004	MORPC, Columbus (10 attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify air quality impacts and potential congestion relief</li> <li>▪ Seek economic data on tourism/ridership impact on small towns along the rail line as well as impacts of moving more freight by rail</li> <li>▪ Pursue tourism opportunities</li> </ul>

**d. Northeast Ohio Technical Feedback**

At the December, 2004 meeting in **Cleveland**, technical participants included staff from NOACA, the city of Cleveland, the Cleveland Port Authority and Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) and ODOT’s District 2 office. Cleveland’s city planners provided an overview of plans for the Cleveland lakefront, where a major Ohio Hub station could be located. ODOT explained how its engineering team was looking at how the proposed redesign of “Dead Man’s Curve” --



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a hazardous curve on the Cleveland Innerbelt (I-90) -- could accommodate lakefront plans. One approach would significantly impact the 26<sup>th</sup> St. Rail Yard operated by Norfolk Southern and CSX. This rail yard was also proposed to play a key role in the operation of the five rail lines needed for the Ohio Hub system. ORDC agreed to provide ODOT a footprint of the land needed at the rail yard to accommodate its plans. In turn, ODOT agreed to review its design to see how these different transportation needs could be accommodated. Construction for the Cleveland Innerbelt is expected in 2008.



***The former E. 26<sup>th</sup> St. freight railroad yard is a possible staging area for Ohio Hub train service in Cleveland. This yard, however, is being encroached upon by local development and a pending highway project. Efforts are underway to preserve the site.***

ODOT also noted that 55<sup>th</sup> St., located under a railroad bridge in the lakefront area, will be expanded. This will require a new, wider railroad bridge. Additionally, ODOT is considering two new railroad grade separations on the west end of the lakefront project.

The port authority shared its plans for introducing ferry service within a year or two, which could connect with the Ohio Hub service. Similarly, a new convention center might choose a location that would serve the area. GCRTA's plans are to help residents access the lakefront through bus and light rail, and potentially add commuter



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rail service later. A \$54 million multi-modal station is proposed for the area in its long-term plans. Ideally, GCRTA would like customers to also be able to connect with intercity rail (the Ohio Hub service) here as well.

City of Cleveland representatives noted that freight operations in the area must be sensitive to the pedestrian orientation of the lakefront development.



In **Youngstown** in February, 2005, technical meeting participants included representatives from Eastgate RCG, the cities of Youngstown, Warren, Niles and Canfield, Trumbull County, Metro Parks, Youngstown State University, ODOT District 4 and members of the Ohio and National Associations for Rail Passengers. Participants shared their past frustrations working with freight railroads and their apparent disinterest in providing passenger rail to Youngstown's regional airport.

***One of two train depots in Youngstown***

Youngstown technical experts also expressed great disappointment in Amtrak's decision to eliminate the Three Rivers service. On the other hand, they were excited that the railroads were now part of the decision-making process and seemed to be changing their mindset toward passenger rail.

One attendee suggested a connection between Youngstown and Ravenna as a preliminary "segment of independent utility" to start transporting passengers before the entire system was built. Another suggested providing a route from Youngstown to Warren, saying that a possible route through Alliance and Columbiana wouldn't attract as many riders. Participants preferred the route through Youngstown along the Norfolk Southern line by the new Convocation Center and park. Another wanted to know if the economic benefit analysis could illustrate who might build the rolling stock and how that and other investments would benefit local industries. Eastgate staff expressed great enthusiasm for the proposal and offered to assist with scouting possible alignments and any other technical needs.

The **Akron** meeting held in March, 2004 had representatives from AMATs and Akron Metro, the local transit agency. Although Akron would not be directly served by routes in the Ohio Hub system, the local attendees conveyed that area residents would welcome and use a southeast Cleveland station, perhaps at Macedonia or Hudson. They added that two bus lines currently travel from Akron to Cleveland, which might work well with a proposed feeder bus route to train stations in the region.



AMAT's long range plan calls for commuter rail service between Canton-Akron-Kent, but has no plans for serving Cleveland at this time. The Akron staff asked that Ohio Hub maps remove reference to possible commuter rail between Akron and Cleveland. Past efforts to provide rail service through the Village of Silver Lake, an Akron suburb, have drawn controversy and a lawsuit from area residents due to their concerns about noise and safety.

Akron Metro is planning a new multi-modal terminal along the CSX right of way on the southwest side of the downtown area, near the University of Akron. It would be built to eventually accommodate passenger rail. It would also accommodate tourist trains operated by the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad.

**Figure II.B.1.d. Northeast Ohio Technical Meetings**

Date	Location/Attendance	Key Issues Raised
Dec. 9, 2004	NOACA, Cleveland (20 attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Integrate and coordinate with Lakefront plans by City of Cleveland, proposed convention center, new ferry service by port authority, Dead Man's Curve on Cleveland Innerbelt by ODOT and new multi-modal station by GCRTA</li> <li>▪ Provide more information on footprint needed for the E. 26<sup>th</sup> St. Rail Yard, where re-routing of Innerbelt is proposed to be located</li> <li>▪ Freight operations must recognize priority of pedestrians and citizens in lakefront area</li> </ul>
Feb. 3, 2005	Eastgate Regional Council of Governments (25 attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Youngstown is looking for ways to differentiate itself as a distribution gateway</li> </ul>
March 2, 2005	AMATS (6 attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Even though Akron would not be directly served by the proposed passenger rail lines, residents would likely use a southeast Cleveland station in Hudson or Macedonia</li> </ul>

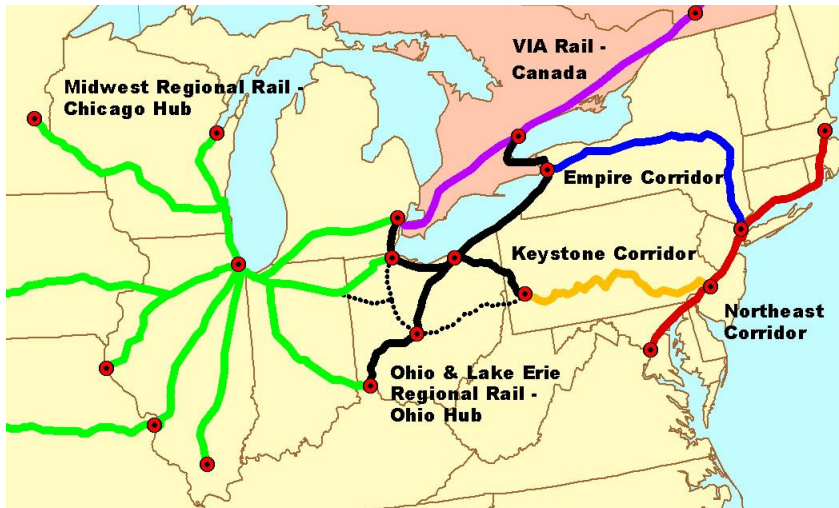
**2. ORDC Response to Technical Feedback: Advance The Hub Plan Further By Adding Routes to the Preliminary System**

As a result of the input from technical professionals, community leaders and the public (see **Section II.C**), 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. Further, ORDC has contacted the Ohio Environmental Protection



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Agency (Ohio EPA) for direction on air quality modeling and how to participate in the statewide air quality planning process.



In response to Cleveland-area technical concerns, ORDC worked with Amtrak engineers to identify and assess the site requirements for a passenger train operations and maintenance facility located at the existing E. 26<sup>th</sup> St. freight railroad yard on the Cleveland lakefront. Amtrak owns a portion of this site while CSX owns the remaining land. The site analysis determined that the E. 26<sup>th</sup> St. yard can accommodate the needs of an intercity passenger rail maintenance facility. However, any additional demand for space by a potential commuter rail operation would be problematic because the site is limited in its ability to accommodate separate facilities for two different types of passenger train operations. Proposals to use the yard for a highway ramp would also severely restrict space. More detailed engineering and design will resolve this issue in the environmental and project development process.



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## C. Public and Community Leader Meetings

### 1. Public and Community Leaders React

In a phrase: “Build it now.” That sums up what can only be described as a sense of urgency that ORDC staff took back from its series of public meetings across the state.

Meetings for community leaders and the general public were held in Toledo, Lima, Columbus, Cincinnati, Springfield, Galion, Youngstown and Cleveland. The meetings were generally hosted by the local metropolitan/regional planning organization and in many cases co-hosted by the city and/or chamber of commerce.

Participants at each meeting were welcomed by the local meeting host – again, typically the MPO – and the meetings were then turned over to the meeting facilitator. Once the meeting purpose was reviewed and self-introductions were made, the facilitator introduced an ORDC representative who presented the study needs, goals and findings in a 45-minute PowerPoint presentation and two-minute video. The facilitator then led the discussion among the meeting participants. The meetings were completed in one and one half to two hours.

Like the technical experts and transportation professionals before them, meeting participants expressed enthusiasm that the Ohio Hub service went beyond the Cincinnati-Columbus-Cleveland corridor and would serve a travel market population of 22 million. Many expressed disappointment that the Ohio Hub couldn’t be put in place sooner and many felt that capacity improvements would help address some of the freight congestion issues in Ohio’s heavily traveled corridors. They liked that the freight railroads were partners in the plan, provided input and that freight movement would improve when the Ohio Hub infrastructure is in place.

The potential for achieving a state funding match for federal funds using expenditures to grade-separate railroad crossings from roadways in the designated high-speed rail corridors was thought to be attractive and innovative. Project financing was recognized as the primary challenge to project implementation. Everyone recognized this as a federal issue, and agreed that the state of Ohio would not likely develop this project without a federal partner. While it was recognized that there is a need to secure a federal funding program, many expressed concern whether this would happen in the near-term. Many were eager to see a change in policy that would encourage more national investment in freight and passenger railroad improvement projects. *(As noted earlier, there is now a trio of bills in Congress that would provide this change in federal policy. 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.)*



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The business and community leaders, as well as the general public, had questions and comments relating to: likely riders, convenience, ticket price, access to local destinations via transit, bus access from rural areas, profitability, preservation of railroad right-of-way, Amtrak involvement, route alignment and priority, potential station locations and detailed economic benefits. In turn, ORDC sought input on community issues, interest in using the service and opportunities for working together to establish federal funding for rail. Participants from the business community tended to focus on attracting tourism and economic development at their stations along the proposed rail lines, access to multiple cities and international airports, job creation, traffic congestion relief, the need to preserve railroad right-of-way and to improve overall freight railroad operations. Members of the public were more likely to comment about the convenience and price of the service, access to tourist destinations and airports, the attraction of leaving their cars at home and the environmental and social benefits of more rail service.

ORDC explained that specific route alignments and station locations would be addressed during the environmental impact study phase and a more detailed economic impact analysis would answer questions regarding who would benefit – and how much -- when a statewide rail service is built and operated. ORDC also noted that passenger rail was unlikely to be funded because of its environmental and social benefits, although these would be certain to occur. Instead, the introduction of passenger rail depends on its ability to create jobs, keep traffic flowing and build upon Ohio’s competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

Feedback unique to Ohio’s various geographical areas is summarized below:

**a. Northwest Ohio Public Feedback**

Approximately 60 business and community leaders attended an afternoon meeting in **Toledo** in November, 2004, followed by an evening meeting attended by 20 members of the public. The meetings were hosted by TMACOG and the Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority, with TMACOG Transportation Director David Dysard and the port’s executive director, James Hartung, presiding in the afternoon. Those attending the afternoon meeting made it clear they were not “anti-car”, but rather “pro-jobs and economic development.” Like the transportation professionals who attended the technical meeting held a month earlier, community leaders and members of the public strongly supported the Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit route and were eager to explore a route to Columbus. These were considered key markets to serve. One participant said it was nice to see that the various state transportation agencies and railroads were participating in the study, since historically they have seemed disinterested in transit. ORDC responded that inter-city passenger rail is more similar to short-hop airline service than mass transit, as the travel distances would be similar, the market would be expected to drive demand and service would eventually pay for itself. This service would not be designed primarily for the transit-dependent or run by local transit



agencies. The business model would also be unlike Amtrak's, which has severe limitations on how it can operate.

The evening public meeting was opened by TMACOG's Diane Reamer-Evans and closed by the port authority's Rob Greenlese. Public participants urged Toledo, Detroit and Chicago to work together as one region to stimulate economic growth through a greater investment in rail. They also supported the concept that rural areas could access rail stations by bus. One couple shared their negative experiences on Amtrak due to late-night service that was delayed – and later cancelled – because of competing freight railroad operations and malfunctioning equipment.

The December, 2004 meetings in **Lima** were hosted by the city of Lima and opened by Mayor David Berger. Forty-two people attended the two public meetings held in the afternoon and evening. They were strong advocates for a link between Pittsburgh-Columbus-Lima-Chicago, and complimented ORDC for its leadership in putting the plan together. They wanted the passenger line to stop in Lima, and to be sure that freight traffic continues to move efficiently. Community and business leaders asked for more comparisons between highway/rail investments, economic benefits of each and more detail on impacts on tourism. They recommended looking at systems in Europe and California for best practices. Mayor Berger reported that Lima has spent \$1.8 million to restore its old railroad depot, which now houses the Lima Water Department, and to rehabilitate a neighboring railroad hotel, now private offices. He said Lima would make similar accommodations for rail passengers if and when the trains begin running.

**Figure II.C.1.a. Northwest Ohio Public and Community Leader Meetings**

Date	Location/Attendance	Issues Raised
Nov. 16, 2004	TMACOG, Toledo (80 attendees at community leader meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Connect Toledo to Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and Columbus</li> <li>▪ Determine economic impacts</li> </ul>
	(20 at public meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Connect rural areas via bus service</li> <li>▪ Provide convenient and reliable passenger rail service</li> </ul>
Dec. 13, 2004	City of Lima (36 attendees at community leader meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine the feasibility of a rail line from Toledo to Columbus and from Pittsburgh-Columbus-Lima-Chicago</li> <li>▪ Continue to improve efficiency of freight rail operations</li> <li>▪ Provide more comparison data on how highways AND rail provide high return on investment</li> </ul>



	(6 at public meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Serve Lima</li> <li>▪ Increase freight capacity</li> </ul>
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**b. Southwest Ohio Public Feedback**

In **Springfield**, Larry Himes, executive director of the Clark County-Springfield Transportation Coordinating Committee, opened the afternoon session in January, 2005 for 32 business and community leaders. He said he sees the Ohio Hub Plan as a means of advancing downtown development, safety, noise control and mobility for the area. He especially lauded the plan’s interstate and international connections to major cities and international airports.



Norfolk Southern and the Indiana and Ohio railroads currently operate about 24 trains a day through Springfield. There are projects underway to create grade separations and close crossings on streets in the immediate downtown Springfield area, which has a series of crossings within a short distance that require frequent sounding of train whistles and delays. Springfield leaders supported the concept of increasing freight capacity while also advancing their goal of quieting the noise. The city

has looked at three possible locations for passenger rail stations in or near the downtown area, which would help spark economic development.

Community leaders voiced support for both the freight and passenger elements of the program and asked what they could do to advance it. They had reservations, however, about passenger service becoming a reality in today’s policy climate. One attendee urged planners to consider excursion trains in ridership and cost estimates. Another stressed that value and connectivity would be the best selling points, so keep fares reasonable.

The 20 members of the public who attended the evening meeting expressed their support as well. They wanted to ensure that a Springfield rail stop is included in the plans, and that the eventual passenger service would be affordable and convenient. One participant urged planners to pursue a “EuroRail”-like pass that allowed passengers to ride the train in several states. There was also interest in a more direct



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connection to Toledo. Several people said they would take the train to Columbus or Cincinnati on a regular basis.

Two meetings were held in **Cincinnati** in January 2005, including an afternoon session for 60 business and community leaders and an evening session for 25 members of the public. The meetings were co-hosted by OKI and the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce. OKI Executive Director Mark Policinski and the chamber's vice president of government affairs, Doug Moorman, presided. Both entities said it was premature to endorse the Ohio Hub but that they were delighted to host public discussions on the issue.

Reggie Victor, transportation planner for the city of Cincinnati, discussed possible station locations, which include the Crossett and Longworth Hall sites near the Cincinnati riverfront as well as the existing Cincinnati Union Terminal. There was sentiment for the historic union station, though freight and intermodal yard operations there severely limit space for passenger service. The station is currently served by Amtrak's "Cardinal", which operates between Chicago and Washington, D.C. on opposing days.

Participants recognized that congestion and freight traffic will grow. The Hamilton County engineer said "the crisis is here – we needed this yesterday." The business and community leaders suggested the study would be more acceptable to local, state and federal governments if improving freight capacity was stressed more strongly and high profile support was brought onboard.



Cincinnati attendees reiterated they didn't want a local levy to fund any of the rail operation. They sought more detail on economic impacts and associated investments needed in suburban counties so they could update their regional transportation plans accordingly. Participants were supportive of the approach to use state infrastructure expenditures to leverage federal funds. OKI Executive Director Mark Policinski remarked that he was "impressed the most that ORDC is trying to build a product, and not just a project."

There was a strong sense of urgency among members of the public who attended the evening meeting. Many were ready to advance the project through its study phases and to start operating the service. Several attendees voiced support for the Union Station being served by the Ohio Hub service, although ORDC explained that it was premature to select the station at this time but the public would ultimately have a say in



the location. Several attendees sought a connection to the Cincinnati International Airport.

**Figure II.C.1.b. Southwest Ohio Public and Community Leader Meetings**

Date	Location/Attendance	Issues Raised
Jan. 25, 2005	Clark State Community College, Springfield  (32 community leader attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Passenger and freight rail investments will help address noise issues currently created by significant freight movement through downtown Springfield</li> <li>▪ Use downtown rail stations to spark economic development</li> </ul>
	(20 at public meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Be sure the train stops in Springfield</li> <li>▪ Start the service as soon as possible</li> </ul>
Jan. 26, 2005	OKI, Cincinnati  (60 community leader attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Don't pursue a local levy to fund passenger rail service</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with city of Cincinnati efforts to locate/design a rail station</li> <li>▪ Use state infrastructure investments to leverage federal funds</li> </ul>
	(25 at public meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consider using Union Station to serve passenger rail</li> <li>▪ Serve Cincinnati International Airport</li> <li>▪ Start the service as soon as possible</li> </ul>

**c. Central Ohio Public Feedback**

Bill Habig, executive director of MORPC in **Columbus**, welcomed 42 business and community leaders to an afternoon session in January, 2005. One attendee suggested the Ohio Hub would help Central Ohio compete as a regional economic corridor. A chamber representative said the Pittsburgh-Columbus-Chicago line was very important to the competitive position Columbus holds in the distribution and logistics industries. Another participant said that passenger connectivity between these cities was critical as well. Freight representatives discussed how investments are needed to help freight railroads maintain just their current market share of the transportation market, let alone increase it.

It was discussed how the locally-proposed light rail line in Columbus would probably use the same CSX/Norfolk Southern railroad corridor used by the Ohio Hub service. ORDC has been working with local transit and state officials on this initiative and said it was committed to continuing this coordination.





***Local light rail, Amtrak passenger rail and interstate freight railroad tracks share a rail corridor in Cleveland, similar to proposed service in Central Ohio***

One participant thanked ORDC and MORPC for hosting the discussion and asked that sessions similar to this one be held in the future as issues such as noise, aesthetics and air quality start to emerge in the environmental impact study phase. Bill Habig complimented ORDC for pursuing a system approach rather than a stand-alone route. He cautioned that working with other states can create new hurdles. He asked what type of authority would oversee an interstate operation. ORDC's Jim Seney responded that he would anticipate the Federal Railroad Administration would oversee these issues, much like the Federal Aviation Administration and the Federal Highway Administration oversee interstate air and highway travel, respectively.

Twenty-five members of the public participated in the evening session in Columbus. Like participants in other cities, attendees were excited about the Ohio Hub. They wanted to ensure there would be multi-modal connections at each station to take passengers to urban centers and key destinations. They asked that fuel savings be promoted as well as the other economic benefits. One participant asked that access for passengers with disabilities be considered throughout the planning process. Several asked how they could convey to elected leaders their support for moving ahead with more detailed planning.

In **Galion**, one meeting was held for 40 area business and community leaders and the public in February, 2005. Galion City Manager Phil Honsey hosted. Attendees traveled from Marion, Shelby, Mansfield and Bucyrus to participate. Participants voiced their overall support for the plan, and wanted to know how they could help advance it. There were questions and comments about Amtrak funding, the economic impacts and how the Midwest Regional Rail System would contribute to overall economic benefits. There was great concern over the loss of existing railroad right-of-way. There was optimism that the climate was improving for freight and passenger rail service. Citizens reiterated the need for fast, frequent and convenient service. Community leaders saw opportunities for increased tourism and interest in smaller cities in Ohio.



**Figure II.C.1.c. Central Ohio Public and Community Leader Meetings**

Date	Location/Attendance	Issues Raised
Jan. 19, 2005	MORPC, Columbus (42 community leader attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make Pittsburgh-Columbus-Chicago route a priority for freight and passenger rail service</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with local rail initiative</li> <li>▪ Consider how best to work with other states</li> </ul>
	(25 at public meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make services accessible to people with disabilities</li> <li>▪ Promote fuel savings</li> </ul>
Feb. 24, 2005	Galion Theater, Galion (40 community leader and public meeting attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Look at how Midwest Regional Rail System could contribute to economic impacts</li> <li>▪ Make service fast, frequent and convenient. Promote it.</li> <li>▪ Use rail service to attract tourism and economic development</li> </ul>

**d. Northeast Ohio Public Feedback**

Participants at the Northeast Ohio meetings conveyed sentiments similar to those from other Ohioans: they supported the overall plan, particularly the economic development, job creation and freight coordination aspects, and thought it should move forward more quickly. Participants also voiced support for potential fuel savings and environmental benefits.

The **Youngstown** meeting, held April 2005, was co-hosted by Eastgate RCG, the city of Youngstown and Youngstown State University (YSU). Forty-five people attended. The combined community leader-public meeting was opened by John Getchey, executive director of the Eastgate RCG. He was followed by YSU's Thomas Finnerty, who said the Ohio Hub would be a great connection for university students across the state, which was consistent with YSU's goal to attract students from outside the immediate area and to connect them with other universities throughout the Greater Ohio region. After the facilitated discussion, Anthony Kobak, chief planner for the city of Youngstown, reviewed action steps and encouraged participants to relay their ideas to elected officials at the local, state and congressional levels.

Mr. Finnerty noted that the Mahoning Valley has lost jobs to Cleveland and Pittsburgh in recent years, so growing numbers of area residents are commuting to those larger cities for work. As a result, he believes commuter rail to those cities in the near term will set the stage for intercity rail service to further destinations later. There was agreement by meeting participants that commuter rail should be pursued and that the



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Pittsburgh-Youngstown-Cleveland corridor be considered a high priority. There was discussion on how the region’s strategic location could play a role in future job creation, particularly if served by rail service. A pastor in the audience said his two congregations have suffered from job loss and younger members moving away to seek better jobs elsewhere. He said his parishioners would ask “what is this plan going to cost me? Does this mean more taxes?” ORDC reviewed the strategy of using existing state expenditures to leverage federal funds.



***Cleveland business and community leaders share their thoughts with ORDC Executive Director Jim Seney***

Forty-eight people attended the business and community leaders meeting held in **Cleveland** on a May afternoon, followed by an evening session attended by 34 members of the public. Rich Enty from the Greater Cleveland RTA questioned where the operating funds would come from, could the Ohio Hub be used to help local transit agencies leverage more federal funds, and could certain Ohio Hub stations be jointly developed with local federal dollars? ORDC responded that operating funds would eventually be recouped through passenger fares, and that ORDC did, indeed, see opportunities for the Ohio Hub system to partner with local transit agencies to joint-develop train/bus stations and leverage more federal funds in the process. One participant said the Ohio Hub should be marketed to business travelers, while another said the ticket price appears too high and should be lowered to attract more riders. It



was suggested that a ticket like the EuroPass be developed for use by Ohio riders as they connect between various modes of transportation. Several urged ORDC to be very aggressive in promoting the Ohio Hub and the public meetings where people can help shape the plans. One attendee suggested selling air rights above train stations to raise more money. One woman said that, “as a blind person, transportation is very difficult. This rail project would be a great boon for people like me who cannot or choose not to drive.”

**Figure II.C.1.d. Northeast Ohio Public and Community Leader Meetings**

Date	Location/Attendance	Issues Raised
April 21, 2005	Oakhill Renaissance Place, Youngstown  (45 community leader and public meeting attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make commuter rail between Pittsburgh, Youngstown and Cleveland a priority</li> <li>▪ Job creation in the Mahoning Valley is critical to the region’s long-term economic health</li> </ul>
May 5, 2005	NOACA, Cleveland  (48 community leader attendees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Be clear in how ORDC will pay for start-up operating costs</li> <li>▪ Pursue joint development and federal funding opportunities with local transit systems</li> <li>▪ Aggressively market the service to business travelers, but make ticket price affordable for others as well</li> </ul>
	(34 at public meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a EuroPass-type ticket that can be used on connecting transportation modes</li> <li>▪ Consider selling air rights above train stations to raise more money</li> <li>▪ People with disabilities will use this service to access more destinations</li> </ul>

**2. ORDC Response: Add Routes/ Move Ahead on Economic & Environmental Impact Studies**



As the months progressed, ORDC revised its presentation to make information more clear and to respond to earlier public comments. Also, as noted earlier, based on the 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.



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Throughout the 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.

#### **D. One-on-One Meetings and Presentations**

In addition to extensive public meetings hosted by ORDC and MPOs throughout Ohio, ORDC participated in a series of one-on-one meetings, presentations to community groups and workshops and events. It is estimated that ORDC reached over an additional 1,000 members of the public through these interactions, listed below:

1000 Friends of Central Ohio Rail Breakfast Meetings

CSX

Ann Canby, Surface Transportation Policy Project

George Chilson, Board President, National Association of Railroad Passengers

Columbus Metropolitan Club "Growing Smarter" Luncheon Series

Environmental Law & Policy Center Regional Passenger Rail Conference

Freight Railroads Conference

Gene Krebs, State Director, Greater Ohio

Dominic Liberatore, Executive Director, Ohio Association of Rail Passengers

Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission

Robert Milbourne, Executive Director, Columbus Partnership

Norfolk Southern

Ohio Association of Rail Passengers

Ohio Association of Regional Commissions

Ohio Contractors Association

Ohio Passenger Rail Summit

Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (OMEGA)

Mark Policinski, Executive Director, OKI

Gordon Proctor, Director, Ohio Department of Transportation



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Railway Age Magazine “Passenger Trains on Freight Rails” National Conference

Eugene Skorpowski, Managing Director, California Corridors Joint Powers Authority

Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Council

State Rep. Danny Bulp

State Rep. Larry Flowers

State Rep. James Hoops

State Rep. Earl Martin

State Sen. John Carey

State Sen. Marc Dann

State Sen. Mark Mallory

State Sen. Tom Roberts

State Sen. Charles Wilson

States for Passenger Rail Coalition

Steel Dynamics, Inc. Manufacturing Plant, “Invent Tomorrow” event in Ft. Wayne, Indiana

Toledo Metropolitan Council Of Governments (TMACOG) Passenger Rail Committee

Steve Tugend, Vice President of Government Affairs, Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce

U.S. Congressman Steve LaTourette

U.S. Congressman Bob Ney

U.S. Congressman Bob Ney’s transportation aides

U.S. Congressman Michael Oxley

U.S. Congressman Ralph Regula

U.S. Sen. Mike DeWine

U.S. Sen. Mike DeWine’s transportation aides

Howard Wood, Director of Planning, Ohio Department of Transportation



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## E. Publicity Efforts

Prior to each public meeting, ORDC staff worked with the meeting hosts to invite community and business leaders and to notify as many members of the public as possible. These efforts include the following:

### 1. Invitation letters and e-mails

Each MPO provided an area invitation list to ORDC or mailed letters of invitation directly to area stakeholders. The list typically included the MPO's board members, area transportation staff, local elected officials, chamber of commerce contacts, business leaders and environmental activists. Letters were often also sent by e-mail to stakeholders for whom there were e-mail addresses. The local MPO tracked RSVPs for the business and community leader meetings.

### 2. Grassroots coordination

Once the invitation for each community was drafted and signed, an electronic file of the invitation was forwarded to several organizations who have expressed an interest in passenger and freight rail issues. These organizations included: the Ohio Association of Rail Passengers (OARP), Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC), the Sierra Club, the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA), Jobs Through Rail Coalition and area chambers of commerce. They, in turn, e-mailed the meeting invitation to their membership lists. OARP, in particular, made follow-up phone calls to ensure meeting participation in each community where a public meeting was held.

### 3. Website listing of meetings

Meeting dates and locations were posted on websites hosted by ORDC, OARP and usually the meeting hosts.

### 4. News releases and media coverage.

Prior to each public meeting, a news release was sent to local print and broadcast media. As a result, typically two to three print and/or broadcast reporters attended each meeting. Print news stories appeared in: there was print coverage in the Associated Press, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Cincinnati Business Courier, Middletown Journal, Springfield News-Sun, Dayton Daily News, Dayton Business Journal, the (Cambridge) Daily Jeffersonian, Galion Inquirer and Mansfield's Richland County News Journal, Toledo Blade, (Cleveland area) Sun Newspapers, The (Youngstown) Vindicator and the Alliance Review.

There was broadcast coverage on: WCPN-Radio in Cleveland; WYTV-TV, WKBN-TV and WFMJ-TV in Youngstown; WBCO/WQEL-Radio in Bucyrus; WBGU-TV in Bowling Green; WKEF-TV, WLIO-TV and WOHL-TV in Lima; WSPD-Radio in Toledo; WMFD-TV in Mansfield; and statewide broadcasts on Ohio Public Radio and TV and Ohio



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News Network (ONN) TV. Broadcast coverage included both news stories and interviews with ORDC staff. Ohio Public Television rebroadcast the Columbus Metropolitan Club speeches by ORDC's Jim Seney, Gene Skoropowski from California Corridors and Calvin Cassidy from PennDOT.

## F. Written Comment Forms

Comment forms were distributed at each public meeting. While over 700 people attended the meetings, 104 comment forms were returned by the end of the public comment period in mid-May, 2005. (*NOTE: Comment forms continued to arrive at ORDC by mail, fax and e-mail past the advertised comment period; only those returned by the deadline are tabulated below.*) Respondents were asked a series of multiple choice questions and then asked to provide responses to two open-ended questions. Responses are summarized below.

### 1. Responses to multiple choice questions

Ninety-four percent of the respondents indicated the federal government should establish a passenger and freight rail development program, similar to the highway, air and transit programs. Ninety-eight percent believed the Ohio Hub should be part of a federally recognized passenger rail network. Fifty-eight percent indicated they did not realize freight traffic would increase so significantly on national highways – by 67 percent – until they attended the public meetings.

When asked to what kind of trips they would take if passenger train service was available today, the responses (including first, second and third choices) were ranked as follows:

- #1 Weekend trips to regional tourist destinations (61 percent)*
- #2 Day trips to sporting events, concerts and festivals (48 percent)*
- #3 Vacations and long-distance travel (47 percent)*
- #4 Business trips to meetings and conferences (44 percent)*
- #5 Trips to visit family and friends (39 percent)*
- #6 Commuter rail trips to work (13 percent)*
- #7 Would not travel by train (2 percent)*

When ranking which train service characteristics are most important, respondents indicated (including first, second and third choices):



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- #1 On-time and reliable train service (63 percent)*
  - #2 Fast service that is competitive with car travel (56 percent)*
  - #3 Affordable fares (38 percent)*
  - #4 Frequent train service (35 percent)*
  - #5 Comfortable trains (22 percent)*
  - #6 Connections to transit and stations with car rental (21 percent)*
  - #6 Convenient and easy to access passenger rail stations 21 percent)*
  - #7 Connections to airports (10 percent)*

Survey respondents were also asked to rank which amenities were most important. The responses, including first, second and third choices, were:

- #1 On-board food and beverage service (63 percent)*
- #2 Able to work on the train using computer, cell phone (60 percent)*
- #3 First class service (34 percent)*
- #4 Able to take bicycle on train ( 25 percent)*
- #5 Able to hold small meetings (18 percent)*
- #6 Club car or bistro car (27 percent)*

Respondents also ranked which rail corridors they would use the most and want to see built first, they indicated:

- #1 Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati (79 percent)*
- #2 Cincinnati-Indianapolis-Chicago (31 percent)*
- #3 Cleveland-Buffalo-Toronto (28 percent)*
- #4 Cleveland-Toledo-Chicago (24 percent)*
- #4 Columbus-Lima-Chicago (24 percent)*
- #5 Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit (17 percent)*
- #5 Cleveland-Pittsburgh (17 percent)*



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#6 Columbus-Toledo (10 percent)

When asked how often they would use the service if it were in operation today, respondents said:

#1 Two, three or four times a year (33 percent)

#2 Once a month (18 percent)

#3 Five to ten times a year (15 percent)

#4 Two or three times a month (13 percent)

#5 Commute daily to work (7 percent)

#6 Once a week (3 percent)

#7 Don't know (2 percent)

#8 Once a year (0 percent)

#8 Would not travel by train (0 percent)

## 2. General comments

ORDC received the following written comments regarding the Ohio Hub proposal:

*"Let's not wait for me to "subsidize" first services until full build-out. Washington State went with incremental improvements to speed, frequency. (This) is what I want, not 9 years out."*

*"Keep moving forward."*

*"It is necessary to have multiple transportation modes and require a network to be successful."*

*"Please get it built as soon as possible. I'll volunteer. Please restore union Terminal and use these lines. (City can connect to downtown with subway/streetcars)."*

*"Evaluate going from Cincinnati to Columbus through Loveland, Wilmington, Washington Court House. That would have less freight conflict and would be faster."*

*"Federal assistance is required to encourage use of private land and freight rail rights of way."*



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*“Energetic, well-founded, doesn’t stretch the imagination, realistic. We must move quickly to protect right-of-ways.”*

*“A very impressive and thorough effort. I think development of Hub plan is critical to keeping Ohio competitive with other states.”*

**3. What respondents would like to see answered in future phases of study:**

*“When can the top priority rail line begin?”*

*“Who would be funding the rail system? Is there a way to pass funding through taxes (i.e. Paul Brown Stadium and Great American Ballpark)?”*

*“Reliable economic projections. Coordination with freight rail fluidity and (other modes of transportation).”*

*“What can we do to help?”*

*“Propose an alignment so that communities can add your interests to their land use plans.”*

*“Further refine alignments and determine obstacles and private coordination (issues).”*

*“How are we thinking about protecting existing rights of way that are not currently impacted?”*

*“Competition for federal (money) between highway and railroads must be addressed.”*

*“Identify route and station locations.”*

**G. Other Feedback: Phone Calls, E-mails, Letters and Resolutions**

Each public meeting and resulting media coverage prompted calls and e-mails to ORDC seeking additional information. Ohio General Assembly members also received calls from their constituents, prompting follow-up calls to ORDC and requests for information briefings. ORDC continues to receive letters and resolutions of support for the Ohio Hub plan and/or specific requests for further analysis. As of August 2005, the Cincinnati City Council, Lima City Council, University Heights City Council, Sylvania City Council, Galion City Council, Monroe County Planning Commission, Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority, Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments and the Ohio Contractors Association had written letters or resolutions of support.



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## IV. Conclusions/Next Steps

By pursuing this public and agency involvement program, ORDC gained valuable input and reinforced positive relationships with stakeholders who could advance -- or obstruct -- this initiative and the eventual development of a statewide passenger rail strategy. The program, with its aggressive use of partnerships with local metropolitan planning organizations, the media and existing grassroots organizations, met its goals of: 1) increasing public understanding of the Ohio Hub Study's assessment of introducing passenger rail and improved freight rail service, 2) leveraging existing communication channels to seek extensive feedback, and 3) using the feedback to adjust the plan and gauge the public's willingness to move ahead with more detailed environmental analysis. The response to the last objective was an overwhelming "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.

Additionally, the 14 public and community leader meetings provided a "news hook" for local media, giving them a reason to cover this issue -- which in turn increased the opportunity for ORDC to educate the public at large in a cost-effective manner. While only a small percentage of the public actually attended the public meetings, a much larger audience had the opportunity to read and/or hear about the study progress through the news coverage, invitation letters and e-mails from grassroots organizations that closely follow rail and transit issues. Similarly, elected officials and other community leaders had multiple opportunities to learn how rail can play a key role in providing Ohioans a balanced transportation network, which in turn can enhance the overall economic vitality of the state.

