

2.0 State Rail Activity in Ohio

Statutory authority to conduct rail planning in Ohio is assigned to the Ohio Rail Development Commission, an independent agency of the Ohio Department of Transportation, in accordance with Chapter 4981 of the Ohio Revised Code. ORDC is the successor of the Ohio High Speed Rail Authority and the Division of Rail Transportation of the Department of Transportation.

2.1 Ohio Rail Development Commission Formation and Purpose

The ORDC was formed in 1994 by combining all of the States non-regulatory rail programs under one agency. By statute, ORDC is an independent commission within the Department of Transportation created to develop, promote, and support safe, adequate, and efficient rail service throughout the state. To meet this task, ORDC uses grants and its revolving loan program to:

- Perform a vital economic development function by assisting businesses locating or expanding in Ohio with rail spurs and other rail infrastructure
- Help rehabilitate light density branch lines on small but critically important short-line and regional railroads that move Ohio's economy
- Assist in the acquisition and continued operation of branch lines
- address special rail problems such as mainline congestion and assisting businesses with rail-related issues to maintain Ohio's status as one of the nation's major transportation hubs
- Assist with the promotion of the rail-related tourism industry
- Maintain Ohio's readiness to move toward intercity passenger rail service at both conventional and high speeds through a variety of planning initiatives

In addition to these development activities, ORDC uses Federal Highway Administration funds allocated by the Ohio Department of Transportation to fund at-grade highway-rail crossing safety improvements throughout the state. These efforts have upgraded over one-thousand railroad crossings, but more importantly, have helped drastically reduce car-train accidents and the number of injuries and lives lost.

As an agency, ORDC is a hybrid of sorts. It is designed to deal with transportation infrastructure, but infrastructure that is normally privately-owned. Its projects are usually driven by business development decisions in the state.

This connection to business development is a major reason why ORDC is so valuable as an independent Commission. The Commission members themselves represent a cross-section of people from railroads, business and government who understand the connection between moving more things faster and better by rail and the growing impact it has on creating new business, creating and retaining good jobs and improving Ohio's overall quality of life.

2.2 Ohio Rail Development Commission Functions

The legislated duties of the ORDC are to:

- Develop, promote, and support safe, adequate, and efficient rail service throughout the state
- Maintain adequate programs of investigation, research, promotion, planning, and development for rail service, which programs shall include the consideration of recommendations by public or private planning organizations
- Provide for the participation of private corporations or organizations and the public in the development, construction, operation, and maintenance of rail service, and as franchises of rail service

In executing its duties, ORDC is permitted to acquire, construct, enlarge, improve, equip, and to sell, lease, exchange, or otherwise dispose of property, structures, equipment, and facilities for rail transportation. It is intended that such activities contribute to the creation or preservation jobs or employment opportunities or the improvement of the economic welfare of the people of the Ohio.

2.3 Rail Funding in Ohio

The Commission issues grants and loans to other public and private sector parties for the purpose of initiating or continuing rail transportation in the state. These can be used for rehabilitation, construction, planning, relocation, or acquisition of rail transportation or rail property. The grants and loans may be funded by the federal government (through federal loans or grants), the state of Ohio, any transportation authority and person, or from any combination of the above. ORDC is charged with establishing eligibility and distribution criteria for the grants and loans. Rail funding is discussed in more detail in **Chapter 12**.

2.4 ORDC Structure

The Commission has a 15 member board, including four non-voting members from the Ohio General Assembly. Seven commissioners are appointed by the governor and one each by the Ohio Senate President and Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives. The Directors of the Ohio Department of Transportation and the Ohio Department of Development serve as ex-officio members. Additionally there are two members from each legislative chamber in the Ohio General Assembly representing the majority and minority parties. Of the members appointed by the governor, one serves as chairman of the commission and each of the others represent a segment of Ohio's interests in rail including freight rail, passenger rail, infrastructure financing, organized labor, manufacturers, and the general public. Additionally, no more than four of the seven members appointed to the commission by the governor shall be from the same political party

2.5 Ohio Rail Studies

Over the past decade, ODOT and ORDC have undertaken a number of studies to determine the existing and future needs of the state's rail system as well as the benefits associated with investing in the rail system. The following is a summary of those studies.

Rail Freight Studies

- "Freight Impacts on Ohio's Transportation System, 2002" – This study documented the levels of rail and truck freight on Ohio's transportation system and provided recommendation for both public and private investment.
- "Ohio Freight Rail Choke Point Study, 2007" – The purpose of this study was to locate and prioritize the most severe impediments on the Ohio rail system on the basis of several factors such as their effect on the economy, safety, and transportation efficiency.
- "ACCESS OHIO 2004-2009" – This is Ohio's statewide transportation plan. It includes a comprehensive analysis of existing transportation conditions, a 26-year projection of the needs and recommendations for Ohio's multimodal transportation system, including roads, bridges, bicycle and pedestrian trails, rail systems, and air and water ports.

A number of rail freight studies have also been undertaken to determine the feasibility of investing in the rehabilitation of individual short line railroads. In addition, a number of Ohio Metropolitan Planning Organizations have conducted studies or inventories of rail operations in their region.

Rail Intercity Passenger Studies

- “Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati High Speed Rail Study, 2001” – This study provided an evaluation of the potential for implementing a high-speed rail service with maximum speeds of 110 mph between Cleveland and Cincinnati through Columbus and Dayton.
- “Ohio & Lake Erie Regional Ohio Hub Study, 2004” – This report was the first of a series of reports which analyzed the feasibility of implementing a high-speed rail passenger network which connected the cities of Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati, with service extensions to Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo/Toronto. A continuing series of reports also analyzed the economic impacts, rail freight impacts, and rail passenger/freight integration impacts resulting from the project initiative.
- “Ohio Hub Passenger & Freight Rail Study” – Public and Agency Involvement Report, 2005 - This report documented the public input received at the 22 technical and/or public meetings held in 10 Ohio cities. The report identifies common themes and concerns regarding the Ohio Hub Plan, and provides detailed issues cited in each of the meeting locations.
- “Ohio Hub Passenger Rail Economic Impact Study, 2007” - This study analyzed how the construction and operation of the Ohio Hub System will stimulate economic activity in Ohio. The report measured both the demand and supply benefits of the Ohio Hub passenger rail system. In addition to construction and operation of the system itself, the economic evaluation also addresses passenger station and multimodal connectivity benefits, freight rail benefits, the benefits of potential commuter rail systems developed in major cities on the system, and tourism benefits.
- “Ohio Hub Economic Impact Analysis, 2007” - This study provided an independent validation of the estimated ridership and economic benefits from the Ohio Hub Passenger studies listed above. The study evaluated the methodologies and conclusions used, and utilized alternative methodologies to evaluate the economic development potential and impacts and provide supplemental information and analysis. Specific areas of analysis included long term employment, income, and real estate development impacts.
- “Amtrak Feasibility Report on Proposed Amtrak Service – Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati, 2009” – This study was prepared for the state of Ohio to determine the feasibility of Amtrak rail passenger operations over the 3-C Corridor. The study includes forecasts of ridership and revenue, estimates for capital improvements, capital costs for equipment procurement and equipment maintenance facilities, and identification of ongoing operating support requirements.

Intermodal Studies

- “Ohio Intermodal Rail Freight Growth Strategy Concept Study, 2006” - This study provided recommendations regarding rail infrastructure investments necessary to accommodate the flow of rail traffic resulting from intermodal growth.
- “Ohio’s Intermodal Transportation System, 2007” – This report documented Ohio’s intermodal assets and summarized their relationship to the total transportation network.

2.6 Ohio’s Involvement in Multistate Rail Planning

Legislation also provides for the state to participate in multistate compacts and other partnerships to establish passenger rail services. These compacts and partnerships include:

- **The Interstate High Speed Intercity Rail Passenger Network Compact:** This compact was ratified and enacted into law for the purpose of states cooperating and jointly administering study of the feasibility

of operating a system connecting major cities in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Illinois, West Virginia, and Kentucky.

- **The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact:** The purpose of this compact is to promote development and implementation of improvements to intercity passenger rail service in the Midwest. Current state members are Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.
- **States for Passenger Rail Coalition:** The Ohio Rail Development Commission joined the States for Passenger Rail when it was established in early 2000. The States for Passenger Rail Coalition is an alliance of state departments of transportation that support intercity passenger rail initiatives and advocate for federal funding. Currently, 24 states are members of the coalition. The coalition's mission is to promote the development, implementation, and expansion of intercity passenger rail services with involvement and support from state governments. The coalition has been very active and has provided testimony at multiple congressional hearings and has had an influence on the drafting of federal bills for funding passenger rail development.
- **The American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials - Standing Committee on Rail Transportation:** Composed of rail officials from state departments of transportation, Ohio participates in AASHTO and SCORT activities including: conferences, technical studies and reports, and advocacy and promotion of various federal issues and projects. SCORT has been very active in its efforts to advance policy statements on passenger rail issues including: Amtrak restructuring; stability for intercity passenger rail; and criteria for national intercity passenger rail investment reform. AASHTO and SCORT maintain a Washington D.C. office that provides a platform from which the state departments of transportation interact with congress as they address transportation issues.
- **Midwest Governor's Memorandum of Understanding:** In 2009, the governors from the MWRRRI states (same states as the MIPRC minus North Dakota) and the mayor of Chicago signed an MOU supporting each state's efforts in applying to the FRA for the \$8 billion in high speed rail funding.
- **West Virginia Doublestack Initiative Feasibility Analysis:** ORDC, in partnership with the West Virginia Port Authority, funded a Rahall Transportation Institute at Marshall University study to determine the feasibility of doublestack container routes connecting east coast ports with Ohio via West Virginia rail routes. The study became the basis of the Norfolk Southern Heartland Corridor project.
- **Memorandum of Agreement among the state of West Virginia, West Virginia Department of Transportation and the Commonwealth of Virginia, Virginia Department of Transportation and the state of Ohio, Ohio Department of Transportation and the Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division for the Heartland Corridor Project:** This cooperative agreement between the signatory states and the federal department of transportation was instrumental in the administration of the Heartland Corridor project.

Ohio's coordination with other states in the region has also resulted in a number of studies which have analyzed rail needs and benefits of the regional rail system. These include:

- "Northern Indiana/Northwestern Ohio Routing Study, 2002"
- "Midwest Regional Rail Initiative Project Report, 2004"
- "Upper Midwest Freight Corridor Study, 2004"

The "Ohio & Lake Erie Regional Hub Study" also analyzed the extension of rail passenger service to Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo. The states of Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and New York either participated directly in the study or were provided the opportunity to review and comment on the study.