

# PART 1: CENTRAL OHIO RAIL AND FREIGHT OVERVIEW

*This page intentionally left blank.*

## **I. INTRODUCTION AND MORPC'S ROLE IN FREIGHT PLANNING**

### **A. Introduction**

As the Columbus region continues to grow, there is a need to improve the people and freight carrying capacity of our local transportation system. Acquisition of right-of-way for this purpose is increasingly expensive and disruptive to existing land use. Because of improvements in technology and the changing economics of transportation, all or parts of many railroad right-of-ways should be reviewed for other transportation uses.

The purpose of this study is to examine the rail lines within the 7-county central Ohio region in order to identify physical constraints and operating parameters which affect the potential use of excess right-of-way for other transportation purposes. This inventory is a planning tool to assist in an objective analysis of a rail line's potential in other uses, such as trails or environmental buffers, as well as assist in intermodal planning, rail crossing studies, and potential infrastructure improvements.

The evaluation contained in this report is general in nature and is to only be used as a starting point for local decision makers who would like to make use of abandoned ROW or excess ROW along active lines but have not had access to data necessary to make this type of evaluation regarding the availability and usefulness of these corridors.

### **B. Federal Mandate**

Beginning with the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, and continuing on with the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) of 1998 and Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) of 2005, Federal transportation bills have significantly broadened the role of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) in matters of regional transportation planning. ISTEA, and continuing with TEA-21 and SAFETEA-LU, mandated that States in cooperation with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) develop transportation plans with an expanded focus on freight and intermodal issues. As a result, MORPC's traditional role of improving the movement of people has evolved to a goal of improving goods movement for the region as well.

As adopted in February of 2007, the final rule for Statewide and Metropolitan Transportation Planning confirms the freight provisions found in SAFETEA-LU (consistent with those outlined previously in ISTEA and TEA-21). States and MPO's are required to consider freight in the planning process, and the bill outlines three guidelines for MPO's directly related to freight and goods movement:

Final Rule 23CFR450.306 Scope of the metropolitan transportation planning process:

(a) The metropolitan transportation planning process shall be continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive, and provide for consideration and implementation of projects, strategies, and services that will address the following factors:

- 1) Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;

- 2) Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and for freight; and
- 3) Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.

SAFETEA-LU once again pushes for greater State and MPO involvement in freight planning through supporting enhancements that better target investment and strengthen decision-making capacity of State and local agencies. It is the intent of this report to fulfill parts of these goals, through providing data to help governments make better informed decisions.

### **C. MORPC Freight Railroad/Goods Movement Interest**

Initial interest in the use of excess rail rights-of-way for public transportation purposes in central Ohio can be found in the "Rail Inventory and Analysis" document of 1968 that became part of the Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan of 1972. The long-range element of this plan recommended that space for rapid transit be reserved within four existing freight railroad rights-of-way.

In 1977, The Mid-Range Transit Development Concept for Columbus, Ohio further refined this work and identified three priority rail rights-of-way in the North and East corridors as alternative locations for public transportation facilities. The East corridor was examined first in conjunction with proposed I-670 for possible use of excess rights-of-way on a jointly owned CSX/Conrail Railroad line running east from the Ohio Center and the East Columbus Industrial track owned by the Yenkin Majestic Paint Company. The potential of using excess rights-of-way on the Conrail Columbus Line which approximately parallels I-71 North was then analyzed in the North Corridor Alternative Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement. In 1993, based on the findings of the North Corridor Alternative Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement, MORPC, working with the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), completed a Long Range System Plan which recommended future consideration of a Light Rail Transit (LRT) system in this ROW.

In 1985 and 1995 the 1968 "Rail Inventory and Analysis" document was updated to become known as the "Inventory of Railroad Rights-of-Way in the Central Ohio Region" and the "Railroad Inventory of Operations in the Central Ohio Region", respectively. The purpose of these updates are similar to the intent of the 2007 update: to make a general evaluation of the availability and usefulness of railroad rights-of-way in the region for other transportation purposes, to identify abandoned portions of rights-of-way that may be lost, and in order to keep decision makers informed. With each update the scope of the project has expanded to include new jurisdictions as the metro area expands, as well as new relevant federal regulations and railroad industry news.

In 1993, MORPC initiated the Inland Port series of studies, spanning over 5 years, in partnership with the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce. The intention of the series was to strengthen the region's role as a distribution and warehousing hub. The work that resulted from this effort won national recognition and became known as the Inland Port Reports, as described below.

- Inland Port Phase I (1994): MORPC concluded its first study exploring the institutional, organizational, and regulatory impediments to freight movement in

the region. This study, entitled “Transportation Infrastructure Improvements Study for the Greater Columbus Inland Port Program”, inventoried the major intermodal freight transfer facilities in central Ohio, assessed present and future freight volume increases through central Ohio, and assessed Columbus' competitive position to succeed as an inland port. Additionally, numerous physical and institutional impediments to freight were identified, freight growth patterns were investigated, and key freight corridors were developed. The study resulted in a list of recommended transportation infrastructure improvements in three industrial districts in the Columbus metropolitan area.

- Inland Port Phase II (1997): MORPC concluded the second phase, with a report entitled Inland Port Infrastructure Improvements Study. This study built upon the foundations established in Phase I and focused on institutional impediments to flows of freight in central Ohio. This study stressed more effective communication between the private and public sectors, and more extensive exchange of information and opportunity for input in the decision-making process on transportation infrastructure improvement projects. In addition, the study also found opportunities for reducing project development duration through planning ahead and anticipating problems and by adhering to Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) guidelines.
- Inland Port Phase III (1998): The Freight Transportation Economic Impact Study for Central Ohio was completed. This study noted that public investment in freight transportation projects were effective methods to achieve economic growth in the region. It also determined which projects would have the greatest potential to yield economic benefits to the local business community. The study also provided a Freight Transportation Investment Model (FTIM), to be used as an ongoing tool to quantify the economic impacts of freight-related projects.

In 1999 MORPC and the City of Columbus developed a task force and subsequent report that focused on “Railroad Corridor Preservation and Transit-Oriented Development”. The intent of this effort was to raise awareness on the need to preserve rail right-of-way for future public use, and particularly stress the need to develop high density and mixed-use development in areas within a 10 minute walk of rail corridors and potential passenger rail stations.

In September 2001, MORPC completed the Central Ohio Regional Rail Study, the freight component of COTA's light-rail transit Major Investment Study. Because COTA's light rail plan hinged on the ability to run light rail or other types of transit within freight corridors this study relied heavily on the input from both CSX and Norfolk Southern (NS) to determine the plan's feasibility. This study, with funding support from ODOT, Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC), Ohio Department of Development (ODOD), COTA and the City of Columbus, identified specific modifications necessary to the freight rail network that would be required to achieve COTA and Central Ohio's passenger rail vision. Results of the study showed that it was possible to work with the private sector to achieve a system that: increases the efficiency of freight operations, reduces grade crossing accidents and blocked crossings, enhances opportunities for rail passenger service within the region, encourages economic development in central Ohio, and reduces vehicular traffic congestion.

*This page intentionally left blank.*