

## MORPC and Freight

Ohio has historically been a crossroads for transportation, especially when it comes to freight. Central Ohio is strategically located within a one-day truck drive of 58 percent of the United States' population and 61 percent of its manufacturing. This historic proximity to people and jobs has led the Columbus region to develop as a center for the logistical industry. Today, our location is just as critical, but when coupled with the region's efforts, central Ohio's success has seen significant growth.

More recent freight developments have been largely tied to shifts in the global supply chain and the expansion of the Panama Canal. Currently, most container traffic enters the United States at the Port of Los Angeles/Long Beach. As these facilities reach capacity, the Panama Canal expansion project will allow an increased volume of post-Panamax container ships to access ports on the east coast.

Ports on the east coast have begun to prepare for the potential influx of container traffic. Likewise, the Norfolk Southern railroad worked with multiple jurisdictions, including the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), to complete its Heartland Corridor project linking the Port of Virginia to Columbus and on to Chicago. This public/private partnership involved not only funding, but the development of its facilities and the infrastructure to serve the new facilities. MORPC has been at the forefront of facilitating these partnerships and securing funding for such projects. At the same time, MORPC helps to ensure that the investments make sense from a long-term perspective to best serve our region.

These partnerships have resulted in major economic development in our region, such as the construction of three intermodal yards, with another in development. Norfolk Southern's Rickenbacker intermodal mega-facility and central Ohio's trucking and air cargo industries created a truly multimodal economic development opportunity for the State of Ohio and the Midwest. The Rickenbacker Intermodal Facility is built on 300 acres south of the Rickenbacker International Airport. Once the facility is built out following the opening of the Heartland Corridor, it will be capable of 400,000 container lifts per year. In the first ten years the facility will save shippers over \$660 million and reduce truck mileage in Ohio by 49 million miles, resulting in a significant reduction of emissions into the air. The long-term impact of this development will be over 20,000 direct and indirect jobs created, and have a \$15.1 billion overall benefit on the region.

Challenges exist to maintain the region's competitive advantage. Bottlenecks threaten the efficiency and productivity of this sector of our economy. A prime example of this is Alum Creek Drive. This road serves as the only Intermodal Connector linking the Rickenbacker area with the Interstate System. Its interchange at I-270 was built as a rural interchange, and the first intersection heading to Rickenbacker is located within 500 feet of the interchange. The proximity of the interchange and intersection results in a hazardous and congested situation that could hinder development.

MORPC and its partners have taken extraordinary efforts to address Alum Creek Drive. Our efforts started in 1994 with a series of Inland Port Studies, which led to the creation of MORPC's freight program. The inland port studies built upon the beginnings of our modern logistical industry with the purpose of economic development in central Ohio. The studies described what we as a Metropolitan Planning Organization could do to strengthen the logistical climate in the region. Recommendations included infrastructure prioritizations, establishment of freight planning, building better public/private partnerships, supporting councils of industry, and designating inland port districts to concentrate efforts. Serious progress has been made on each of the recommendations and they live on today.

Resulting from the study, MORPC established freight districts and prioritized infrastructure improvements. One way we have achieved these goals is through the creation of the Rickenbacker Infrastructure Coordinating Committee. Committee membership included all levels of government and industry in the area. The committee's objectives were to coordinate and prioritize local projects and to plan infrastructure investment in the Rickenbacker area. MORPC's Rickenbacker Area Road Network Assessment report, completed in 2007, has guided improvements in the area.

MORPC has a key role in developing infrastructure project prioritization for the Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT's) major funding source called Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC). During the prioritization effort, MORPC partnered with the private sector to ensure the best projects for the region were selected. While we took a leadership position in the prioritization and coordination of a multi-jurisdictional planning team, we took a very different role in its execution.

After the inland port studies, MORPC worked to establish what is commonly known as a freight roundtable. After several iterations, the Columbus Chamber created the Columbus Region Logistics Council (CRLC). This industry-led council has four missions: Workforce Development, Technology, Business Environment, and Infrastructure. MORPC currently sits on the Infrastructure Committee. This council has become a champion of the Alum Creek issue discussed earlier.

In 2008, a partnership was struck among the council, federal, state, local governments, and MORPC to push the project forward for funding through the Ohio Bipartisan Job Stimulus Logistics and Distribution program. A major development from this partnership was to streamline the standard 8-10 year project development cycle to 4-5 years in order to be more sensitive to the needs of industry and the success of the Rickenbacker area. This streamlining was done primarily by infusing local and private funding early in the project development.

A key lesson that we learned was to correctly know what role to take, whether it was as leader, supporter, or facilitator. The council is led by 24 industry leaders and has moved forward major projects in all four of its focus areas. Outside of transportation, MORPC's major role on the council is to facilitate collaboration and to represent its member communities' interests.

This council has been remarkably more effective than the previous roundtables that followed the standard MPO freight roundtable model. The main innovation is that private industry is able to focus the public sector as well as themselves on freight issues - more specifically, the time spectrums required by each sector's needs. The public sector is normally focused on long-term objectives. The private sector on the other hand is focused on quarterly results. In addition, this partnership enables both the private and public sectors to bring out the best in each other. For example, while MORPC was able to truly engage the private sector in the transportation planning process, the private sector taught us to think more like a business. One of the most valuable contributions of MORPC to the CRLC is the numerous contacts we maintain in the public, private, and quasi-public sectors. We are able to identify issues and opportunities faced by one sector and educate and recruit participation from the others.

Working across jurisdictional boundaries and forming true public/private partnerships is completely voluntary. In central Ohio, our regional partners do it because there is now wide recognition that working together is more advantageous than going it alone. For example, there is no formal master agreement binding together the partners of the Alum Creek interchange project. Everyone recognizes the importance of making Rickenbacker a success and so has chosen to cooperate; all of the partners recognize they have mutual goals that can be more quickly achieved together.

While multi-jurisdictional cooperation and public/private partnerships are active and very successful in central Ohio, we still have work to do. A major barrier to coordination and implementation is funding limitations, including building a level of trust with the private sector to attract the necessary seed funding for challenging projects. MORPC is currently working with the Columbus Region Logistics Council on building a business case for infrastructure investment, and working with developers to properly market infrastructure investments to their customers to help overcome this barrier. These efforts are ever more important as infrastructure funding becomes more and more limited. This is also tied to our drive to educate our members on different innovative financing techniques that might be able to fill potential funding gaps.

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