



# 2023 STATE OF THE REGION



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PLANNING COMMISSION



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MID-OHIO REGIONAL  
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# POWERING OUR REGION FORWARD

**T**his is an exciting time for Central Ohio. We live in a vibrant, growing, world-class region; one now projected to exceed 3 million people by 2050.

At the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), we work with communities to create an environment for prosperity. It is no secret that the power of Central Ohio's success is rooted in our spirit of collaboration.

Together, we are proud to work with more than 80 local governments and community partners in the region, providing programs that harness the collective force of information, collaboration, and imagination.

To own the future, we must take bold steps to ensure Central Ohio serves its residents and businesses by addressing the needs of our growing region, building on our strong strategic framework of paying it forward, driving investment, building value for members, and creating an environment for prosperity.

As many of you know, MORPC provides comprehensive planning, data and information to help communities plan for the future, but our work goes beyond planning and data. Our members are constantly finding ways to leverage our collaborative relationships and tap into available information and resources. Together, these tools spark big ideas to create a thriving, prosperous region.

As the decade continues to unfold, growth will bring urgent clarity to invest in both necessary and transformative projects. We need big, bold thinking to create communities with a lifestyle and culture that draws and retains the best talent and raises the bar for our region's overall quality of life.

And the time to invest in the future is now.

Existing roads and highways around the region need upgrades. Plans envision major improvements to existing routes, smart technology projects, and new connections. We need to power forward with new options that include trains, transit, and trails. We should expect a system that serves everyone with more choices, from the heart of the city to growing hometowns.

We must create new rapid, reliable multi-modal options to spur needed housing, new access to jobs, and better service for those who need it most. We should invest in a robust regional transit network to improve rural transit and build upon COTA's innovative mobility projects.

The regional trails system will need to be built out, with dedicated bike lanes, and investment in transformative efforts like RAPID5, elevating access to nature, drive economic development, and better connect neighborhoods.

Urban, suburban, rural, big, or small, MORPC is committed to continuing to work together with the many diverse communities in our region. Growing better, together, as we get bigger.

Together, we are committed to working with our members and partners to make these big ideas a reality as we power our region forward.

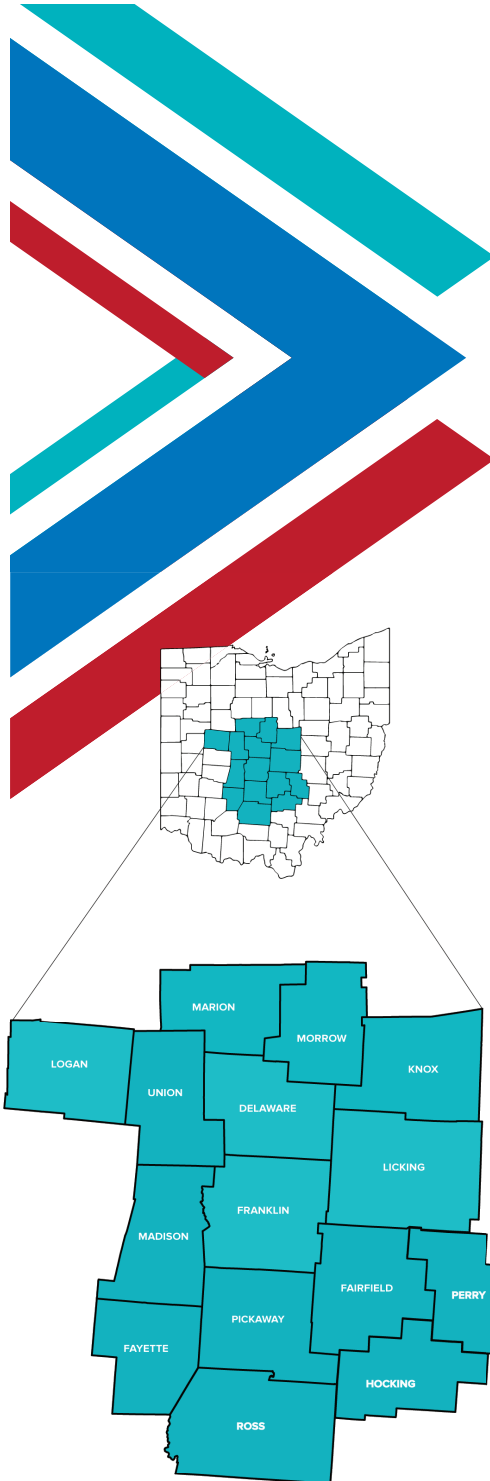
Kind Regards,



**William  
Murdock, AICP**  
Executive Director,  
MORPC



**Erik J. Janas**  
MORPC Board Chair





# CENTRAL OHIO LEADERS CELEBRATE SUCCESSES AT 2023 STATE OF THE REGION

**A**gainst the backdrop of a growing region, top community and business leaders from across Central Ohio joined the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) for the 2023 State of the Region. The State of the Region is an annual celebration of the region's shared accomplishments and showcased strategies for powering the Central Ohio region forward.

Held at the Hilton Columbus Downtown on March 31, nearly 1,000 regional leaders and partners gathered to celebrate the collaborative work being done throughout the region to invest in both necessary and transformative projects.

This year's theme, *Powering Our Region Forward*, considered this watershed moment for the region: the historic national investment in infrastructure, and the potential to dramatically impact the prosperity of the region's residents for generations to come.

Kicking off MORPC's annual signature event, attendees were invited to participate in an immersive experience, "Welcome to 2050," curated by Holovisn, a global market leader in holographic display technology. The event showcased train tracks that were once frequented by Amtrak on the ground floor of what is now the Columbus Convention Center. Adjacent to this view, a holographic representation of transportation reimagined featuring trackless trams and passenger rail service making stops in between a hub at the downtown Convention Center connecting to the east at the John Glenn International Airport to the west to the communities of Dublin and Hilliard were on display as the region embarks on its 2050 regional transportation plan.

MORPC welcomed keynote speaker Deputy Assistant Secretary Charles Small, United States Department of Transportation (USDOT). Small serves as the primary liaison for state, county, and local elected officials, leading outreach and engagement strategy with non-federal stakeholders. In a day which highlighted the future growth of our region, Small's remarks echoed MORPC's work toward building a thriving Central Ohio.

Following the keynote, DriveOhio Executive Director Preeti Choudhary, led a panel discussion with top transportation experts from across the nation. The panel included Derrick James, Amtrak; Karina Ricks, Cityfi; Christopher Hart, Hart Solutions LLC; and Thea Ewing, (formerly with MORPC) HNTB. The panel focused on the future of transportation and how Central Ohio can prepare for a mode shift, providing more choices to serve everyone.

Three Central Ohio leaders were recognized with special honors as MORPC bestowed the William H. Anderson Excellence in Public Service Award, the Regional Leaders Award, and the William H. Habig Collaborative Achievement Award.

The **William H. Anderson Award** recognizes a MORPC board member who exemplifies outstanding leadership, a vision for the community and the region, and a commitment to MORPC. The award honors longtime MORPC board member, William H. Anderson, who was the epitome of a civic volunteer, remembered for the zeal with which he championed MORPC's mission and goals. This year the award was presented to Lancaster, Ohio Mayor David Scheffler.

Scheffler has served as a MORPC board member since 2018 and joined the executive board in 2020. He serves as the chair of the Regional Policy Roundtable and was instrumental in the creation of the 2023-24 Public Policy Agenda.

Having served Lancaster since 2018, Mayor Scheffler is an innovative leader for his community, putting the needs of the city first while also looking at the big picture. His motto, "Challenge the status quo," defines his approach as mayor. He understands the benefit to Lancaster for embracing the role as a regional collaborator. He was instrumental in the creation of the Fairfield County Workforce Development Center, bringing together the city's Economic Development Department, Fairfield County Economic Development, Ohio University, the Ohio University-Lancaster campus, and Hocking College.

MORPC's **Regional Leadership Award** recognizes individuals who make extraordinary efforts to ensure the future viability of the region's communities. The Regional Leadership Award originates

from MORPC's continuing dedication to address issues that transcend community boundaries and stimulate visionary thinking. This year's recipient is Christie Angel, Past President & CEO of the YWCA Columbus.

Angel leads by example and has spent three decades engaging her community, building relationships, and advocating for the vulnerable so that all people can experience peace, justice, freedom, and dignity.

Prior to joining the YWCA in 2017, Angel's experience in the public and private sectors ranged from the City of Columbus to several government and public policy agencies. Under Christie's leadership, the YWCA Columbus launched the "American Electric Power Foundation Center for Racial Equity" to advance education, civic engagement, and advocacy.

Christie lives by the YWCA's mission, "to eliminate racism and to empower women," serving as a tireless advocate for historically marginalized and underserved communities. Christie is an active community volunteer; having served on numerous community boards and commissions including the Greater Columbus Arts Council, Campus Partners for Community Urban Redevelopment, The Links, Inc., the Human Service Chamber of Franklin County, and the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation/Capitol South, among others.

The **William C. Habig Collaborative Achievement Award** is presented to an individual or organization that has achieved an effective effort or innovative

collaborative project in Central Ohio. Honorees have demonstrated success in developing a specific initiative or entity that supports broad inclusion, diverse thoughts in the process, and delivers tangible results addressing key challenges facing the region. This award was presented to One Columbus.

One Columbus is the economic development organization for the 11-county Columbus Region. Working with local and state partners, the agency serves as the business location resource for companies across Central Ohio as they grow, innovate, and compete within the global economy.

One Columbus has helped to secure more than \$10 billion of capital investment, 50,000 direct jobs, and \$2 billion of new payroll across the Columbus Region, and was instrumental in bringing businesses like Intel, Honda, Amazon, and Hyperion to Central Ohio. The organization's overall goal of "turning Greater Columbus into the most prosperous region in the United States," lays the framework for addressing issues in housing, education, labor force and transportation, among others.

One Columbus is committed to ensuring the region remains vibrant and an economically healthy region while serving growing companies that would like to call Central Ohio home.

To watch a recap of the 2023 State of the Region visit, [www.morpc.org/sotr](http://www.morpc.org/sotr). Also, be sure to **save the date for the 2024 SOTR – March 15, 2024 at the Hilton Columbus Downtown!** ■

## 2023 STATE OF THE REGION AWARD RECIPIENTS

### WILLIAM H. ANDERSON AWARD



**DAVID SCHEFFLER**  
Mayor  
City of Lancaster

### REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARD



**CHRISTIE ANGEL**  
Former President & CEO  
YWCA Columbus

### WILLIAM C. HABIG COLLABORATIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

**ONE1  
COLUMBUS**



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2023 State of the Region PRESENTING SPONSOR MESSAGE

# A MESSAGE FROM THE CITY OF GROVE CITY

BY:  
RICHARD L.  
"IKE" STAGE  
Mayor, City of  
Grove City



## Employing Innovation to Move Us Forward

Emerging as a premier location for the future of gene therapy and advanced materials manufacturing, Grove City is home to a collection of next-generation visionary business leaders who are moving our region – and the world – forward. Products and services touching the lives of people worldwide are coming from our community, and we are honored to play a role in their efforts and successes.

Tosoh America Inc., a chemicals and advanced materials manufacturer, is one of Grove City's long-established business partners. Tosoh's success has led to consistent growth over more than 40 years, including a recent 30,000-square-foot medical facility expansion, creating 40 new jobs.

Forge Biologics and American Nitrile are also bringing jobs to Grove City while impacting lives.

With recent major breakthroughs in gene therapy, Forge Biologics saw a need and powered forward to secure \$330 million in funding to build one of the world's largest genetic medicines manufacturing facilities, here in our hometown.

Emphasized by the pandemic, American Nitrile also recognized an unmet need and set out to restore nitrile gloves manufacturing. Choosing Grove City as the hub of their efforts, American Nitrile boasts it is the *greenest glove factory in the world*, aligning perfectly with our commitment to environmental responsibility.

## Living and Playing in Grove City

Our unique hometown feel is a constant among many factors that make Grove City a great place to call home. As our region's population continues to climb, we take pride in balancing the needs of each demographic.



Our unique hometown feel is a constant among many factors that make Grove City a great place to call home.

We continue to develop affordable housing options in Grove City, such as Homeport's Arrowleaf complex. Senior communities like Homestead Village, Lamplighter Senior Village, and, coming later this year, Season's Grove, help make independent living attainable.

Complementing our established neighborhoods are desirable new areas where developers are building multigenerational housing. Beulah Park, for example, offers condominiums, single-family homes, and senior and assisted living, all connected to our historic Town Center.

Outdoor areas are at the forefront of every project. For example, Beulah Park is developed around a 32-acre central park, a social space filled with features for all ages, like several shelters, pickleball courts, playgrounds, trails, a pond, and a future amphitheater.

## Connecting to Grove City's Future

Known for our hometown feel and welcoming nature, Grove City remains focused on people-centered community development. In short, we design around people, connectivity, and social well-being.

Exciting things are planned for Grove City, such as Broadway Live, a mixed-use development coming to the historic Town Center, expected to be a catalyst for continued growth in the city. The plan introduces reimagined spaces, supporting established small businesses and growing as a meeting place of old and new, traditional and revival.

Development in the Southwest Regional Medical and Innovation Gateway benefits from the recent construction of Mount Carmel Grove

City Hospital, the Veterans Outpatient Clinic, and The James Grove City, among others.

To support future growth in the area and provide improved connectivity throughout the community, a plan for a new interstate overpass was introduced last year. Implementing the vision will help attract new jobs, services, and amenities for the community.

Our diversified development efforts illustrate Grove City's continuing commitment to serve as a welcoming community for all. ■

*Mayor Richard L. "Ike" Stage was elected in 2019 to his sixth non-consecutive term as mayor of Grove City, Ohio. He served as the appointed City Administrator of Grove City from January 2000 through November 2003 and was elected to City Council in 2005 as the Councilman-at-large and served a two-year term ending Jan. 1, 2008.*





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**SWACO**  
FROM WASTE TO RESOURCES

# MORPC FORMS REGION'S FIRST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) worked throughout 2022 to collect and assemble the necessary documents to submit a designation application to the United States Economic Development Administration (EDA) to form the region's first Economic Development District (EDD).

## What is an EDD?

Areas are designated by the EDA and serve as multijurisdictional collaborative agencies.

EDDs help lead locally based, regionally driven economic development planning by leveraging public, private, and non-profit sectors and establishing a strategic development plan for regional collaboration.

The state of Ohio is home to six currently designated districts: Buckeye Hills-Hocking Valley Regional Development District; Eastgate Regional Council of Governments; Maumee Valley Economic Development District; Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization; Ohio Mid-Eastern Government Association; and the Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission. With a historic precedence of designated districts residing in Appalachia Ohio, MORPC worked to submit the state's first designation request in an urban center of the state.

The Columbus Region consists of 11 counties: Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Knox, Licking, Logan, Madison, Marion, Morrow, Pickaway, and Union.

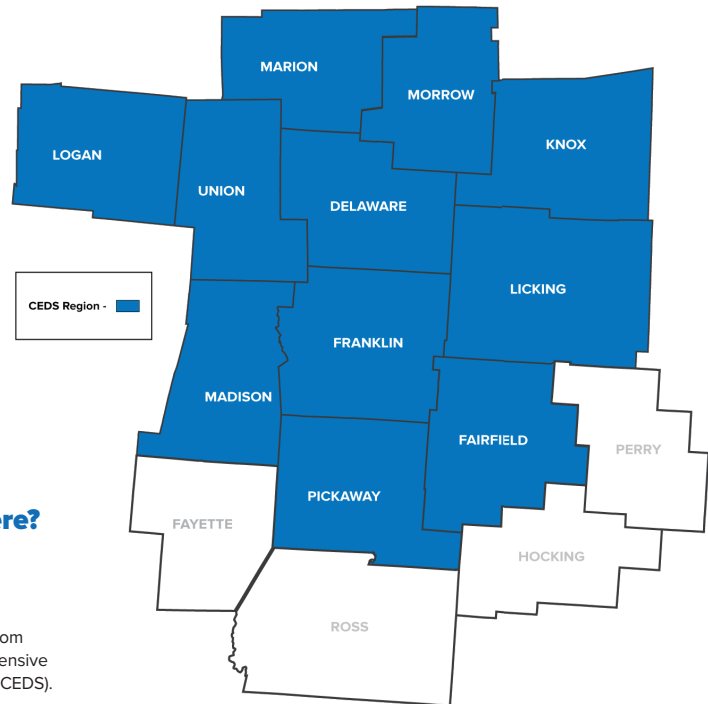
## How Did We Get Here?

MORPC, in partnership with One Columbus and the Mid-Ohio Development Exchange (MODE), received approval in early 2022 from the EDA for the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

The CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development and serves as a roadmap for planning. The development of the CEDS was a collaboration in the region, bringing together representatives from both the public and private sectors, to ensure consensus as the blueprint for the district was established.

Once the approval of the region's CEDS was secured, MORPC visited each of the counties in the district, presenting economic development updates, and requested a letter of support, from county commissioners, confirming alignment around the formation of the district. With letters from all 11 counties in-hand, MORPC worked with the EDA to submit the region's designation request at the end of 2022.

## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



## What's Ahead?

With a designated district, Central Ohio will receive increased access to regional funding, bringing to the table public works grant funding, economic adjustment strategy funding, and annual grant funding for short and long-term planning. Additionally, the district will be provided access to technical assistance providers as individual communities map out their roadmap for development.

An aligned region also can leverage existing programs and projects, including MORPC's Competitive Advantage Driving Investment Program. The program advances strategic investments, led by working groups made up of local leaders, to develop and maintain prioritized projects.

A newly formed EDD will ultimately lead to expanded region-wide collaboration and enhanced alignment among the 11 counties that make up the region. As we head into 2023, it is full steam ahead as a region as MORPC looks forward to the new and continued partnerships that will soon form the Columbus Region Economic Development District. To learn more visit: [www.morpc.org/ceds](http://www.morpc.org/ceds).







## CENTRAL OHIO'S PROGRESS TOWARD MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

The ride to work may look different in a few years for those who travel Central Ohio.

Public opinion is changing, as many Americans prefer options in their daily mobility choices. While the car may continue as the primary mode of transportation, streets are no longer planned without sidewalks and connectivity to the social fabric that surrounds them, and safety is a top-of-mind concern for not only drivers, but everyone using the region's transportation systems. MORPC advances this trend by awarding federal surface transportation dollars to projects such as expanding trails, funding the construction of bus-rapid transit (BRT), and complete street redesigns.

MORPC's programming team includes expert planners and engineers dedicated to multimodal mobility, transportation demand management (TDM), and safety, among a few specialties.

### LinkUS

The partnership between the City of Columbus, Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), Franklin County, and MORPC to invest in the future of mobility continues to move forward. The design of BRT for East Main and West Broad Street is entering the next phase, and includes visualizing the built environment with dedicated lanes and multimodal stations. A conceptual design for what a station might look like has been presented. The partners will be seeking community feedback in the coming year to ensure that a variety of user experiences are considered and integrated into the design.

As the regional convener, MORPC is tasked with administering the transit supportive infrastructure (TSI) planning to ensure municipalities can plan and build the needed connective-tissue infrastructure – such as sidewalks, trails, and multiuse paths – for users to access the new transit system. The

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) closely aligns with the goals of the LinkUS program and will be updated in 2023 to reflect the future of mobility.

### COTA Plus and Delaware County Transit FLEX

Central Ohio transit agencies are exploring new operation models away from the hub-and-spoke fixed route options that have dominated the urban fabric for decades. Delaware County Transit has a Flex Service Zone in the city of Delaware that is taking off, with record ridership in 2022. Students, workers, and seniors are seeing the benefits of taking this rideshare, curb-to-curb model.

COTA is continuing to expand its COTA Plus zones and is expected to add additional zones with the implementation of the LinkUS plan. Like the DCT Flex service, riders can

schedule a ride and get picked up at the curb. While the zones do not exist everywhere in the fixed route service area, riders of the fixed route system can get a free ride from a bus stop in a COTA Plus zone as an extension of their ride if they must transfer to reach their final destination.

### Micro Mobility and Transportation Demand Management

Scoters, e-bikes, and dockless bikes are popping up across Central Ohio. Several companies are bringing these options to municipalities that have changed code changes to allow them. This year, MORPC is planning to offer education and outreach to communities interested in changing their code to allow for these services for their residents. Utilizing the work already



**OPTIONS** ➤ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

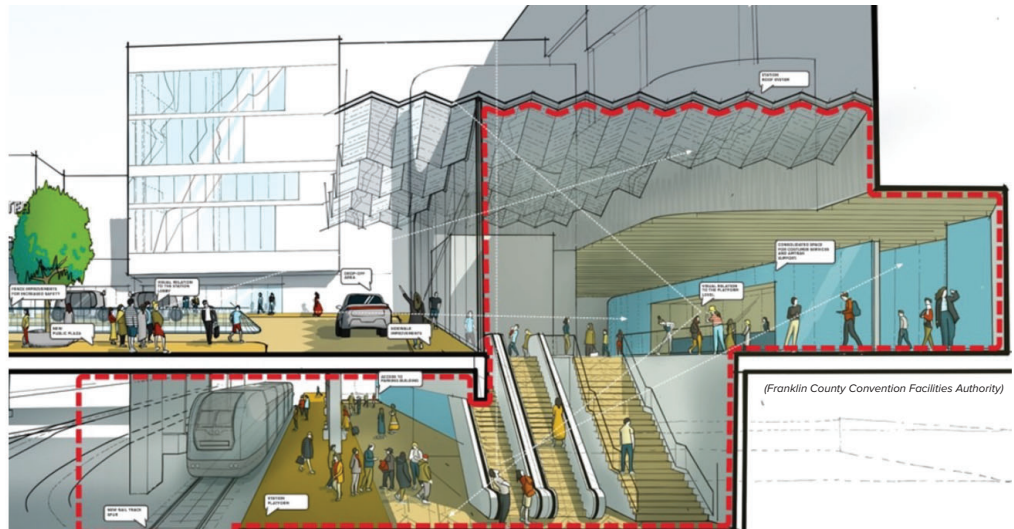
done by cities such as Columbus and Dublin, best practices can emerge to manage the infrastructure this new transit mode brings.

When it comes to ridesharing, MORPC's vanpool and carpool programs grew in 2022 as more companies transitioned back to the office at least a few days a week. Investment in the rural counties and cross-county vanpools continue to see growth as the economy extends beyond the county lines. Gohio Commute allows residents near each other to sync up for a shared ride to work if they are heading in the same direction.

## Passenger Rail

Amtrak trains haven't been to Columbus since 1979, but recent progress could change that narrative. MORPC, alongside Ohio's four largest MPOs and cities, is working with the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) to submit the 3C+D corridor for placement in the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor ID Program.

MORPC is also partnering with the City of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, on a submission to study the Chicago-Ft. Wayne-Columbus-Pittsburgh line, formerly known as Midwest Connect that was previously studied for hyperloop services.



A study commissioned last year by the CFA provided renderings showcasing how a new train station could be integrated into the Convention Center, with pedestrian access from N. High Street.

Each of the lines would eventually connect to the Columbus Convention Center station, currently in the design phase through the Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority (FCCFA). The estimated \$22 million facility is envisioned to connect multiple modes of transportation in the heart of downtown.

Building a more prosperous Central Ohio requires that we champion new ideas and concepts for how residents, businesses and visitors move around the region. MORPC and its regional partners are boldly leading the charge toward finding ways to support our current transportation systems while embracing the innovation that will help

Central Ohio to remain a great place to live and work while accommodating for growth. To learn more about how MORPC is working to advance the future of multimodal transportation in the region, visit [www.morpc.org](http://www.morpc.org).



## GROW IN OPPORTUNITY



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<b>TOWNSHIPS</b>	Blendon   Bloom   Clinton   Etna   Franklin   Granville   Jackson   Jefferson Jerome   Madison   Mifflin   Perry   Plain   Prairie   Truro   Violet   Washington
<b>ASSOCIATE MEMBERS</b>	Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority Columbus Metropolitan Library Educational Service Center of Central Ohio Franklin Soil & Water Conservation District Licking County Soil & Water Conservation District META Solutions Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio



# METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR PRIORITY INVESTMENTS IN THE REGION

**A**s new development continues to come to Central Ohio, bringing jobs and opportunities to the region, that same growth will also place a strain on the current transportation infrastructure. It is critical that as we plan for this growth, that we continuously study, plan for, and invest in the regional transportation system. Wise investments in transportation infrastructure can also be a driver of inclusive and sustainable development.

This is accomplished through the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the region's guiding document identifying priority investments to facilitate the movement of a growing number of people and goods while advancing the regional goals of health and safety, sustainable neighborhoods, economic prosperity, energy resilience, protecting natural resources, and innovation.

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission is leading the planning to identify transportation strategies and projects that will move the region closer to these goals through the development of the 2024-2050 MTP. The plan will lay the foundation for billions of dollars in federal, state, and local investments in Central Ohio and establish eligibility to bring in competitive grant funding made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, passed in 2021.

## Metropolitan Transportation Plan

**\$30 BILLION**  
in priority transportation  
infrastructure investments

**6**  
high-capacity  
transit corridors

**400+**  
miles of stand-alone  
bicycle and  
pedestrian facilities



**40**  
miles of freeway  
lane management

**150**  
targeted intersection  
improvements

These funds will improve, maintain, and operate public transit, highways, bikeways, sidewalks, and related facilities. By focusing on making transportation safer for all people; increasing access to jobs, education, and amenities; reconnecting historically disadvantaged communities; and strengthening mobility options, these projects will impact everyone's quality of life.

Currently, the 2020-2050 MTP identifies nearly \$30 billion in priority transportation infrastructure investments, including six high-capacity transit corridors (four of which are advancing as Bus Rapid Transit corridors through the regional partnership of the LinkUS Mobility Initiative), more than 400 miles of stand-alone bicycle and

pedestrian facilities, more than 40 miles of freeway lane management, and nearly 150 targeted intersection improvements.

Building upon these priorities, the 2024-2050 MTP will identify additional corridors for rapid transit, projects to build out the regional trail network, safety improvements on our roadways, and strategies to walk safely and comfortably in developed areas. It also will include strategies for maintaining existing infrastructure and integrating emerging technologies for sustainable management of our transportation systems. Through collaboration, these investments will support and strengthen other key regional initiatives such as Rapid5 and LinkUS.

MORPC invites the community to weigh in on the strategies and projects being considered for inclusion in the MTP. Public engagement opportunities will be occurring throughout 2023, including public comment periods, interactive web maps, and scheduled meetings and presentations throughout the development process.

MORPC leads a continuous planning process that brings together local governments from Central Ohio as part of its ongoing transportation planning process. It also coordinates with the Ohio Department of Transportation, area transit agencies, and the Licking County Area Transportation Study. Independently and cooperatively, these entities collect data and complete technical analyses to identify transportation needs that are incorporated into the MTP.

For those actively engaged in the planning for our transportation needs, 2023 is a big year. The MTP is updated every four years, with the completion of this MTP in early 2024. Central Ohio residents are encouraged to participate in the development of this important plan by following its progress and providing input. To learn more about the regional goals, objectives, strategies, and projects included in the 2020-2050 MTP and how to get actively engaged involved, visit

[www.morpc.org/mtp2050](http://www.morpc.org/mtp2050). ■



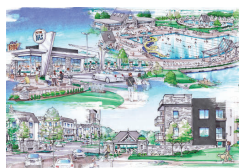
## 200 YEARS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Settled on the banks of the Big Walnut River nearly two hundred years ago, Obetz has long served as a center of commerce for the Central Ohio Region. From our early days as a stagecoach junction, to our industrial revolution railroad economy, to becoming a regional leader in e-commerce, Obetz continues to evolve its vital role in the Ohio economy.

Obetz' future is unlimited with more than 350 businesses calling Obetz home, six hundred acres of City parks, four new housing developments under construction, Central Ohio's hottest housing market, the fifty-acre regional entertainment powerhouse affectionately called Fortress Obetz, and more than 20,000 jobs.

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# THE SECRET IS OUT! CREATING COMMUNITIES THAT CONNECT RESIDENTS TO NATURE IMPROVES HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

One of the best-kept secrets in Central Ohio is that Franklin County is home to more than 146 miles of beautiful and scenic waterways, with hundreds of miles of paved waterside trails traversing the natural environment.

The combined waterways and trails – like the Olentangy Trail, Alum Creek Trail, and Scioto Trail – offer opportunities to enjoy the waterfronts, wetlands, unique natural spaces, and outdoor recreation that exist along our waterways. That's a truly special amenity here in Central Ohio, especially considering research continues to show that time spent in nature has astonishing physical and mental health benefits like decreasing anxiety and depression, and lowering the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes.

While Central Ohio's outdoor natural resources are extensive, many still find themselves primarily connecting to the world digitally. We can connect with colleagues over Zoom, order groceries with an app, and use social media to stay up to date with friends. While this digital world offers more flexibility than ever to balance; living, working, and playing, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) remains committed to enhancing that balance by making it easier than ever to immerse oneself in nature.

A re-visioned Central Ohio Blueways program has embarked on the ambitious goal of making Central Ohio a region synonymous with outdoor recreation. With big goals for the future, like access improvements, wayfinding strategies, and trip planning tools, the program is focused on designating the five major waterways in Central Ohio as State Water Trails through the Ohio Department of Natural Resources by the end of 2023. This first step will open many doors to building a robust program that guarantees every Central Ohioan is able to access and enjoy the beautiful water resources in the region. However, developing the Blueways is just one component of ensuring equitable access to nature and outdoor recreation.

MORPC's Central Ohio Greenways (COG) Board is committed to adding more than 500 miles of trails while simultaneously celebrating the region as a hub of beautiful, scenic, nationally



MORPC's Central Ohio Greenways (COG) Board is committed to adding more than 500 miles of trails to the region.

recognized trails with the potential to draw tourists and deepen Central Ohioans' pride of place.

Our region is uniquely positioned to attract people from all over the state and country as we offer connections to the state's Ohio to Erie Trail and the nation's Great American Rail Trail. Recognizing a Trail Town approach as a way of leveraging tourism opportunities, active transportation, and quality of life benefits, COG is developing a framework for a regional Trail Town designation initiative in which our communities can unite in a shared outdoor recreation and transportation marketing effort.

Trail Town planning expert and author, Amy Camp, suggests that a "Trail town is both an investment and an attitude.

*To be a trail town is to pay attention to trails, invest in them, and make a concerted community-wide effort to improve trail-to-town connections."*

We know from surveys that urban, rural, and suburban communities across the region are ready to invest in trails and are eager to attract more people to their businesses, parks, and neighborhoods. COG is supporting community interest in Trail Towns by advancing wayfinding, public art, and branding guidance to ensure traveling by trail is easy, comfortable, and enjoyable.

To further drive the vision toward more equitable access for the region's outdoor resources, MORPC is partnering with Rapid5 to transform Central Ohio's natural spaces. This

new non-profit organization, led by Dr. Amy Acton, is focused on building a future where Columbus residents are more connected to not only nature, but one another. Its commitment to supporting Blueways, Greenways, and other nature-centered programs to ensure that the benefit of the outdoors is available to everyone, and at the center of our region's way of life. You can learn more about the RAPID 5 initiative at [www.rapid5.org](http://www.rapid5.org).

A future region where everyone can benefit from robust, well-maintained paths, trails, and waterways is within our reach, thanks to the work done through programs and resources like COG and Central Ohio Blueways. Learn more by visiting [www.morpc.org/cog](http://www.morpc.org/cog) and [www.morpc.org/blueways](http://www.morpc.org/blueways). ■



# MORPC'S ADVOCACY STRATEGY CONTINUES TO DRIVE INVESTMENT IN THE REGION

**2**023 is already on track to be a year of growth and opportunity for Central Ohio. Last year set the stage for record new investments in the region and in public infrastructure around the country.

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) is now aligning staff and strategy to meet this moment and ensure that as the region grows, it also grows better. Through efforts at the Statehouse and in Congress, MORPC continues to advocate for Central Ohio's top priorities and secure funding for transformative initiatives.

At the heart of MORPC's advocacy strategy is the newly updated 2023-2024 Public Policy Agenda. The agenda was crafted by a working group consisting of MORPC members and key regional partners and led by Columbus City Councilwoman Lourdes Barroso de Padilla, who also serves as Regional Policy Roundtable Vice Chair. Through a thoughtful and deliberative process, the Regional Policy Roundtable, chaired by Mayor David Scheffler of Lancaster, approved an ambitious agenda for the next Congress and Ohio General Assembly emphasizing three key areas: MORPC's strategic framework, regional priority projects, and improving housing access. With these priorities in hand, MORPC looks forward to working with Central Ohio's legislative delegations to continue building on recent progress.

MORPC continues to build on its *Drive Investment* strategy, which aims to secure the financial resources necessary for key projects in the region and to create an environment for prosperity.

Between the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other federal budget measures, these investments present a once in a generation opportunity for our region. Attracting this investment will make it easier to address challenges like connecting affordable internet at home or reconnecting historically marginalized neighborhoods to resources. It can also elevate opportunities like bringing passenger rail back to Central Ohio. Driving investment to our region can impact the prosperity of our communities and the lives of generations to come.

To further leverage this unique investment opportunity, MORPC partnered with the Columbus Partnership to form a group of public and private sector thought leaders to prepare for the expansion of passenger

## Driving Investment & Creating Prosperity

**300,000  
MORE JOBS**



**300,000  
HOUSING UNITS**



**3.15 Million  
PEOPLE BY 2050**



rail in the Columbus region. Through its work, the group determined that the significant population centers, vibrant and growing rural areas and cities, and major investments in economic development make it clear that Ohio and the Columbus region represent the best business case for new passenger rail routes and service in the country. This partnership led to critical steps in moving this regional priority forward.

This past February, Governor DeWine directed the Ohio Rail Development Commission to apply for the first phase of funding to study expanding passenger rail service in the 3C+D corridor. MORPC stands ready to compete for this investment on behalf of its growing region and looks forward to working together to be a resource to the Ohio Rail Development Commission on this effort.

Internally, MORPC moved quickly to build out its team, identify key partners, and develop new tools and pathways for members to take advantage of these funds. Just in the last few months, MORPC created a new position, a regional investment officer that is dedicated to identifying relevant opportunities, convening key stakeholders, and developing strategies to pursue funding. Additionally, a new opportunity portal was launched, and local partners were engaged to secure more than \$26.5 million in federal budget earmarks for projects across the region.

As the work to enhance Central Ohio's communities, economies, and natural assets move forward, MORPC's collaboration with its partners across the region will continue to pay off. To learn more about MORPC's advocacy work, visit [www.morpc.org/govaffairs](http://www.morpc.org/govaffairs). ■

# WELCOMING.



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come together,  
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# CHOOSE TO EMBRACE GROWTH AND INVEST IN PEOPLE

**B**y now, it is no surprise that Central Ohio is growing. MORPC's latest forecasts anticipate that we will be a region of 3.15 million people by 2050 – an increase of 5 percent compared to previous forecasts. Compared to 2020, this represents an increase of 726,000 people or 272,000 households. And while growth is sometimes framed in the context of its potential negative impacts on traffic and schools, it is important to embrace Central Ohio's growth as a genuine opportunity.

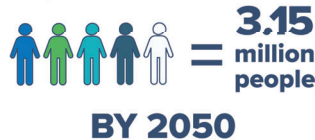
Columbus is fortunate to be a growing metro area that continues to attract talent domestically and internationally. It is much harder to combat a shrinking population than to support a growing one, especially when the growth is consistent and manageable. We can't stop the growth, nor should we desire to do so; however, we can choose our response to it. The good news is that the growth rate for the next 20 years, while strong, will be more manageable than the fastest-growing metros, such as Austin or Boise.

One approach to growth is to view it as a threat to our way of life, choosing not to plan for future needs. In this scenario, growth will follow the path of least resistance as residents struggle to find homes that meet their needs or budget, development will expand outward, and we could lose

## 2024 - 2050 Population Growth Forecasts

Recent growth places Central Ohio among the fastest-growing large metros in the country.

Franklin County is expected to absorb half of the regional growth and will welcome more than twice as many newcomers as the next highest county (Delaware).



prime farmland and natural areas at a concerning rate. In turn, commutes will become longer, and roadways more congested and dangerous. More residents will be dependent on cars, since it will be impractical to support premium transit across such a sprawling region, resulting in dissatisfaction for would-be transit users and motorists alike. And to make it all happen, we can expect to pay more in taxes to service these unsustainable infrastructure investments.

On the other hand, communities can choose to embrace growth as an

opportunity for a better future. One in which residents plan and prepare together to accommodate the people who choose to live in Central Ohio. When planning for growth, it is important to support it, shape it, and do so in a way that makes communities more connected, resilient, fiscally responsible, and safer.

Critical to successful growth are communities that connect to jobs, schools, services, and each other, as well as protect historic buildings, natural amenities, rural landscapes, and that which makes the region special. Tax

dollars go further, and the transportation network can support more travelers across more modes – including premium transit – with less congestion. When we choose to see growth as an opportunity, we choose to invest in people as our most valuable resource. People will respond in-kind, by investing in Central Ohio as a place where they and their families and businesses can thrive, now and for generations to come. Learn more about MORPC's plans for ensuring that the region can keep up with its growing population by visiting [www.morpc.org/rhs](http://www.morpc.org/rhs).

**T**his past February, MORPC released its latest population projections for the Central Ohio region. The latest numbers show that the region is now expected to grow to 3.15 million people by 2050, a slight increase from the initial projections. Accounting for the increase are ethnic and diverse populations. As the region continues to grow, inclusive strategies for community engagement will be more critical now than ever.

As a result of decades-long patterns and practices of discrimination being reinforced by systemic racism, diverse populations have been left out of the public input process, resulting in plans and projects not representative or responsive to their community needs.

Recognizing the existing barriers, MORPC has been intentional about bringing diverse communities of all sizes and interests together to collaborate on the future of economic growth, development, transportation, energy, and environmental stability in Central Ohio.

By creating an inclusive public engagement strategy, MORPC is building strong relationships and helping capture different values and perspectives. Having diverse public opinions helps lead to better decision-making and policy discussions, which also increases the potential for the successful implementation of plans, projects, and programs because the entire community

## INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT REQUIRES INTENTIONAL PLANNING AND STRATEGIES



feels heard and valued in the process.

Effective community engagement requires intentional planning and consideration of the needs of various communities. One of the ways MORPC accomplishes this is through partnering with other organizations that can help amplify our various opportunities for public comment.

Over the past year, MORPC has strengthened its relationships with organizations that have been traditionally

underserved to provide updates on key programs and initiatives. These efforts have resulted in more diverse representation on the organization's work groups and committees.

MORPC has also made a concerted effort to create a more welcoming and inclusive work environment by partnering with HBCUconnect.com, a platform dedicated to providing networking, professional, and educational opportunities for alumni and students of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This

partnership has been beneficial in attracting diverse talent for the Local Government Summer Internship Program and key positions at MORPC.

Building upon the success MORPC has been able to achieve using this locally-based, national network, the agency was able to develop a new benefit for its members. MORPC now offers members an opportunity to advertise niche, executive-level, and hard-to-fill jobs on its HBCU portal at no additional cost to its members.

When it comes to public engagement, MORPC has been exploring more non-traditional outreach methods, including new technology, to create more immersive experiences for diverse audiences regarding key initiatives such as mobility, like the one featured at its annual State of the Region event. This year, MORPC partnered with Holovisn, a cutting-edge holographic company that specializes in visual storytelling, on its "Welcome to 2050" exhibit. The exhibition featured an exciting and innovative glimpse into what the future of transportation could look like when communities work together to accomplish a shared vision for mobility.

To get engaged, connect with MORPC on social media @MORPC. To learn more about MORPC's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity, visit [www.morpc.org/eliminate racism](http://www.morpc.org/eliminate racism).



## CLEAN WATER IN A REGION DRIVES ECONOMIC GROWTH

**M**any factors contribute to strong economic growth, with clean water topping the list. Recent developments and announcements in the Central Ohio region from businesses that utilize water as a core component of their operations indicate the validity of this statement. Historically, the region has been and continues to be a magnet for manufacturing, technology, business services, and logistics companies. In fact, Central Ohio has been tagged as one of the fastest growing metros in the country.

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) aims to better understand future growth and development and the impact this growth may have on a variety of issues, including water. The most recent projections estimate a region of nearly 3.15 million residents by 2050. As plans are made to address this growth, it is critical as a region, to think collectively about how to sustainably manage water resources so they can meet residents' needs while simultaneously protecting our rivers and streams' biological and chemical integrity. More specifically, economic growth and development promote urbanization, often driving up



As plans are made to address regional growth, it is critical to think collectively about how to sustainably manage our water resources.

impervious surfaces. If not managed sustainably, these surges will pose a significant threat to our water sources that provide high quality drinking water, recreational opportunities, and sustain the very economy that makes Central Ohio a competitive region.

But this is not an insurmountable problem. MORPC, along together with its local and state partners, the business community, RAPID 5, and others, are committed to safeguarding regional waters through several services and initiatives. Top on the list for water

resources planning is the discussion around a regional water management plan.

A regional water management plan is a comprehensive planning document that would encourage development of voluntary regional strategies for managing our water resources. This plan would allow for the development of a vision and direction for the sustainable management of local water resources. A successful planning process would include a group of stakeholders providing

recommendations to appropriate authorities, identifying critical water planning areas, and helping to facilitate a process for public input. At a deeper dive, a regional water management plan also would address supply-demand gaps based on forecasted needs, identify water needs and priorities by major water user groups, and evaluate water management and conservation strategies by counties and sectors. The plan would provide a framework for action that includes water management strategies focused on water quality, water quantity, and increase of awareness related to conservation, and changing weather adaptation.

As plans for the region continue to develop, it is critical to remember that water is a finite resource which calls for collective action toward its management and sustainable usage. As an agency, MORPC is committed to providing technical analysis and planning for water resources management related to stormwater management, water use and source water protection, watershed restoration, and protection of aquatic habitats and water resources. To learn more about MORPC's water initiatives, visit [www.morpc.org/sustainingscioto](http://www.morpc.org/sustainingscioto). ■

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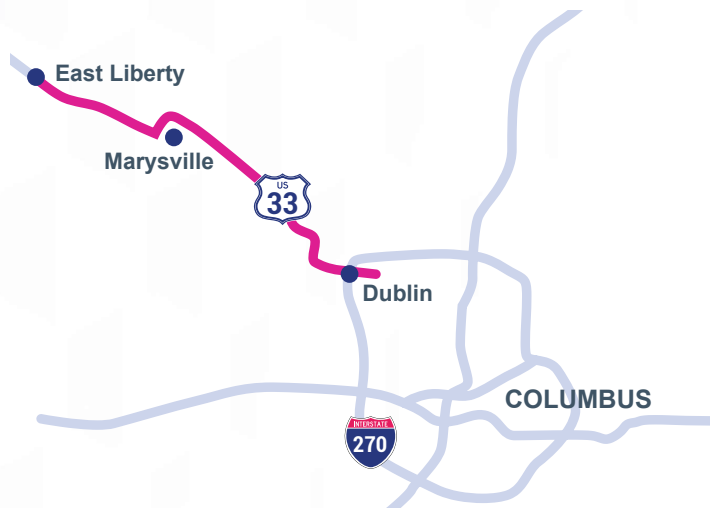
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