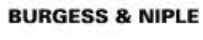


# CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Building the Future of Housing & Transportation

## 2024 STATE OF THE REGION





# A Bold Day In Westerville

On February 28, the City of Westerville and Harlem Township announced their intent to merge. Comprehensive, thoughtful planning is key to uniting these communities for continued growth in the Region.

Learn more at [www.westervilleharlem.org](http://www.westervilleharlem.org).

# CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

## Building the Future of Housing & Transportation

Central Ohio is a region rich in history, culture, and incredible potential, from the downtown streets of our state capital to the charm of surrounding suburbs, and the beauty of our rural communities. As a growing hub of innovation, education, and industry, the region captivates residents and visitors alike. It's no wonder that we are experiencing population and economic expansion, contributing to our status as one of the fastest-growing regions in the country.

At the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), we know it may feel as if your community is experiencing rapid change in isolation, but you are not alone. All our communities are engaged in conversations addressing pressing issues in housing and transportation or are embarking in visionary planning efforts. All of Central Ohio senses the change.

*Connecting Communities: Transforming Our Future through Housing and Transportation* envisions a holistic transformation of our communities to meet the needs of residents today. This includes providing diverse choices in housing and transportation, unique for each community from urban neighborhoods to burgeoning hometowns.

As we grow, it's important to continue to foster a sense of "connectedness" in our region - a place where all residents can thrive. Through our strategic framework, we aim to strengthen those bonds.

Our top goal, **to create an environment for prosperity**, drives us to help communities plan for the transportation and housing needs of the future by offering technical assistance, developing equitable solutions to address the housing crisis, and working to provide cleaner air and water. We **drive investment** with direct funding for infrastructure and strategies to access federal, state, and private dollars. We **build value for our members** by bringing communities together with objective data and mapping, best practices in planning, and collaborative policy work. And we **pay it forward** by connecting young talent to public service – enriching our communities.

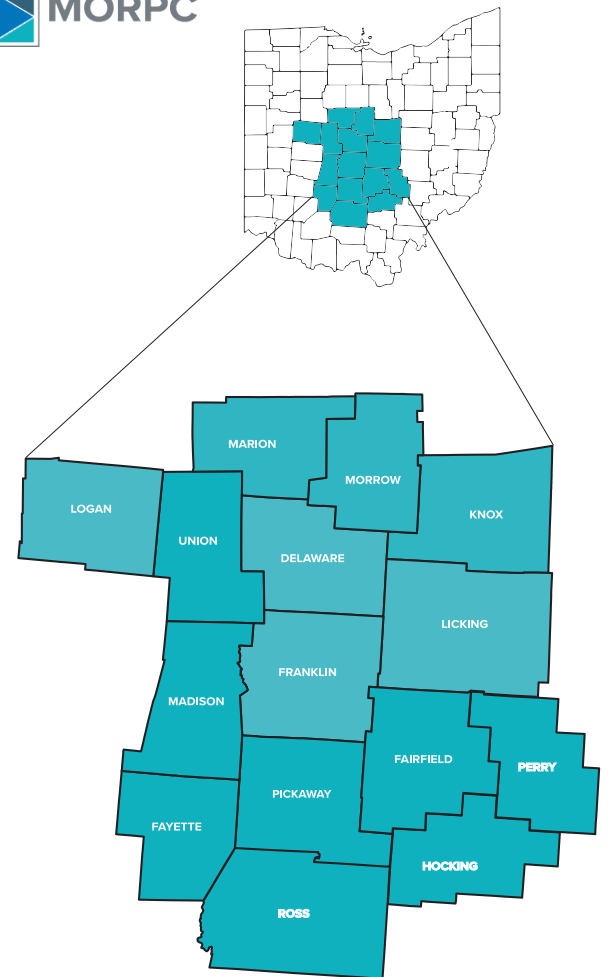
Through the lens of this framework, we can address a rising need for housing options in our communities. Neighborhoods that connect us to jobs, schools, services, and each other, while still protecting historic buildings, natural amenities, and rural landscapes: those things that define the essence of our region.

It is not enough to build more houses. Thriving will require a focus on strengthening existing places while creating new ones. Market studies also show the demand for walkable and connected neighborhoods remains high, balanced with reasonable commute times, so we must strive to ensure homes are near jobs and transit lines.

In the decade ahead, rapid, reliable transit and more transportation options will be critical and must take center stage. A robust regional transportation network, including transformative projects like the recently approved passenger rail projects and the LinkUS Mobility Initiative, lays the groundwork for enhanced job access, and a transportation system built for everyone.

Central Ohio's growth story underscores its resilience, adaptability, and forward-thinking approach to connecting our communities. As projections estimate our population to surpass three million people by 2050, our collective action is more vital than ever. Partnerships, the bedrock of our achievements, unite us in purpose with nearly 90 local governments and community partners.

It will take collaboration and partnership to address our housing and transportation challenges. The good news is this: Central Ohio's greatest asset is our ability to work together. When we do, our region can rise to meet these challenges, remain competitive, and ensure a high quality of life. ■



### Kind Regards,



**Chris Amorose Groomes**  
Board Chair, MORPC  
Mayor, City of Dublin



**William Murdock, AICP**  
Executive, MORPC



# CENTRAL OHIO LEADERS CELEBRATE TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS, REGIONAL SUCCESS AT 2024 STATE OF THE REGION

Nearly 1,000 top elected officials, business and civic leaders from across Central Ohio, one of the fastest-growing regions in the country, joined the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) for the 2024 State of the Region. This annual event celebrates the region's shared accomplishments and showcases strategies for planning for the future. This year's theme, *Connecting Communities: Building the Future of Housing and Transportation*, envisioned a holistic transformation of Central Ohio's communities to meet the needs of residents today and tomorrow. This included providing diverse choices in housing and transportation, unique for each community from urban neighborhoods to burgeoning hometowns.

MORPC welcomed keynote speaker Majora Carter, real estate developer, urban revitalization strategy consultant, MacArthur Fellow and Peabody Award-winning broadcaster. Carter is responsible for the creation of numerous economic development, technology inclusion and green-infrastructure projects, policies, and job training and placement systems. She is also a lecturer at Princeton University's Keller Center. In a day which highlighted the future growth of the region, Carter's remarks echoed MORPC's work toward fostering a sense of "connectedness" in Central Ohio – a place where all residents can thrive.

Additionally, MORPC unveiled the preliminary results of the *Leaders Listen Survey Series*, developed in partnership with The Columbus Dispatch and Measurement Resources Company, to obtain residents' opinions on experiences and services in the region. The Leaders Listen Series is a set of short surveys produced by MORPC that periodically invites residents within the Central Ohio region to share their input. The most current survey topic in this series is housing.

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 Village of Ashville Administrator Franklin Christman.

An alumnus of both The Ohio State University and Capital Universities, Christman boasts a career spanning two decades in public service as the Administrator for the Village of Ashville. He has served for a decade as a valued MORPC commission member, and his invaluable expertise and dedication have made him an integral figure in Central Ohio. Christman played a pivotal role in the establishment and advancement of the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO) and contributed significantly to MORPC's Executive Committee from 2019 to 2023. His leadership has been pivotal in shaping the strategic direction of the agency.

Throughout his tenure as Administrator, Christman demonstrated a commitment to the planning and progress of the community, with a focus on bridging the gap between rural and urban areas within the region. His efforts have been instrumental in fostering collaboration and engagement, with notable successes including encouraging Pickaway County communities to become an active member of MORPC, in addition to securing the membership of South Bloomfield and the City of Circleville.

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

addressing issues that transcend community boundaries and inspire visionary thinking. This year's recipient is President and CEO Lark Mallory, the Affordable Housing Trust for Columbus & Franklin County (AHT).

Under Mallory's leadership, AHT has made remarkable strides in addressing the critical need for affordable housing in our community. AHT provides financing to developers of affordable housing, and the loan portfolio includes construction loans, traditional single property loans and structure financing and bond transactions. This commitment has significantly impacted the region's housing landscape. As fund manager, Mallory's stewardship of the organization's \$100 million Housing Action Fund will facilitate the construction of affordable homes in seven Central Ohio counties, extending its reach beyond Franklin County. Moreover, under Mallory, the Regional Impact Fund will provide first-of-its-kind financing for new homes in Delaware, Licking, Fairfield, Pickaway, Madison, Union, and Knox counties.

Prior to assuming her current role, Mallory served on AHT's board of directors where she chaired the governance committee and was a member of the finance committee. Mallory currently serves on the board of the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium and River South, an organization that issues bonds to support the development efforts in the River South area of downtown Columbus.

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 FRAMEWORK – Communities of Licking County & Partners.

The groundbreaking initiative known as FRAMEWORK emerged from the collaborative efforts of Licking County leaders, spearheaded by Sarah Wallace of the Thomas J. Evans Foundation. The announcement of Intel's \$20 billion investment in early 2022 marked a pivotal moment in the region's economic trajectory. In response, FRAMEWORK was born. The Thomas J. Evans Foundation was appointed as a neutral convener for 15 jurisdictions. This visionary approach enabled them to facilitate dialogue and collaboration amidst unprecedented opportunities and complexities.

FRAMEWORK has effectively navigated conflicts, fostered trust, and instilled confidence in managing the future. By embracing diverse perspectives and promoting inclusive decision making, this initiative demonstrated exceptional leadership in addressing the region's evolving needs. Additionally, FRAMEWORK is a testament to each jurisdiction's commitment to preserve the distinct character of their communities while strategically addressing shared challenges, paving the way for sustainable growth and enhanced well-being. Through its collaborative approach, FRAMEWORK has set a precedent for effective partnership and tangible impact addressing sustainable growth.

To watch a recap of the 2024 State of the Region visit, [www.morpc.org/sotr](http://www.morpc.org/sotr). Also, be sure to **save the date for the 2025 State of the Region – March 21, 2025, at the Columbus Downtown Hilton.**

**2024 STATE OF THE REGION AWARD RECIPIENTS**

<p><b>WILLIAM H. ANDERSON AWARD</b></p> <p><b>FRANKLIN CHRISMAN</b> Village Administrator Village of Ashville</p>	<p><b>REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARD</b></p> <p><b>LARK T. MALORY</b> President &amp; CEO Affordable Housing Trust</p>
<p><b>WILLIAM C. HABIG COLLABORATIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD</b></p>	

# LINKUS: CONNECTING PEOPLE TO OPPORTUNITY THROUGH HISTORIC MOBILITY INVESTMENTS

**B**y 2050, the Central Ohio region is projected to welcome 726,000 new residents, resulting in a total population of 3.15 million.

Presently, approximately one-third of Franklin County residents reside in areas of low or very low opportunity. Housing costs have surged by 32 percent since March 2020, and in 2022 alone, housing costs increased by 16 percent, compounded by an annual transportation burden of over \$12,000 on the average household.

Central Ohio stands at a unique crossroads. The region has an opportunity to make historic investments in the transportation system today to meet the needs of a growing region tomorrow. From decades of studying growth and investment trends, it has become evident that maintaining the status quo has limitations. Investing in an array of mobility options such as rapid transit, sidewalks, and trails offers undeniable improvements in quality of life. These benefits encompass household cost savings, dependable travel times, and safer access to jobs, schools, recreation, and entertainment. Moreover, the region can reap advantages through increased tax revenue per acre, reduced long-term infrastructure expenses, and lower greenhouse gas emissions, leading to

improved air quality.

To realize these goals, MORPC is partnering with the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) and the City of Columbus on the LinkUS Mobility Initiative, a comprehensive and interconnected transportation solution for the region. Some key components of LinkUS include:

- 1. A new rapid transit system to provide quicker and more dependable service with dedicated lanes, traffic signal priority, and quicker boarding times.**
- 2. The development of a robust network of safe bike and pedestrian paths throughout Franklin County.**
- 3. Initiatives to create walkable communities with affordable access to work, home, and entertainment.**
- 4. Access to connections, including airports and proposed passenger rail stations within COTA's service areas, which include Columbus and surrounding areas.**

## Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

One of the most frequently asked questions about LinkUS is how it differs

from the existing transit system. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a proven solution for facilitating faster, safer, and more sustainable transportation. BRT is a premium system designed to accommodate more passengers through larger vehicles, advanced technology, and frequent service. Dedicated lanes for rapid transit enhance reliability and convenience, setting it apart from traditional bus systems.

Building upon prior regional studies such as insight2050 Corridor Concepts and COTA's NextGen, BRT service is currently designed for three Central Ohio areas: West Broad Street, East Main Street, and the Northwest Corridor, comprising Olentangy River Road, Bethel Road, Sawmill Road, and SR-161, with future corridors being planned in the region. With regional collaboration and leveraging of federal and local funding, Central Ohio's BRT service could be operating as early as 2028.

## Transit Supportive Infrastructure

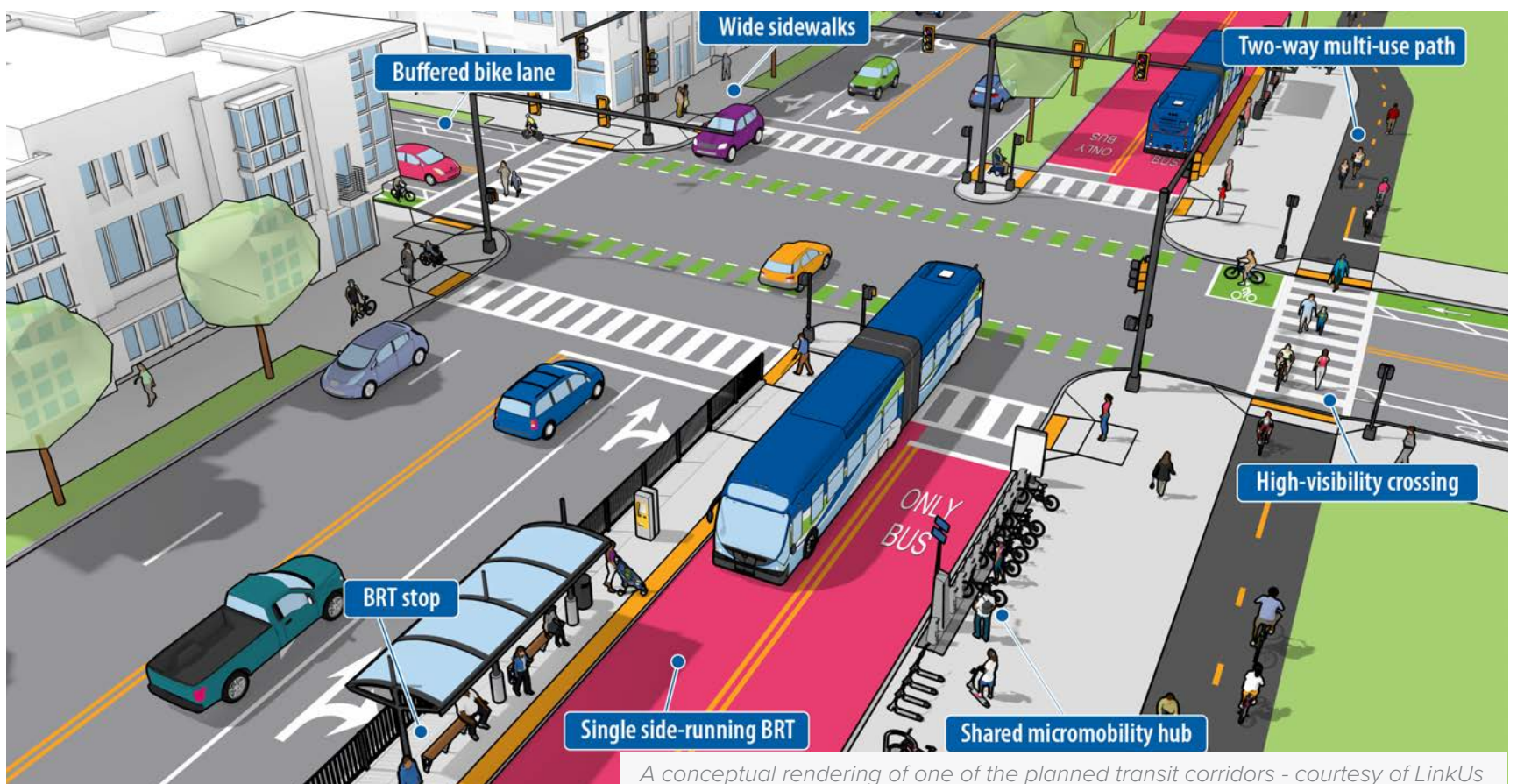
LinkUS is more than just creating a new transit system. It aims to enhance the overall quality of life for Central Ohio residents. Through the Transit Supportive Infrastructure (TSI) program, LinkUS establishes a dedicated funding source to improve existing and create new sidewalks,

trails, and bikeways for all communities within COTA's service area. Regionally transformational projects like the Heritage Trail and a Scioto Trail extension have already been identified as priorities, along with local sidewalk connections, safe crossings, and multi-use paths. An estimated \$60 million per year in local support is expected to be allocated for the construction of over 500 miles of pedestrian- and bike-focused projects.

## Equitable Transit-Oriented Development

In redesigning Central Ohio's transportation system to serve all residents, it is equally vital to ensure the sustained vitality of the communities it serves. This involves preserving existing housing, jobs, businesses, and other valued community assets. Through the development of an Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Action Plan, LinkUS partners are collaborating with communities to identify strategies for community preservation while creating new, diverse, and affordable housing options. These efforts aim to attract new job opportunities and enhance amenities.

To learn more about LinkUS, visit [www.linkuscolumbus.com](http://www.linkuscolumbus.com).



A conceptual rendering of one of the planned transit corridors - courtesy of LinkUS

# NAVIGATING THE REGION'S HOUSING CHALLENGES THROUGH COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

Central Ohio is experiencing significant growth, with forecasts projecting a region of 3.15 million people by 2050. This surge equates to an increase of almost three-quarters of a million people, or over a quarter of a million new households in the next 30 years, driven by substantial private investments in the Central Ohio economy and workforce. Communities, fully aware of the implications of such a large influx of people, are confronted with a significant dilemma: maintain the status quo or embrace a change in thinking to proactively address the challenges that come with growth. At the heart of this dilemma lies the issue of housing.

The scale of the anticipated growth can feel overwhelming, but with proactive planning, it is possible to leverage the growth to transform the region. Over the past decade, new housing construction in Central Ohio has lagged behind the pace required to

keep up with the demand created by new jobs and economic growth in the region. With housing supply dwindling, competition for available housing units has become increasingly fierce. This competition has led to a rise in housing costs for both potential homeowners and renters, subsequently reducing disposable income for households, impacting areas like childcare, groceries, medical bills, and entertainment. The tight housing market has also resulted in the displacement of existing residents in many communities who are unable to accommodate increased property taxes and rents.

Fortunately, many local governments in Central Ohio are keen to find ways to accommodate the anticipated growth and mitigate any negative impacts on their communities. They are updating their comprehensive plans or zoning codes, with due consideration for social equity, sustainability, or economic vitality. However,

these communities face the challenge of balancing these proactive efforts with the ongoing need to maintain current service levels through zoning and permit reviews, leaving few staffing and financial resources available to be proactive. To address this challenge, MORPC (Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission) has focused concentrated efforts on finding solutions.

In the summer of 2023, MORPC launched a new community assistance service to aid communities in their long-range planning efforts. The Community-Based Planning Assistance program includes a Consultant Services Program and Planner Pool Program, offering relief by connecting MORPC members to consultants who can support their comprehensive planning or zoning code updates. Additionally, MORPC staff is made available for temporary staffing support or small-scale projects, such as parking studies. These services enable a community's staff to have more time to plan

for the future. Nationally, MORPC is also working to harness the collective efforts of other regional agencies around the country. In 2024, MORPC will be active in the creation of a working group dedicated to the issue of housing, working with staff members from the National Association of Regional Councils, the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission in Boston, and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments in Washington D.C. The aim of this working group is to advance the national discussion on the housing crisis to both learn and share potential ways in which metropolitan regions can address the housing issues that are impacting so many of our region's residents.

To learn more about the Community-Based Planning Assistance program, visit [www.morpc.org/communitybased-planning-assistance/](http://www.morpc.org/communitybased-planning-assistance/)

## PROSPERITY FORECAST FOR 2050



**300,000  
MORE JOBS**



**300,000  
HOUSING UNITS**



**3.15 Million  
PEOPLE BY 2050**





**BETA**  
DISTRICT

Where the future is tested in the Columbus Region

# Join the Innovation Revolution

Collaboration and ideation are in our DNA in The Beta District. Our public officials unite with pioneers like Honda, Cardinal Health, ScottsMiracle-Gro and more every day to test, refine and innovate.

Working on a connected vehicle? Fine tuning your revolutionary telehealth solution? We want to work with you in The Beta District, where the future is being tested today.



Take off with us!



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**60+**  
Colleges &  
Universities Within  
a 20-Mile Radius

**37,000+**  
Technology and Science  
Workers Employed

**\$150M**  
Funds Allocated to  
Infrastructure  
Technology

**1600+**  
Companies Located  
in The Beta District

## FOSTERING INCLUSIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT: TRANSFORMING THE PLANNING PROCESS

**A**s the nation progresses toward a post-pandemic existence, this moment requires pause and introspection. To ensure that Central Ohio moves forward deliberately, it is important to not only reflect on valuable insights gained over the past four years but to recognize that further adjustments are not only inevitable but vital to the future of the region. Every resident of Central Ohio must enjoy equitable access to essential aspects of life, including housing, transportation, healthcare, education, and economic prosperity. One important way that this is achieved is through the deliberate inclusion of diverse voices in the planning process.

MORPC is committed to actively obtaining public input, engaging with communities, and including them throughout the decision-making process through inclusive engagement strategies. While often, the scope of the public's influence seems limited, there are instances where public opinion has shaped outcomes. The valuable input received by MORPC has played a pivotal role in shaping a successful public participation program.

Public engagement provides an internal, transparent pathway for historically

marginalized, underserved, and overburdened communities that have often been left out of the planning process. MORPC's Public Participation Plan addresses this by outlining specific steps to ensure everyone in Central Ohio has the opportunity to provide feedback on transportation planning efforts within the metropolitan planning organization area. It also encompasses sections dedicated to environmental justice, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and procedures for addressing nondiscrimination complaints related to MORPC's programs and activities.

Building on past efforts, in 2021, the current White House administration launched a comprehensive initiative to foster public involvement, particularly concerning environmental justice issues, which seeks to address the disproportionate health and environmental impacts experienced by Black and brown communities. Early in his presidency, President Biden signed Executive Order 14008, marking the launch of the most ambitious environmental justice agenda ever pursued by the Federal Government. Environmental justice, as defined, signifies fair treatment and meaningful participation of all

individuals, irrespective of their race, color, national origin, or income, in formulating, implementing, and enforcing environmental laws, regulations, and policies. For the first time in the nation's history, the Federal Government has set a goal for 40 percent of the overall benefits from specific federal investments to flow to marginalized, underserved, and pollution-burdened communities. This initiative is known as the Justice40 Initiative.

Earlier this year, MORPC, in partnership with COTA and the Columbus Partnership and in collaboration with Cityfi, hosted a training session on Justice40. Attended by more than 40 local leaders, decision-makers, and agency representatives from across the region, the primary objective of the training was increased awareness and interest regarding the potential benefits of Justice40. The training aimed to share a framework and methodologies for inclusively engaging disadvantaged communities in grant applications and provide attendees with a toolkit to use as a resource when applying for federal funding and community planning efforts. MORPC also moderated and, together with its consultant Cityfi, participated in a Justice40 webinar hosted

by the National Association of Regional Councils and National Association of Development Organizations. The event attracted more than 200 attendees from across the nation and featured representatives from the US Department of Transportation, Environmental Protection Agency, and Economic Development Administration.

Through creating an inclusive public engagement strategy, MORPC is fostering robust relationships and capturing many values and perspectives. This diversity in public opinion enriches decision-making and policy discussions, ultimately increasing the likelihood of successful implementation of plans, projects, and programs. This approach ensures that the entire community feels heard and valued.

To engage with MORPC, **connect on social media at @MORPC**. For more information about MORPC's Public Participation Plan, visit [www.morpc.org/PublicParticipation/](http://www.morpc.org/PublicParticipation/). To learn more about MORPC's commitment to environmental justice and Justice40, visit [www.morpc.org/environmentaljustice](http://www.morpc.org/environmentaljustice). ■





# DRIVING CHANGE: CENTRAL OHIO'S TRAVEL GUIDE TO 2050

Following every major development or transportation announcement in the region, the typical questions that arise are: “are we ready?” or “what are we doing to prepare?”

By conducting the metropolitan transportation planning process, MORPC can offer assurance to those asking these types of questions. While recent growth positions Central Ohio amongst the fastest-growing large metros in the country, the 0.89 percent annual growth rate is more manageable than that of other metros like Austin or Boise, which have been growing at twice the rate of Central Ohio.

Central Ohio's robust growth can be attributed, in part, to continued, strong economic development. Regardless of where new development emerges, the resulting growth in jobs and population brings increased demands on the transportation system. Through the agency's comprehensive, continuous forecasting process, it is possible to anticipate development-induced growth and plans for it. Over the past few decades, MORPC has done just that; rather than reacting to the incredible growth experienced in recent years, and continued expansion that is expected over the next decade, MORPC has been planning for growth.

This planning is accomplished through the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), Central Ohio's guiding document that identifies priority investments aimed at the efficient movement of a growing number of people and goods while advancing regional goals of health and safety, sustainable neighborhoods, economic prosperity, energy resilience, protecting natural resources, and innovation.

MORPC is leading the region in identifying and implementing regional transportation strategies and projects. These efforts, essential to the development of the 2024-2050 MTP, are pivotal in guiding the region toward the plan's objectives. The plan lays the foundation for billions of dollars in federal, state, and local investments in Central Ohio and enables Central Ohio to secure competitive grant funding made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021. These funds will be dedicated to improving, maintaining,

and operating 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 profoundly enhance the quality of life for all residents.

While numerous agencies and local governments conduct studies on and implement improvements to the transportation system in Central Ohio, MORPC, as the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Columbus Urbanized Area, is the steward of federal transportation funds. This responsibility necessitates facilitation of regional collaboration to ensure federal transportation funds are utilized for local priorities that advance regional goals.

As part of its ongoing transportation planning process, MORPC fosters collaboration with the Ohio Department of Transportation, area transit agencies, and the Licking County Area Transportation Study (LCATS). Independently and cooperatively, these entities collect data and conduct technical analyses to identify regional transportation needs. MORPC then prioritizes and coordinates strategies and projects to meet these needs through the MTP development process until 2050.

Following extensive public engagement and rigorous project evaluation, MORPC has shared a draft list of priority strategies and projects to be included in the 2024-2050 MTP.

MORPC encourages public participation through various engagement opportunities and channels, including public comment periods, interactive web maps, a public open house on March 19, and specially scheduled meetings and presentations.

While MORPC leads a continuous planning process, the MTP undergoes official updates every four years. This is a wonderful opportunity for the Central Ohio community to become engaged in this important plan by following its progress and providing input. To learn more about the regional goals, objectives, strategies, and projects, and how to get involved in the development of the 2024-2050 MTP, visit [www.morpc.org/mtp2050](http://www.morpc.org/mtp2050).

## Draft Metropolitan Transportation Plan

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\$35 Billion

in priority transportation  
infrastructure investments

5

high-capacity transit corridors

365

miles of stand-alone bicycle  
and pedestrian facilities

100

miles of freeway  
lane management

120

targeted intersection  
improvements



# DRIVING PROGRESS: MORPC'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP & INVESTMENT INITIATIVES PROPEL CENTRAL OHIO FORWARD

As Central Ohio continues to grow, the Government Affairs and Community Relations team at MORPC is forging relationships, expanding its reach, securing landmark investments, and championing the interests of the vibrant Central Ohio community. Leveraging strategic alliances across Central Ohio, at the Statehouse, and on Capitol Hill, 2023 marked a year of achievements for both MORPC and the region. Fueled by this success, the Government Affairs and Community Relations team is eager to build on this progress in 2024, steadfast in its commitment to support MORPC's members navigate the challenges that lie ahead.

Recent years have seen historic investments from the federal level, as well as significant funding opportunities emerging from the Statehouse. Anchored by MORPC's Drive Investment strategy and its Public Policy Agenda, the agency has been in support of several key initiatives in recent state budgets. In the state transportation budget, MORPC, alongside its partners, has led the advocacy for funding increases for Regional Transportation Planning Organizations, such as the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization. Additionally, the team has championed substantial investments for the critical enhancement of railroad crossing elimination and rail safety infrastructure.

The current operating budget – passed in 2023 – also contains a \$700 million One-Time Strategic Community Investment Fund; \$750 million All Ohio Future Fund for economic development infrastructure projects; and \$500

million Connect4Ohio program to improve workforce mobility. In tandem with other local government advocates, MORPC successfully backed an increase in the competitive bidding threshold, elevating it from \$50,000 to \$75,000, with provisions for automatic annual adjustments. These successes open a gateway of possibilities for Central Ohio, particularly in areas experiencing rapid population and economic growth.

As MORPC assists its members in harnessing these resources, the agency's dialogue with the Ohio General Assembly persists, with a keen focus on housing and land use issues. The goal remains steadfast: to secure dedicated state funding for local governments and regional councils to expedite the modernization of zoning codes and to pave the way for a future of sustainable growth and community development.

At the federal level, beyond advocating for funding from landmark legislations like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and CHIPS Act, MORPC led the Columbus Region Coalition in successfully lobbying to secure over \$35 million through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023. These dollars will directly fund transformative projects across Central Ohio, like the Rickenbacker Area Mobility Center, The Ohio State University's EV Battery Innovation Lab, and critical transportation improvements near the Intel site.

MORPC's Drive Investment strategy extends beyond

securing discretionary grants. In an effort to deepen connections within Central Ohio's defense community, the team has been cultivating partnerships between members and the region's defense installations. A highlight of this initiative was last summer's inaugural Central Ohio Defense Community Partnership Conference, hosted at Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base, which brought together 121st Air Refueling Wing personnel and MORPC member communities, creating a platform for collaboration and cost-saving partnerships in areas like procurement, training, and energy. Furthermore, MORPC's involvement as an active member of the Association of Defense Communities, a national organization dedicated to fostering relationships between defense installations and the communities in which they operate, further cements the agency's role in this sector.

In 2024, the Government Affairs and Community Relations team could not be more excited to serve its member communities. With a commitment to assisting communities in building upon the abundant opportunities for collaboration and funding at the state and federal levels, MORPC will continue working toward ensuring that every member community has the tools and ability to fully leverage these prospects to achieve their goals and enhance their growth.

To learn about MORPC's Government Affairs initiatives, visit [www.morpc.org/GovAffairs](http://www.morpc.org/GovAffairs). To explore the Drive Investment strategy, visit

[www.morpc.org/drive-investment](http://www.morpc.org/drive-investment). ■

## 2023 Operating Budget

\$ 750  
Million

All Ohio  
Future Fund

\$ 500  
Million

Connect4Ohio

\$ 700  
Million

One-Time  
Strategic Community  
Investment Fund



# PASSENGER RAIL: ONE STEP CLOSER TO RETURNING TO CENTRAL OHIO REGION

It has been more than 40 years since the last passenger train left Columbus, but after a recent federal award, Central Ohio is back on track to restoring service.

MORPC supported two applications to the Federal Railroad Administration’s (FRA) new program to coordinate systematic passenger rail planning across the country, the Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program. In December 2023, the FRA announced that both the Cincinnati-Dayton-Columbus-Cleveland (3C&D) route and the Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus-Pittsburgh route (formerly “Midwest Connect”) were accepted into the program.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law established the Corridor ID Program to give interested sponsors the opportunity to work directly with the FRA to develop

detailed plans and lead to actionable projects. The process will identify specific needs along the corridors and propose strategies and solutions to enable the arrival of passenger rail services in the region. The program allows partners to understand how freight and passenger rail can work together in Ohio. Service development planning will show what improvements need to be made along each corridor in such a way that upgrades will ensure the safety and productivity of all users on the rail network, such as better signaling, grade crossings, trackage, bridges, and more.

Corridors completing the program will be preferred for additional funding for construction and operation in the future. MORPC will be working in partnership with the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC), the City of Fort Wayne, and other

supporters to determine such details as alignments, station locations, speed, frequency, rail upgrades, and costs needed to connect Central Ohio to other major metropolitan regions.

The project will advance in three steps:

1. **Scoping and estimating the cost to complete the program.**
2. **To examine what it would take to bring passenger rail to Central Ohio; what it will take to get it up and running and how many people would use it.**
3. **Involves engineering and environmental work and requires a 20 percent non-federal match.**

Following this program would be the actual construction and building out of the

rails, stations, and trains. If all goes well, the process is expected to be completed, with passenger trains ready to roll, by the end of the decade.

This represents a multi-million-dollar federal investment in Ohio, expanding mobility options in communities across the state, urban, suburban, and rural areas. As part of the initial application process, MORPC received more than 100 letters of support and many more positive comments from political leaders, regional organizations, community champions, and the business community across five states. Both the FRA and Amtrak recognized the groundswell of support, and the enthusiasm was a key factor in the awards.

For more information, visit [www.morpc.org/corridor-identification-and-development-program](http://www.morpc.org/corridor-identification-and-development-program).



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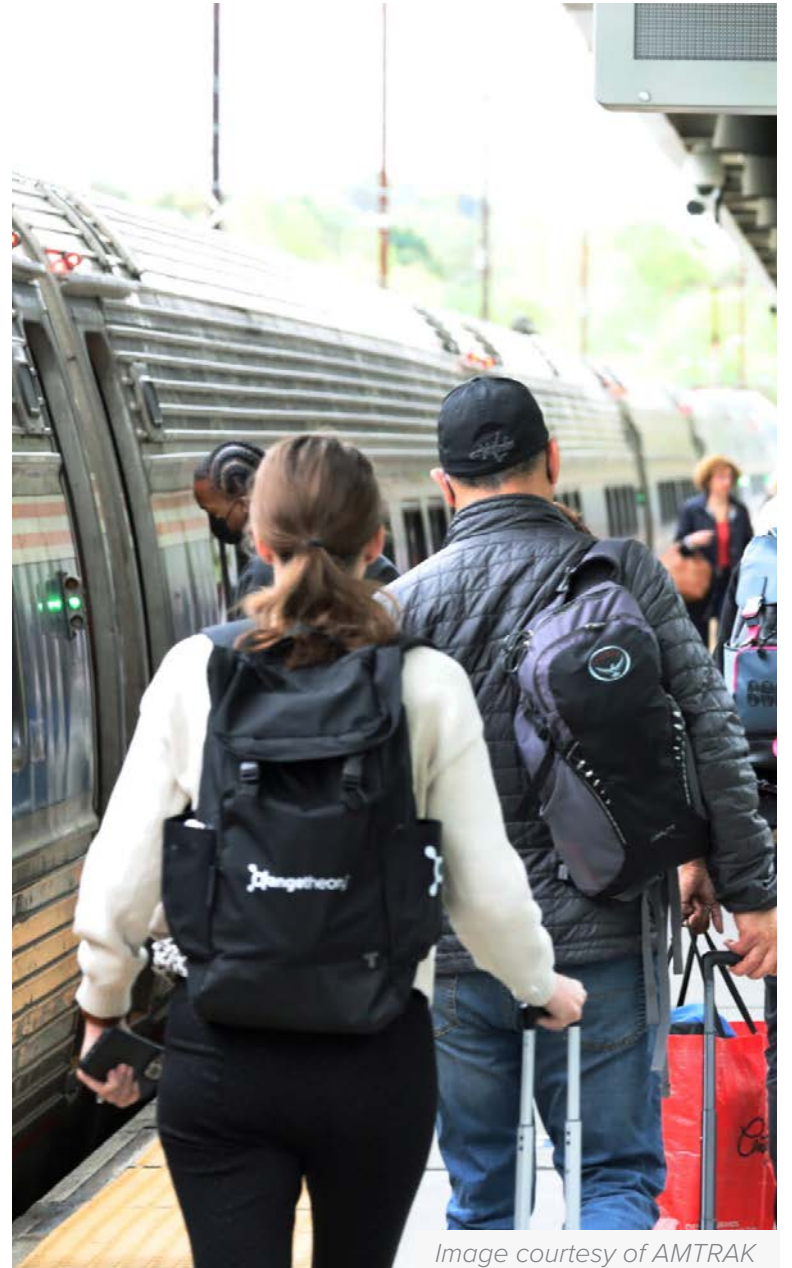



Image courtesy of AMTRAK

# THE EVOLUTION OF CENTRAL OHIO'S GREENWAYS AND THE FUTURE OF OUTDOOR CONNECTIONS

For more than 50 years, trails and greenways have provided scenic opportunities to walk, bike, and roll while experiencing the beauty of Central Ohio's waterways. The Olentangy Trail, established in the 1960s, marked the beginning of this legacy, and since then, the region has expanded its network with hundreds of miles of trails. Throughout Central Ohio's history, people have yearned to connect with nature, but recent data suggests that this desire has grown even stronger.

According to the Outdoor Industry Association's 2023 Outdoor Participation Trends Report, outdoor recreation participation has grown steadily since 2014, with a significant surge in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in 2022, an impressive 55 percent of the U.S. population engaged in outdoor recreation. To meet the increasing demand for a deeper connection with nature, identifying and developing more opportunities for people to incorporate this connection into their daily routines is imperative.

Since 2018, the Central Ohio Greenways Regional Trail Vision has served as an aspirational guide, encouraging communities

to work towards adding over 500 additional miles of regional trails. These trails serve as the backbone of an active transportation and recreation network, linking neighborhoods, job centers, and cultural destinations. In the most recent funding cycle, MORPC's attributable funding program allocated \$60 million to support these trails and standalone bike and pedestrian infrastructure projects, a significant increase from previous cycles, which typically allocated around \$4 million.

Beyond funding infrastructure, MORPC's Central Ohio Greenways (COG) Board is dedicated to making Central Ohio trails safer, more convenient, and enjoyable for everyone. In 2022, MORPC introduced a Trail Town Framework designed to encourage communities to welcome trail enthusiasts into their town centers, businesses, and neighborhoods. This not only promotes economic development and tourism but also enhances the local quality of life. This framework is a pioneering model that embraces rural, suburban, and urban communities, unifying them into a single program that celebrates the diversity of Central Ohio.

MORPC is currently assembling a working group comprised of advocates, tourism

experts, planners, marketers, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and economic experts to implement the COG Trail Town Framework. With funding from the Ohio Department of Transportation, MORPC is developing a comprehensive Wayfinding Strategy that will ensure consistent signage and mapping across the trail network. This strategy will also incorporate recommendations for integrating placemaking, public art, and cultural elements into infrastructure that prioritizes people and their connection to nature.

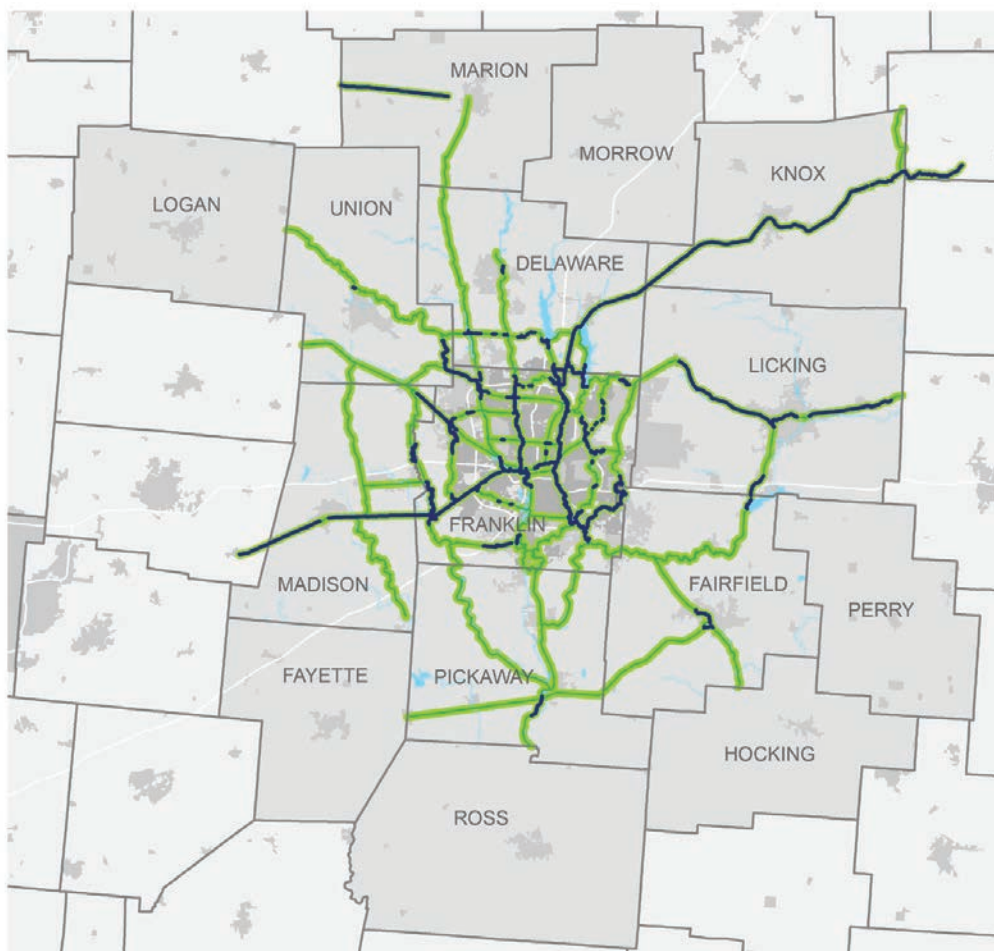
Crucial to offering these connections to nature is the preservation and conservation of the environment. MORPC, with support from The Columbus Foundation and in partnership with the Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District, is creating a central database that consolidates environmental watershed data. This data will be used in conjunction with demographic information, social justice indicators, and existing planning efforts to facilitate holistic decision-making for development. This approach aims to ensure equitable access to outdoor recreation while prioritizing the protection of environmentally sensitive regions.

In complement to Greenways initiatives, the MORPC Blueways Advisory Panel strives to balance ensuring equitable access to water-based recreation activities such as kayaking, paddleboarding, and fishing, and safeguarding waterways by protecting natural habitats, including vulnerable wildlife and celebrating biodiverse hotspots.

MORPC is currently seeking the Ohio Department of Natural Resources State Water Trail Designation for select navigable waterways, which will create more funding opportunities and promote water recreation in the region. This designation, alongside existing Scenic River designations, promotes a harmonious approach to conserving and connecting with nature throughout Central Ohio.

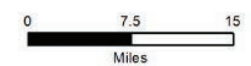
Beyond these efforts, MORPC remains committed to its partnership with RAPID 5 to conserve land and weave parks, trails, and open spaces together, ensuring everyone in the Central Ohio region can access nature near their homes.

To learn more about Central Ohio Greenways, visit [www.morpc.org/COG](http://www.morpc.org/COG).



- Regional Trail of Significance**
- Existing Multi-use Path
  - Proposed Multi-use Path
  - Greenway Trail Corridor
  - River/Water

Central Ohio Greenway Trails



The information shown on this map is compiled from various sources made available to us which we believe to be reliable. N:\ArcGIS\CORE\COG\COTrailVision15.mxd 2/15/2024

# PICKERINGTON: LOWEST CITY INCOME TAXES IN CENTRAL OHIO



- Pickerington's workforce and picturesque suburban community is booming with excellence and prosperity.



- In Pickerington business owners and employees keep more of their income.



- **Join our growing Medical Corridor.**



City of  
**PICKERINGTON**  
WHERE CONNECTIONS ARE MADE

[CI.PICKERINGTON.OH.US](http://CI.PICKERINGTON.OH.US)



BUSINESSES  
*Thrive* IN PICKERINGTON



## COLLABORATION IS WHAT COLUMBUS DOES BEST.

Creating affordable housing in our communities takes hard work and the fostering of vital partnerships. Together, we strengthen the Metropolitan Columbus area and turn houses into homes.

It's a job we can all get excited about.

# MORPC ACHIEVES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT DESIGNATION FOR CENTRAL OHIO

In September of 2023, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration approved MORPC's application for an 11-county area in the Central Ohio region to be designated as an Economic Development District (EDD). The 11-county region encompassing Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Knox, Licking, Logan, Madison, Marion, Morrow, Pickaway, and Union counties, is the largest metropolitan area in Ohio to achieve this designation.

## Uniting for Economic Growth

MORPC, in collaboration with One Columbus and the Mid-Ohio Development Exchange (MODE), sought to obtain the EDD designation by crafting the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), a regional guide for economic growth. The creation of the CEDS was a joint endeavor that united economic developers, representatives from higher education institutions, workforce representatives, and industry partners to ensure a consensus-driven blueprint for the district.

The CEDS outlines three primary objectives:

1. **Capitalizing on current economic achievements to prepare communities for future expansion**
2. **Implementing a multifaceted approach to boost labor force participation**
3. **Advancing infrastructure development with improved alignment.**

According to the EDA, Economic Development Districts play a critical role in leading the locally driven, regionally focused economic development planning process, facilitating the engagement of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to establish a strategic roadmap for collaborative regional development. EDDs provide local communities with access to funding opportunities in the form of grants and loans, as well as administrative and technical support, and access to valuable data and technology resources.

On December 19, 2023, MORPC hosted Ellen Heinz, the Ohio Program Representative from the EDA, for a



series of meetings with stakeholders and partners within the 11-county region. The focus of these meetings was on partner projects, both those currently underway and future initiatives. The EDA presented its priorities, available funding opportunities, and the essential components of a successful grant application for an EDA Notice of Funding Opportunity.

## What's Ahead?

Having obtained the designation for the district, the next phase involves the formation of an Economic Development District Governing Board. This board will be comprised of representatives who champion the primary economic interests within the region. Their main objectives will revolve around driving the execution of the CEDS by fostering regional alignment, engaging in both short and long-term planning, and actively pursuing grant funding opportunities.

## MORPC Economic Development Resources

The Competitive Advantage Projects (CAP) program, a collaboration between MORPC and One Columbus, aims to drive transformative economic development by focusing on strategic innovation, infrastructure improvement, housing initiatives, and workforce-related investments throughout Central Ohio. MORPC partners with working groups within each county to establish and update

a list of CAP projects – these represent the top priorities for each community and are reviewed every two years.

Recently, MORPC launched its Drive Investment Portal, a powerful tool designed to assist its members in navigating and tapping into various available funding options. This resource provides comprehensive information on active and upcoming grant and loan programs offered by federal, state, and local organizations, tailored to accommodate a wide range of project types and funding needs.

When local communities apply for EDA's loan or grant opportunities, MORPC will provide them with a letter of alignment. This letter serves as a key component of the EDA grant application, demonstrating

the project's alignment with the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and MORPC's endorsement and support for the endeavor.

In planning forward, MORPC eagerly anticipates collaborating with its partners as they pursue essential economic development initiatives, including those related to housing, infrastructure development, and workforce enhancement, among others, all aimed at preparing the region for future prosperity. For more information about how MORPC is driving investment and development in the Central Ohio region, visit [www.morpc.org/economicdevelopment](http://www.morpc.org/economicdevelopment).

## Economic Development Districts in Action:

- ✓ Advance regional economic development to improve quality of life for residents and strengthen the business community.
- ✓ Align public, government and private investments to advance the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and achieve better outcomes.
- ✓ Identify new funding resources and tools to close gaps and fund promising growth opportunities.
- ✓ Promote regional competitiveness and innovation.
- ✓ Provide recommendations and strategies for recovery and resilience planning.
- ✓ Offer technical assistance, research, and data analyses.

# STRATEGIC WATER AND WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT IN CENTRAL OHIO: A COLLABORATIVE AND PROACTIVE APPROACH

The past year has been an exciting one for Central Ohio, particularly when it comes to managing and developing regional water resources. During this time, significant strides have been made in economic development, statewide implementation of the H2Ohio initiative, and projections of population growth, sparking in-depth discussions and forward-thinking strategies for water resource management.

Central Ohio is fortunate to have clean and abundant water resources to support the growing region. However, carefully utilizing these resources is essential to ensure their longevity for future generations. Recognizing the critical need for strategic planning in response to the region's rapid expansion, the Governor's Office has initiated a comprehensive regional water study.

The Ohio EPA, in collaboration with other state bodies and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), will embark on this study, encompassing 15 counties in Central Ohio. The study aims to assess current and future water supply and demand, identifying gaps and prioritizing areas for investment in water and sewer infrastructure. Additionally, it will explore innovative approaches to water capture, conservation, and re-use while preserving the ecological integrity of our natural resources.

The study is slated for completion within the year, featuring monthly webinars to inform key stakeholders and gather their input. MORPC is also actively involved in developing Water Quality Management Plans, known as 208 Plans, on behalf of the Ohio EPA. These plans outline effective and comprehensive strategies for managing water pollution from various sources within a specific geographic area. They address wastewater collection and treatment and identify the responsible management agencies.

Undertaking this planning at a regional level through a collaborative approach is crucial. The 208 Plans also project future growth patterns and developmental trends, analyzing their



*Big Walnut Creek - courtesy of Central Ohio Greenways*

impact on water quality and wastewater treatment requirements. Through this process, MORPC engages with regional stakeholders to determine the agencies responsible for wastewater collection and treatment and to monitor any developmental changes within their planning areas.

This planning process enables local jurisdictions and municipalities to actively shape their growth strategies, aligning

them with local values and environmental conditions. Notably, under the federal Clean Water Act and the Ohio Revised Code, the Ohio EPA prohibits issuing certain permits and funds for wastewater projects that conflict with a Water Quality Management Plan (208 Plan).

As a resource, MORPC is also creating an online, interactive map for Central Ohio. This map will delineate current and future wastewater service areas and treatment options based on developed plans. The

map is accessible through the Ohio EPA 201/208 facility planning map.

The proactive and intentional water and wastewater planning efforts in Central Ohio, led by state agencies and supported by MORPC, underscore the region's commitment to a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable future.

To learn more about MORPC's water planning efforts, visit

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



# LEADERS LISTEN: PUBLIC SHARES HOPES FOR REGION'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AND ENVIRONMENT

Residents from across Central Ohio voiced concerns about daily life and environmental sustainability, from issues such as getting around the region, air and water quality to the changing climate. Yet, there is strong support for forward-thinking solutions like investments in new and expanded transportation options and efforts to protect greenspaces and improve environmental conditions.

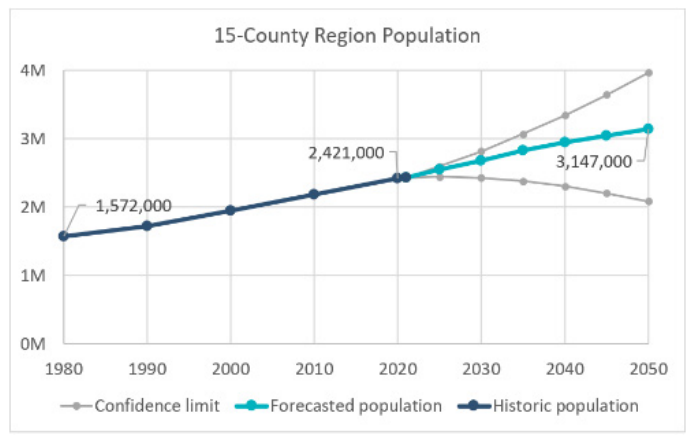
The Leaders Listen series is a set of Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) surveys and reports, created in partnership with The Columbus Dispatch, CHRR at OSU, and Measurement Resources

Company. The surveys create a vital bridge between area residents and those steering the region's future and facilitate community-driven planning and policymaking. The first two surveys in the series, focusing on transportation and the environment, each drew responses from over 2,000 residents across MORPC's 15-county area.

Looking toward the future of the region, there will be many opportunities to reshape it and its communities to reflect the wants and needs of its residents. Our population is expected to grow to more than 3 million people by 2050, adding about 350,000 workers.



## LEADERSLISTEN



Category	2020 Value	2050 Forecast	Change
POPULATION	2,421,000	3,147,000	+726,000 (30%)
HOUSEHOLDS	928,000	1,200,000	+272,000 (29%)
LABOR FORCE	1,263,000	1,613,000	+350,000 (28%)

Source: MORPC 2050 Population Forecast 2023

The Central Ohio region is expected to grow by an additional 726,000 people, 272,000 households and 357,000 workers.

> SURVEY - CONTINUED PAGE 17



### GROW IN OPPORTUNITY

### Join companies that are Growing in Gahanna!

- ADB Safegate • Benchmark Industrial
- Crocodile Cloth
- Central Ohio Urology Group
- Donatos • Edison Brewery
- The Grote Company • High Bank Distillery
- KEMBA Financial Credit Union
- Leaderpromos • Noble Cut Distillery
- Orthopedic ONE • Romanoff Group
- Simple Times Mixers



### ADB Safegate Center of Innovation

**Grow in Opportunity:** Only minutes from John Glenn International Airport and downtown Columbus, the City of Gahanna is a place people love to call home. With innovative industries, access to talent, and compelling spaces, Gahanna offers everything you need to **grow your business.**

To learn about opportunities in Gahanna, contact the Gahanna Economic Development Department at (614) 342-4020 or email [development@gahanna.gov](mailto:development@gahanna.gov).





### Transportation Experiences & Preferences

To better meet the transportation needs of residents, leaders should focus on embracing new types of transportation, expanded pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and convenient transit. To address common environmental concerns of residents, decision-makers should consider implementing a range of strategies and policies to conserve and sustain our natural amenities for future generations. It is imperative to ensure that growth and development are strategically managed in a way that allows for the preservation and improvement of our current standard of living.

Each of the following highlights from the survey results is more than just a statistic; they are windows into the daily realities of residents.

When it comes to transportation and mobility, new and expanded transportation options, short commute times, and safety are top of mind for area residents. Notably, survey respondents who identified as Black were the most likely to be highly satisfied with their transportation needs being met, while those who identified as White were most likely to report being "not at all" or only "slightly" satisfied.

The transportation survey points to area residents' desire for improved options as we grow. Central Ohioans want to maintain modest travel times through regional investments in passenger rail, bus service, bike routes, and sidewalks with an eye toward safety. Regional growth affords an opportunity to realize better transportation experiences for everyone.



Passenger Rail | Bus Services  
Bike Routes  
ranked the top investment priorities

66%  
ranked the top investment priorities

46-65%  
No convenient to bus, bike, or walk to work or for errands

92%  
In favor of regional passenger rail service

75%  
Passenger rail service is very or extremely helpful

# Welcoming

When people come together,  
**GREAT THINGS HAPPEN!**

As partners in a strategically-planned community, New Albany collaborates with our residents and businesses to create a shared vision for the future that brings people together to do more than just live and work. It's a friendly, inclusive community that makes you feel at home, encourages a healthy, active lifestyle, nurtures the creative spirit, invests in lifelong learning, supports business and protects the environment for future generations. It's more than a place, it's a way of life.

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COMMUNITY CONNECTS US  
newalbanyohio.org





### Perspectives on Environmental Sustainability

When it comes to environmental sustainability, there is broad consensus among Central Ohioans that conservation of greenspaces and improvement of air and water quality must be prioritized. Findings reveal a common concern about climate change, strong support for commercial solar power, and that leaders should do more to protect the environment.

The sustainability survey shows the desire for improving the environment and conserving the region’s natural amenities. As we grow and develop, residents want increased conservation of greenspaces and waterways. Prioritizing sustainability policies and practices will help ensure all Central Ohioans have a safe and healthy environment in which to grow and thrive.

### Key Areas of Concern

2/3

Of residents believe climate change is somewhat or extremely worrisome

70%

Feel Central Ohio leaders are not at all or only moderately addressing environmental needs

650,000+

Estimated residents within Central Ohio would rate drinking water and outdoor air as poor or fair quality

### Priority Investments



Conserve greenspaces and waterways



Improve water quality



Expand waste reduction and diversion



Improve air quality



Expand wind and solar electricity generation



Increase number of electric vehicle charging stations

### Conclusion

MORPC’s goal is to help Central Ohio thrive and prosper. We must listen closely to the diverse voices of the community. Leaders Listen highlights remarkable unity on many issues across generations, geography, and political orientation. The forthcoming Leaders Listen survey will focus on housing, exploring the challenges and opportunities this critical issue presents. To learn more about the Leaders Listen survey series, visit [www.morpc.org/leaderslisten](http://www.morpc.org/leaderslisten).





# MORPC

**Chris Amorose Grooms, Chair | Michelle Crandall, Vice Chair | Ben Kessler, Secretary**

## CITIES

Bellefontaine | Bexley | Canal Winchester | Chillicothe | Circleville | Columbus  
Delaware | Dublin | Gahanna | Grandview Heights | Grove City | Groveport  
Heath | Hilliard | Johnstown | Lancaster | London | Marysville | Mount Vernon  
New Albany | Newark | Obetz | Pataskala | Pickerington | Powell | Reynoldsburg  
Sunbury | Upper Arlington | Westerville | Whitehall | Worthington

## VILLAGES

Ashville | Buckeye Lake | Galena | Gambier | Granville | Hebron | Lithopolis  
Lockbourne | Marble Cliff | Minerva Park | New Lexington | Plain City | Riverlea  
Shawnee Hills | Somerset | South Bloomfield | Urbancrest | West Jefferson

## COUNTIES

Delaware | Fairfield | Franklin | Hocking | Knox | Licking | Logan | Madison  
Marion | Morrow | Perry | Union

## TOWNSHIPS

Blendon | Bloom | Brown | Clinton | Etna | Franklin | Granville  
Jackson | Jefferson | Jerome | Madison | Mifflin | Perry | Plain  
Prairie | Truro | Violet | Washington

## ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

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

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