Chapter 3: The Transportation System

The transportation system’s role is to accommodate the travel needs of the region. The entire transportation system, however, is made up of several components or sub-systems that should be seamlessly connected to provide fluid movement across the system. These include roadways, transit, bike-ways, pedestrian facilities, and the unique intermodal facilities that interface these surface modes with ground and air freight. These components each serve their own particular and equally important role in providing for mobility for all persons throughout the region.

This chapter describes these individual systems and intermodal connections that make up the entire surface transportation system.
3.1 Roadway System

The roadway system is the primary component of the transportation system in Central Ohio. Roadways are classified based on the role and function each roadway serves within the larger system. Interstates and Expressways have very limited access and carry a high volume of vehicles making regional trips. Arterials primarily provide mobility, but also provide access to abutting land uses, unlike interstates and expressways. Collectors carry lower volumes of traffic and provide more access points to local roads and destinations. Local roads generally are not intended for long distance travel. Their main function is to provide access to homes and businesses. For this reason, the information, projects, and strategies presented in the MTP focus on interstates, expressways, arterials, and collectors only, as they make up the most important roadways in the roadway network. Figure 3.1 shows the roadway system by functional class.

For the purposes of the MTP, focus is on roads classified as “collectors” or higher. As of 2015, this includes 5,560 lane miles of roadways in the MPO planning area. “Lane mile” refers to the length of each roadway (in miles), multiplied by the number of lanes in each roadway. That is, a mile of road with four lanes contributes four lane miles in the calculation. Figure 3.1 breaks down the 5,560 lane miles by roadway classification. “Centerline mile” refers to the length of the roadway without regard to the number of lanes.

![Diagram showing 2015 Lane Miles by Facility Type]

The MTP focuses on the 5,560 lane miles of roadways classified as collector and above.
Where lane miles illustrates the extent of the roadway system, “vehicle miles traveled” (VMT) depicts the use of the roadway system. Mathematically, VMT is a combination of the distance traveled by all vehicles in a given area over a specific period, which is usually a day. VMT within the MPO planning area has shown an average annual growth of 0.6 percent since 2005. Figure 3.2 shows daily VMT by roadway classification type from 2005 to 2015. Although VMT declined in 2007 and 2008 due to high gas prices and the economic recession, VMT generally continued to rise after 2008.

There are a couple of aspects of the roadway system condition to consider. First is the physical condition—are the roadways and bridges in good repair? Section 4.1 discusses that aspect. Second, how does the roadway operate in terms of level of congestion? This section summarizes the various measures used to determine operational qualities of the system.

While VMT depicts overall use of the roadway system, it alone cannot demonstrate where roadway capacity adversely affects traffic congestion. Growth and development of the region over the past several decades has lead to congestion on the roadway system in Central Ohio. Figure 3.3 shows average traffic conditions during peak periods on major roadways in the MPO planning area in 2015. Roadway segments in green (no congestion), yellow (moderate congestion), and red (severe congestion) portray how traffic puts stress on Central Ohio’s roadway system. MORPC’s Travel Demand Model helps estimate the levels of congestion shown.

The MTP sets a target that less than 5% of VMT should operate under congested conditions daily; less than 10% during peak periods.
Combining VMT and congestion provides insight into the impact of congestion on overall roadway travel. Figure 3.4 illustrates the amount of VMT at different levels of overall congestion. The tree bars on the left illustrate this during a 24-hour time period; the three bars on the right illustrate this during the combined AM and PM “peak periods” when system traffic is highest. Each 3-bar set illustrates this combined measure on all roadways, all freeways and all arterials and collector streets, respectively.

**TRAVEL TIME UNCERTAINTY INDEX**

“Travel Time Uncertainty Index” compares the worst traffic conditions in a given time period to average traffic conditions for the same time period considered. This index is calculated as a ratio of 95th percentile travel time to average travel time for a specific roadway segment. The 95th percentile travel time represents the worst congestion condition in one month.

Travel time data were obtained from ODOT for the NHS segments in MORPC’s MPO area. An index was calculated for each segment with travel time available, and then a region-wide index was estimated by averaging individual indices across the segments weighted on their average travel time. The numbers shown in Figure 3.5 are the travel time uncertainty indices from 2010 to 2014, for AM and PM peak periods, respectively. For example, the index for 2014 PM peak period is 1.324, which means that compared to a typical PM peak period, it could take a traveler 32.4% more time to make a trip than in average travel conditions. This measure is meant to provide an indicator of how much extra time a traveler should plan to add to one’s trip when traveling during peak periods, to account for delays caused by “worst-case scenario” congestion.

The MTP sets a target for a region-wide Uncertainty Index of 1.25 by 2040.
With continued growth and development as forecast in Chapter 2, the region will experience increased demands on the roadway system. Chapter 6 describes the strategies and projects identified to meet these new demands.

FIGURE 3.5
Travel Time Uncertainty Index, Peak Periods, 2010-2014
Public transit serves the transportation needs of many central Ohio residents. The need and demand for transit is changing in response to both underlying demographic changes in central Ohio’s population and cultural preferences. Changing cultural preferences for transportation are evident from foreign born populations, younger and older generations. A large portion of these populations have expressed a desire to live in communities with access to transit that are pedestrian and bike friendly.

Transit dependent individuals may not be able to drive. Individuals may be unable to afford personal transportation, or lack the ability, interest to drive; public transit may provide the only independent means of transportation. It preserves the connection to work, daily living needs, medical appointments and other destinations.

For riders of choice, public transit may offer a more convenient, economical and/or environmentally prudent choice over other modes of transportation. The very presence of a convenient and accessible transit system may help attract and retain a skilled workforce and enhance the quality of life.

The transit systems that operate within the MPO area range from large urban to coordination programs. These system classifications relate to the size of the urbanized area or cluster they serve, which, in turn, determines eligibility for different sections of federal funding. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) formula funding is often determined by area population, population density, transit system ridership and operating costs. Three types of transit systems operate within the planning area.

- Large Urban Transit Systems serve an urbanized area (UZA) defined by the Census with a population over 200,000. In the planning area the Columbus urbanized area has two urban systems the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) and Delaware Area Transit Agency (DATABus). As a result of the 2010 Census, in 2013 as defined by the US Census Bureau the Delaware Area Transit Agency (DATABus), which is owned and operated by the Delaware County Transit Board (DCTB), was reclassified from a rural transit system (in an urbanized cluster with less than 50,000 people) to a small transit system in a large urban area with population over 200,000.

- Small Urban Transit Systems serve urbanized clusters with a population of 50,000 or more. The Licking County Transit Board (LCTB) is the only small urban system in the MPO area.

- Rural Transit Systems serve areas that do not meet the above population thresholds. Two such systems operate in the MPO area—the Lancaster Public Transit System (LPTS) and Union County Agency Transportation Service (UCATS)

System service areas are shown in Figure 3.6. Table 3.1 displays statistics for each system.
Other transit systems adjacent to the planning area include Pickaway and Madison counties. The Pickaway Area Rural Transit (PART) is a rural transit system that offers demand-response, point deviation, Columbus Shuttle, rural route and other immediate response services. Madison and Union counties participate in the ODOT Office of Transit’s Coordination Program with Madison County Ride and UCATS.

These transit service areas are shown in Figure 3.6

**CENTRAL OHIO TRANSIT AUTHORITY (COTA)**

COTA primarily serves Franklin County but extends into portions of adjacent counties that are part of charter municipalities, including the cities of Columbus, Dublin, Reynoldsburg and Westerville. Charter municipalities and Franklin County have representation on COTA’s Board of Trustees and agree to tax areas of the municipality outside of Franklin County; in return service is provided to all areas of that pay COTA’s sales tax. Cities may join COTA’s charter.

**TABLE 3.1**

Transit System Trip Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Annual Data</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COTA</td>
<td>Fixed-Route</td>
<td>Passenger Trips</td>
<td>18,764,047</td>
<td>18,423,352</td>
<td>18,472,039</td>
<td>19,041,382</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E&amp;D Passengers</td>
<td>2,685,794</td>
<td>2,707,358</td>
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<td>2,723,436</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Miles</td>
<td>11,518,844</td>
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<td>10,350,019</td>
<td>10,886,551</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Hours</td>
<td>835,880</td>
<td>789,910</td>
<td>842,794</td>
<td>892,727</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demand-Response</td>
<td>Passenger Trips</td>
<td>259,888</td>
<td>268,960</td>
<td>277,137</td>
<td>285,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E&amp;D Passengers</td>
<td>259,888</td>
<td>268,960</td>
<td>277,137</td>
<td>285,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Miles</td>
<td>2,829,784</td>
<td>3,082,210</td>
<td>3,011,978</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Hours</td>
<td>141,779</td>
<td>159,306</td>
<td>167,045</td>
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<tr>
<td>DATABus</td>
<td>Fixed-Route</td>
<td>Passenger Trips</td>
<td>17,192</td>
<td>22,276</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E&amp;D Passengers</td>
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<td>6,187</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Miles</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demand-Response</td>
<td>Passenger Trips</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E&amp;D Passengers</td>
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<td>24,204</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Miles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Hours</td>
<td>24,333</td>
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<td>LPTS</td>
<td></td>
<td>Passenger Trips</td>
<td>78,505</td>
<td>55,321</td>
<td>73,819</td>
<td>92,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E&amp;D Passengers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Miles</td>
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<td>382,816</td>
<td>440,391</td>
<td>516,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vehicle Hours</td>
<td>30,706</td>
<td>22,070</td>
<td>27,538</td>
<td>25,934</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COTA provides four types of fixed route service, as shown in Figure 3.7:

- Local bus service makes frequent stops along routes that run into or through Downtown Columbus.
- Crosstown service is similar to local but does not run through Downtown Columbus.
- Express service, which makes infrequent stops, typically operate one direction in the morning and the reverse in early evening.
- Circulators are short routes that connect nearby neighborhoods such as the CBUS circulator service in Downtown Columbus.

**COTA’s Mobility Services**

- Mainstream paratransit service provides demand response service within three-quarters of a mile of fixed route service for qualifying customers as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). “Demand response” refers to a system that dispatches transit vehicles to a destination upon request instead of a fixed schedule. Such a system requires users to call ahead of time for scheduling.
- Mainstream also provides non-ADA demand response transportation service for clients who want to travel outside COTA’s ADA service area beyond three-quarters of a mile of a fixed route line but within COTA’s service area.
- Customers who require long-term medical treatment such as dialysis, or chemotherapy can use COTA’s Will Call Program. The program was designed to supplement Mainstream service and help alleviate situations where customers have to wait for the vehicle after finishing their treatment.

**CBUS Downtown Circulator**

In May, 2014, COTA began a free circulator service in downtown Columbus that provides a connection between the Brewery District, Downtown and the Short North. The service operates 7 days a week every 15 minutes (10 minutes in weekday peak).

The CBUS averages 1,500 boardings a day, reducing automobile use and promoting economic activity. To improve air quality and reduce operating costs, the CBUS service uses specially branded compressed natural gas (CNG) buses. In less than two years, on March 18, 2016 COTA celebrated one million trips on CBUS.

As a good community partner, COTA has been dedicated to providing CBUS service for free to promote the use of transit by Downtown workers, residents and visitors. The unique brand of the buses and stops as well as simple schedule and alignment makes the service very easy to use.

**DELAWARE AREA TRANSIT AGENCY (DATABUS)**

DATABus became part of the Columbus Urbanized Area from an urban cluster as a result of the 2010 Census. The reclassification to an urban transit system changed the way DATABus receives FTA funding from Section 5311 funds administered by ODOT to Section 5307 formula funding administered by DATABus directly with FTA and reporting to NTD. With this shift, the federal operating funds available to assist in subsidizing transportation were severely reduced.
DATABus serves all of Delaware County with demand-response, and six fixed routes (shown in Figure 3.9) and paratransit service. Current fixed routes include the Green Route from Delaware City to COTA’s Crosswoods Park-N-Ride via the Polaris area, four Delaware City Routes and one route to the Village of Sunbury. DATABus receives no county sales tax levy funds. Instead, local funding comes directly from the budgets of participating jurisdictions in Delaware County. DATABus and COTA accept transfers between their fixed-route systems.

The DATABus Board provides Mobility Management to the Delaware County community. Mobility Management strives to provide a one-stop information source for transportation options in Delaware County by linking passengers’ needs with the most appropriate form of transportation. Mobility Management also provides referral services to passengers who may qualify for financial assistance with their transportation needs.

The governing board of DATABus made a decision to move away from subsidizing the more costly demand-response transportation and to focus on fixed-route transportation since it is a more efficient service as it relates to the cost per passenger. As a result, the limited federal operating funds available are now used to support fixed-route transportation. Demand-response transportation is no longer subsidized and the fares increased significantly, making it less affordable for the majority of general public passengers.

In 2015, DATABus commissioned a study to determine what services the community wanted and expected from DATABus and if the community would support the services with local funding. The preliminary results of the study indicate that Delaware County is a very affluent county and that the need for public transportation is not of high demand. The study also indicated that the current DATABus fixed-route structure is adequate and that any further expansion should be developed primarily with demand-response service and not the implementation of additional fixed routes.

LICKING COUNTY TRANSIT BOARD (LCTB)
LCTB provides demand-response service in almost all of Licking County. Its service area includes the City of Pataskala and Etna Township, which are both in the MPO area. In addition to its fares, LCTB receives local funding from Licking County general revenue funds and local service contracts. LCTB receives state funding from ODOT’s Office of Transit and federal funding through FTA.

LANCASTER PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEM
LPTS provides curb-to-curb demand-response service and three deviated-fixed routes in Fairfield County. Unlike the other transit agencies in the MPO planning area, a countywide board does not govern LPTS. At present, it remains a department of the City of Lancaster. Like DATABus, it receives no county sales tax levy funds. With local support, it began serving Violet Township and the city of Pickerington in 2010. With the financial support of jurisdictions across Fairfield County, in 2011 the service went countywide. LPTS receives state and federal funding through the ODOT Office of Transit. As shown in Table 3.1, the two townships served by LPTS have increased over recent years.
FIGURE 3.8
COTA Park and Ride Facilities
Each transit system in the counties surrounding Franklin receives requests for transportation into Franklin County and the City of Columbus. Employment opportunities, specialized medical treatment, shopping and entertainment all draw passengers beyond their country of origin. However, the distance that transit providers must travel beyond their normal service area can be cost prohibitive. It also deprives that transit system from a fleet vehicle for a long period when it could be serving other customers instead. Systems that do provide such trips add a significant premium to the fare.

**INTER-CITY TRANSIT SERVICES**

In addition to the local transit systems, three companies provide inter-city motor coach service in the planning area.

Greyhound operates the largest intercity bus system in the nation. It offers service to over 2,300 destinations and maintains interline partnerships to facilitate transfers to destinations beyond its network. Greyhound also offers passengers the opportunity to connect with Amtrak service in Cleveland or Cincinnati. The company maintains a station in Downtown Columbus.

MegaBus offers service to Chicago through Indianapolis and direct service to Cincinnati. It runs from two posted on-street stops in Columbus close to the Columbus Greyhound Station and at the OSU Student Union. MegaBus offers low-cost, limited-stop service. Others nationally are using this same model, replacing old amenities, such as centralized stations, with on-board Wi-Fi internet access and electrical outlets. These services also appeal to new generations of riders in terms of speed by minimizing the number of stops and cost.

GoBus is a Rural Inter-City Bus Service. This service is designed to address low-cost and geographically accessible intercity bus transportation needs of the entire state by supporting projects that provide transportation between non-urbanized areas and urbanized areas that result in connections of greater regional, statewide, and national significance. Funding for the Rural Inter-City Bus is administered by ODOT, and the service is currently operated by Lakefront Lines.

Buses are equipped with amenities, such as bike racks, wireless internet and electrical outlets, offering service similar levels to those found on MegaBus or Greyhound, with connections to other transportation options such as Amtrak and airports. Passengers are also able to connect with healthcare and educational opportunities.

GoBus operates five lines, some of which can be transferred between each other listed below.

- Columbus, Athens, OH and Parkersburg, WV, facilitating transfers at Port Columbus International Airport and the Greyhound Station in Downtown Columbus
- Cincinnati and Athens, OH, facilitating transfers to the Greyhound Station in Cincinnati
- Cleveland, OH and Parkersburg WV, and Athens, OH with transfers to the Greyhound Stations in Cleveland, Akron and Canton
• Columbus to Wooster, OH, with transfers to the Licking County Transit Board office, Port Columbus International Airport and the Greyhound station in Downtown Columbus
• Columbus to Van Wert, OH, with transfers to the Greyhound station in Downtown Columbus

COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLANS
Transportation needs that go unmet by transit systems may sometimes be fulfilled through other government departments, non-profit organizations and private companies. Federal, state and local funding programs beyond those specifically designated for public transit can generate alternate transportation service offerings. Coordination of these programs offers the chance to better use these funds so that fewer needs go unmet.

All five counties covered or partially covered by the MPO planning area maintain their own Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan, or Coordinated Plan. Local coordinating councils or boards typically carry the responsibility for implementing these plans. These boards include representatives from the transit system and human service agencies, such as county boards of developmental disabilities, groups focused on senior transportation, and county departments of job and family services. The funding and operating picture behind human services transportation remains as diverse as the needs of the populations served. Coordinated plans and these boards seek to find opportunities to coordinate services and meet the transportation needs of the elderly, low-income and persons with disabilities.

FTA Section 5310 funds to enhance the mobility of seniors and persons with disabilities are available to transit providers, local jurisdictions, non-profits and private for-profit companies to help implement a county’s Coordinated Plan. MORPC is the designated recipient for the Columbus UZA, and ODOT’s Office of Transit serves the same role in the small urban and rural areas outside the MPO.
Bicycle and pedestrian facilities, or active transportation facilities, are important links in the transportation network. Bicycling is a viable transportation option, especially for trips that are two miles or less. Every trip, whether it involves travel by car, bus, bike, rail or air, begins and ends with a pedestrian trip. At least one-third of the region’s population does not drive because they are unable due to age, economics, health, or simply choose not to. A convenient and safe active transportation network accommodates these users and could attract others to make short trips by biking or walking, rather than by automobile.

MORPC and several jurisdictions have adopted Complete Streets Policies. The policy requires all transportation project sponsors using MORPC-attributable funding to accommodate all users along project roadway corridors. In 2011, the National Complete Streets Coalition recognized MORPC’s policy as the best among large MPOs.

### BICYCLE FACILITIES

To date, the MPO planning area has 580 miles of bikeways (see Figure 3.10). The bikeway system includes a diverse set of facilities. It includes “multi-use paths,” which are facilities physically separated from the roadway and intended for multiple, non-automotive uses, including biking. The bikeway system also includes on-road facilities such as bike lanes, paved shoulders, and shared lanes.

A skeletal system of north-south shared-use paths is developing along the region’s six rivers and major streams. While local communities are building more bikeways, east-west access across the region remains limited. Issues with the bicycle network include:

- Lack of east-west connections
- Crossing wide, heavily traveled arterials, rivers, and freeways
- Lack of continuity among jurisdictions (MORPC’s Active Transportation Plan, discussed in Chapter 6, strives to address this issue)
- Lack of complete bicycle facilities
- Inadequate signage
- Lack of driver awareness and respect for cyclist use of the roadway

Chapter 6 will describe the strategies and projects identified to address these issues.

In 2009, MORPC and local partners created a Bike User Map for the region that is available both as a printed map and as an interactive online map. The base for this map was Bicycle Level-of-Service (LOS) data, which illustrate the usability of roads for bicycling. It was created using public input. The map has been reprinted several times since then, including minor updates, and has been distributed to over 180,000 people.
FIGURE 3.10
Bicycle Facilities, 2015

The information shown on this map is compiled from various sources made available to us which we believe to be reliable.

Source: MORPC Regional Bikeways

Ohio Location Map

0 2.5 5 Miles

Bikeway
- Existing
- Committed
PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES
The MPO planning area lacks a comprehensive system of pedestrian facilities. Past construction of components of the roadway system did not always include consideration for pedestrians. In 2015 MORPC partnered with the City of Columbus and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) to compile an inventory of sidewalk facilities in the MPO planning area. The inventory is available online in an interactive web map format and includes attributes such as where sidewalks are and are not located, and the location of marked and unmarked crosswalks. The inventory is maintained by ODOT, and local jurisdictions are responsible for providing and updating data. The inventory is used to support transportation planning activities throughout the region. Existing sidewalk facilities are shown in Figure 3.11.

A pedestrian network should provide comfortable and safe walking conditions for everyone. To provide such conditions, one must consider street widths, travel lanes, traffic volumes, travel speeds, and roadside connections, which include sidewalk width and separation from moving traffic. A comprehensive network of pedestrian facilities provides for direct and convenient pedestrian travel within and between residential areas, places of employment, neighborhood activity centers, and other destinations. In very rural areas, a paved shoulder may be an appropriate pedestrian facility; in more urban areas, a sidewalk is most appropriate. Multi-use paths are an important component of a pedestrian network as well.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN
The Active Transportation Plan (ATP) identifies regionally significant active transportation corridors that include pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities around Central Ohio. The ATP was created as part of the MTP to help communities identify regionally significant projects that include pedestrian, bicycle, and transit accommodations – or complete streets.

The ATP focused on 12 Key Regional Corridors across the Central Ohio Region and looked at the character of those corridors and grouping them into different segment types. These segments were created to better understand the needs of the area based on the land use surrounding it, and other factors. The ATP created a set of best management practices that were assigned to the corridor segments to reflect appropriate complete streets accommodations.

IMPACT OF TRAILS STUDY
In 2014 an Impact of Trails Study for Central Ohio was conducted by local and regional planning partners. The study includes counts of trails users, intercept and online surveys of trail users, interviews of local leaders about the importance of trails in the region, analyses of property values near trails, and analysis of the costs of trail construction and maintenance. The results show that trails provide many values to local residents and communities. Some of these values can be measured in dollars; others cannot. Central Ohio trails enhance the lives of thousands of Central Ohio residents who travel millions of miles on them annually for recreation, fitness and health, commuting, and other purposes. Trail users value trails, visit them frequently, are satisfied with management by local agencies, and want greater connectivity for bicycling and walking throughout the region.
3.4 Intermodal Freight & Aviation

Goods are moved, transferred, and distributed from the Central Ohio region to destinations across the United States and around the world. Whether by truck, rail, or air, our region’s efficiency in the movement of goods is an important part of the nation’s security, economic competitiveness, trade, and commodity flow. MORPC’s planning activities consider strategies and projects that support the area’s economic vitality, increase the mobility of freight, and enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system across and between modes, including freight.

Central Ohio has historically held an important place in national freight movements. Our region’s economy has benefited from its multimodal transportation assets for many decades. Today, the Central Ohio region is home to an inland port and is crossed by two of the nation’s arterial rail corridors as well as two major interstate highways that traverse the country coast to coast.

Central Ohio is strategically located within a 10-hour truck drive of 47 percent of the United States population and 61 percent of its manufacturing. This historic proximity to people and jobs has led the Columbus region to establish a strong logistics sector that contributes to our region’s economic vitality. Over 4,000 logistics and distribution operations employ 77,000 people in the Central Ohio region. Our location is critical to the movement of goods at the state and national stage.

Our region’s freight activities are contingent on shifts in the global supply chain, such as the expansion of the Panama Canal, slated for completion in mid-2016. Currently the port with the most depth, most container traffic enters the United States at the Port of Los Angeles/Long Beach. However, in preparation of the Panama Canal expansion, other ports such as the Port of Virginia have included dredging into their Master Plans to meet the needs of larger barges. This increase in imports along the east coast ports is expected to impact the flow of freight in Central Ohio, and increases the competitive advantage of our location in attracting and retaining logistics businesses.

While ports on the east coast continue to prepare for the potential influx of container traffic, Central Ohio public and private partners made strides to complete its Heartland Corridor project, linking the Port of Virginia to Columbus and on to Chicago. This public/private partnership involved not only funding, but also the development of its facilities (like Buckeye Intermodal Yard and the Rickenbacker Intermodal Facility) and the infrastructure to serve them. These partnerships have resulted in sustaining existing businesses, and created new economic development in our region. Some quick facts about the MPO’s freight/economic assets:

Over 4,000 logistics and distribution operations employ 77,000 people in the Central Ohio region.
Four intermodal lift and rail yard facilities

2 Class 1 rail service providers (CSX and Norfolk Southern), and a third Class 1 (Genesee & Wyoming) operates in the region

Rickenbacker Airport, dedicated mostly to air freight cargo

Rickenbacker Inland Port, which includes Foreign Trade Zone #138

In 2014, the region exported $6.2 billion in goods

These assets translate into more higher-paying jobs, a greater tax base, and an improved quality of life for Central Ohio residents.

CENTRAL OHIO FREIGHT FACILITIES

Today’s economy requires rail, truck, water and air modes to work together to provide the best value for their customers. The MPO area is home to significant air, rail and truck intermodal hubs, and it is within this multi/intermodal framework that the needs of our regional freight network continue to be considered. MORPC works closely with its regional partners to meet the needs of Central Ohio’s freight facilities. Below is an overview of our region’s most important freight assets. These are shown in Figure 3.12.

INTERMODAL LIFT AND RAIL YARDS

Central Ohio’s public and private sectors have long recognized the importance of the logistics industry to the region’s economy. As such, investments have occurred across the region to position the MPO area competitively in the retention of existing businesses and to attract new businesses as the economy fluctuates. The MPO area is home to four major intermodal lift and rail yards, most of which have experienced improvements to accommodate growth in the region’s logistics sector.

CSX Buckeye Yard

Also referred to as CSX Columbus, Buckeye Yard is one of five CSX intermodal terminals in Ohio. Buckeye Yard is owned by two railroads, CSX and Norfolk Southern (NS). NS owns the classification yard and western portion of the yard, and uses Buckeye Yard primarily for storage. CSX Columbus is located on the eastern side of the classification yard.

In 2010, CSX purchased land to enable an expansion of Buckeye Yard to accommodate increases in container traffic stemming from improvements at the CSX’s Northwest Ohio Intermodal Transfer Container Facility (ITCF). The $59 million expansion of Buckeye Yard was completed in 2013, adding 24 acres to a total of 36 acres and doubling capacity from 180,000 to 360,000 lifts per year.

Rickenbacker Global Logistics Park

This facility is part of one of the MPO area’s most critical intermodal assets that connect air, rail and truck freight modes. The rail component is serviced by Norfolk Southern and CSX. The Norfolk Southern Rickenbacker Intermodal Terminal covers 175 acres and can handle more than 400,000 containers annually.
FIGURE 3.12
Freight Facilities
Discovery Park Intermodal Yard

Discovery Park Intermodal Yard is located in southeast Columbus with rail and truck access to warehouse and distribution facilities in nearby Rickenbacker. Operated by Norfolk Southern, it opened in 1990 and underwent one major expansion in 1994, followed by a second in 1999. These expansions occurred to provide more parking and container storage, but did not expand rail track length to accommodate lift expansion.

Discovery Park is a 40-acre yard that has experienced a steady increase of rail lifts since 1993, and growth has reached a plateau as the intermodal yard has passed its designed efficient capacity of 125,000 lifts per year.

Parsons Yard

Parsons Yard is an intermediate-sized yard on the south side of Columbus operated by CSX. It is used primarily to serve local industry, but it is also a support yard for coal operations, handling loaded and empty hopper cars/trains. Spot car repair and locomotive service tracks are also located in the yard. Regional and short-line railroads use this yard to switch service between them and the Class I railroads.

AIR FREIGHT CARGO FACILITIES

Rickenbacker International Airport

While there are five airports in our region that are part of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), only two engage in air cargo activities: Port Columbus and Rickenbacker International airports. Port Columbus Airport’s air cargo operations are minimal and secondary to its passenger operations, with Rickenbacker Airport as the region’s primary air cargo airport. The presence of these air facilities increases the multimodal opportunities for freight movements in the region and leverage our region’s competitiveness at a national and global level. In 2015, over 900 million pounds of freight were handled at Rickenbacker, nearly 150 million pounds more than the total weight handled in 2014.

As one of the world’s only cargo-dedicated airports, Rickenbacker International Airport offers an uncongested option to move air cargo to, from and within the United States.

Rickenbacker’s success in recent years is resulting in the need for expansions of the airport to accommodate adequate cargo storage as well as an overall increase of airport operations. The region’s public and private stakeholders are working collectively to fund these needed improvements, including infrastructure needs to meet the growth of an area that houses one of the region’s most critical freight assets.

Rickenbacker Inland Port (Foreign Trade Zone #138)

Considered an inland port, Rickenbacker provides Central Ohio with air, truck and rail intermodal capabilities. The area includes the Rickenbacker International
TABLE 3.2
MPO Area Airports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Airport</th>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>NPIAS Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Port Columbus International</td>
<td>Columbus Regional Airport Authority</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rickenbacker International</td>
<td>Columbus Regional Airport Authority</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolton Field</td>
<td>Columbus Regional Airport Authority</td>
<td>Reliever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio State University (Don Scott)</td>
<td>Ohio State University</td>
<td>Reliever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware Municipal</td>
<td>City of Delaware</td>
<td>General Aviation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Port Columbus
Port Columbus is the region’s main commercial passenger airport. Port Columbus provides 140 daily departures to 34 airports. In 2015, 6.8 million passengers used Port Columbus. This facility also handles a small amount of air freight relative to its sister airport Rickenbacker, with a total 7.7 million pounds of freight being handled at Port Columbus in 2015. Port Columbus is responsible for nearly
33,500 jobs, with an annual payroll over $1.1 billion, and a total of $3.7 billion in annual economic output to the Central Ohio Region.

Regional stakeholders recognize the potential for economic growth that the Port Columbus International Airport represents for Central Ohio. In April 2014, the Jobs, Expansion and Transportation (JET) Task Force was convened to provide recommendations on how to position the Port Columbus International Airport area for an economic development boom. Comprised of leaders from the business, economic development and transportation sectors, the task force focused on how best to redefine our airport as an economic hub and the center of transportation for the region. Three working groups were created: Economic Development, Regional Transportation and Air Service. MORPC led the transportation working group and contributed to a report and recommendations to the city and its regional project partners: the Columbus Regional Airport Authority and Franklin County.