



# WILLIAMS ROAD

## Multimodal Corridor Planning

RAISE Discretionary Grant Application | Submitted April 14, 2022



THE CITY OF  
**COLUMBUS**  
ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR



MID-OHIO REGIONAL  
**MORPC**  
PLANNING COMMISSION



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**Project narrative, appendices, and letters of support are available online:**

**<http://www.morpc.org/williamsroadcorridor>**

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## I. Project Description

This application is seeking \$7 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT's) Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program for a planning grant to support the planning and design of a multimodal freight corridor on Williams Road. The corridor supports projected regional population and job growth within the larger south side region and Rickenbacker Airport and Global Logistics Park, including Foreign Trade Zone 138. The corridor handles a significant amount of freight, due to multiple logistics centers and railyards towards its center; and it also serves a significant amount of personal vehicles, due to significant residential communities along the corridor. Safety and lack of transportation opportunities are significant challenges within the corridor.



Figure 1 - Project corridor. Available at a larger scale in [Appendix 1 – Corridor Map](#).

This project is a collaborative, regional effort to (1) address safety and transportation challenges; and (2) significantly improve freight and transportation opportunities along a corridor that includes multiple political sub-divisions, logistic centers, railyards, opportunity zones, areas of persistent poverty, and a historically disadvantaged community. Part of the planning process will include identifying how to (1) separate two-at-grade rail crossings that are within 250 feet of each other; and (2) incorporate separated bicycle and pedestrian facilities into the corridor, with a strong preference to include separated facilities on both sides of the roadway. Jointly developing a common corridor plan will ensure all sections ultimately are constructed in a consistent manner, and that it maximizes the benefits for all stakeholders. The challenges and costs for the corridor are greater than any single agency can handle on its own, and USDOT funding is necessary for the region to address these challenges and costs.

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### A. Concise Project Description

This project will develop a corridor plan for the Williams Road corridor, and an emphasis on improving the corridor as an effective multimodal freight corridor. The limits of the corridor plan start at Williams Road's western terminus near the Scioto River and extend to its eastern terminus at Hamilton Road (SR-317). The corridor plan will also include all the corridor's intersections, including the intersections of High Street (US-23) at Williams Road, Alum Creek Drive at Williams Road, and Hamilton Road (SR-317) at Williams Road. The Hamilton Road intersection is also near an interchange for Hamilton Road and US-33, and the corridor's impact on that interchange will also need to be included in the planning process. The project also will develop plans to separate two at-grade rail crossings and replace one grade-separated rail crossing.

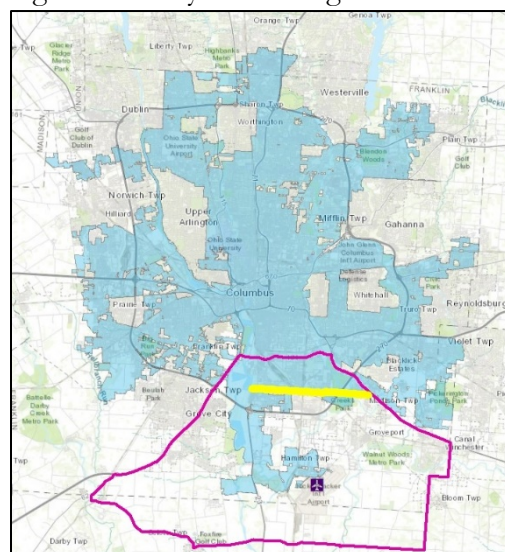


Figure 2 - Regional map, showing corridor, Rickenbacker International Airport, and the Rickenbacker study area. Available at a larger scale in [Appendix 1 – Regional Map](#).



In addition to completing the initial Planning Phase, the project will also complete the following for the entire Williams Road corridor: Preliminary Engineering Phase, Stage 1 Plans, and all required environmental studies and NEPA documentation. Columbus, the Franklin County Engineer (FCE), MORPC, and their partners intend to pursue additional design and construction funding once the corridor plan is complete.

#### **B. Transportation challenges that it is intended to address**

The Williams Road corridor supports projected regional population and job growth within the larger south side region and Rickenbacker Airport and Global Logistics Park, including Foreign Trade Zone 138. Rickenbacker International Airport (FTZ 138) is a major gateway for domestic and international freight shipments, with regular service to destinations such as Hong Kong, Luxembourg, and Dubai. International cargo increased 65% in 2017 and is projected to increase by 900% in the latest airport masterplan. The Rickenbacker free trade zone was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> out of 195 active zones for the amount of merchandise received in 2018; and approximately \$10.4 billion worth of goods moved through FTZ 138 in 2018.<sup>1</sup> Due to its location within the Rickenbacker area, the Williams Road corridor handles a significant amount of freight, but roadway safety and lack of transportation opportunities are significant challenges within the corridor. Williams Road's transportation challenges stem from three sets of factors: (1) the roadway was not originally constructed to be a multimodal freight corridor, (2) it is difficult to plan consistently when balancing a wide variety of land uses and political subdivisions within the corridor; and (3) the corridor is heavily affected by its one grade-separated rail crossing, two at-grade rail crossings, and two railroad classification yards (CSX's Parsons Yard and Norfolk Southern's Watkins Yard).



*Figure 3 - Traffic stopped on Williams Road due to stopped train blocking crossing. Additional pictures available in [Appendix 9 – Corridor Pictures](#).*

Williams Road was not constructed to be a multimodal freight corridor. It is one of the few east-west connections across the south side of Columbus, and this connectivity allows it to handle a significant amount of freight moving to and from multiple logistics centers and industries towards the corridor's center. However, it does not handle this freight well, and it currently cannot handle the growing demand for multimodal mobility options. Most of the corridor consists of one travel lane in each direction, separated by a double yellow line; and most of the corridor lacks any sort of separated facility for either pedestrians or bicyclists. This project will bring the corridor up to modern standards for not just the freight and vehicles using the roadway, but also the pedestrians and bicyclists who are requesting separated facilities. Multimodal options are especially important because the corridor –

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<sup>1</sup> Hayleigh Colombo, "Rickenbacker's foreign-trade zone climbs in national ranking, clears \$10B mark for goods passing through," Columbus Business First, December 17, 2019, <https://www.bizjournals.com/columbus/news/2019/12/17/rickenbackers-foreign-trade-zone-climbs-in.html>

especially the western half, serves multiple census tracts that have limited transportation options and have been classified as either areas of Persistent Poverty and/or Historically Disadvantaged Communities.

Developing a plan for the entire corridor has been complicated because of the wide variety of land uses and political subdivisions along the corridor. Land uses along the Williams Road corridor include residential, commercial, parkland, two railroad classification yards (CSX's Parsons Yard and Norfolk Southern's Watkins Yard) and multiple logistics centers. The City of Columbus, Franklin County Engineer, and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) all maintain different portions of the roadway itself; and additional entities border the roadway, including: the City of Groveport, the City of Obetz, Hamilton Township, and Madison Township.



Figure 4 - FCE drone footage showing mix of land uses. Additional pictures available in [Appendix 9 – Corridor Pictures](#).

The corridor's rail crossings present additional challenges. The current grade-separated rail crossing is in poor condition, and it has a risk of flooding during heavy rain. There are also two at-grade rail crossings less than 250 feet apart, and trains frequently stop on the tracks and block corridor traffic for more than an hour at a time. These crossings present unique maintenance, safety, and congestion challenges that limit Williams Road's efficiency and resiliency as an east-west connection across the south side.

In terms of how this project will address these challenges, pursuing a joint corridor plan is one way this project itself addresses the challenges created by multiple agencies having jurisdiction over different parts of the corridor. The corridor planning process will then address both the roadway challenges – including the need to add meaningful multimodal mobility options – and the rail crossing challenges as part of the planning process. The plan will closely evaluate how to upgrade the existing travel lanes, add multimodal mobility options, repair/replace the existing grade-separated rail crossing, and separate the existing at-grade rail crossings.

### C. Project History

Williams Road is an important east-west connection, and improvements in the corridor are included in the regional Metropolitan Transportation Plan, MORPC's 2018 Rickenbacker Study, and regional trail plans. Multiple segments and intersections on Williams Road are included in the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's (MORPC's) 2020-2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP):<sup>2</sup>

- 1469 – Williams Rd. from Lockbourne Rd. to Libby Dr., Multiuse path
- 62 – Williams Rd. from Corr Rd./Lockbourne Rd. to Alum Creek Dr., Add turn lanes and complete street facilities to 2 lane roadway
- 3 – Williams Rd. from Alum Creek Dr. to Hamilton Rd., Add turn lanes and complete street facilities to 2 lane roadway
- 159 – Williams Rd. at Lockbourne Rd./Corr Rd., Add/Modify turn lanes and add complete street facilities

<sup>2</sup> "2020-2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan(MTP): Projects Webmap," MORPC, last accessed Mar. 3, 2022, <https://morpc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/CrowdsourcingReporter/index.html?appid=5b842ecac9e64683b092a9b5f3dcd2ca>

• 164 – Groveport Rd. at Williams Rd., Add/Modify turn lanes and add complete street facilities

MORPC’s 2018 Rickenbacker Study included recommendations to improve the Williams Road corridor by adding turn lanes, from Lockbourne Road to SR-317, and improving the intersection of Williams Road and Groveport Road.<sup>3</sup> The study also included recommendations for (1) community strengthening placemaking on Williams Road; (2) separated bicycle and pedestrian facilities to expand and connect the regional low-stress network; and (3) trail connection to the Scioto River, which the study identified as a Recreation Greenways & Blueways Placemaking Corridor. The Central Ohio Greenways (COG) also identified the corridor as future east-west connection from the Scioto River to Three Creeks Metro Park. The current COG vision for the trail anticipates the Williams Road connection ending west of I-270, at the Alum Creek Trail, but the proposed study will carry the trail further east to the intersection with SR-317, which will also provide access to the Big Walnut Trail.

In addition to the Rickenbacker study, ODOT included the intersection of Williams Road at Hamilton Road as part of a safety study completed for the US-33 and SR-317 (Hamilton Road) interchange.<sup>4</sup> The Franklin County Engineer has also received multiple community complaints regarding the unsignalized intersection of Williams Road at Spangler Road; and it has studied potential safety improvements for the intersection, although a signal was not warranted at the time.<sup>5</sup>

In 2018, the City of Columbus hired a consultant to do a very high level, preliminary overview of the corridor in anticipation of submitting at least one potential segment of the corridor in MORPC’s bi-annual FHWA formula funding grant cycle competition. However, this review indicated improvements to the corridor could cost at least \$144 million. This assumed separated bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and a typical 5 lane section for the majority of the corridor. The City decided to pursue other corridors at the time. A further review of corridor traffic, however, indicated that it will not be necessary to add additional travel lanes as part of this project. Recent growth demands, however, as well as additional funding opportunities through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law have prompted the City and other regional stakeholders to reexamine the corridor.

#### D. Proposed Schedule

The corridor plan will use a schedule based on ODOT’s Project Development Process.<sup>6</sup> The schedule takes into account the length of the corridor, as well as the challenges that have already been identified. It also takes into account the project’s need to coordinate with multiple railroad companies,<sup>7</sup> local governments, residential groups, businesses, and other corridor stakeholders. The schedule can be adjusted based upon grant agreement dates. Both Columbus and the Franklin County Engineer have significant experience coordinating planning studies and federal aid projects, and they have the staff, experience, and capacity to successfully execute the proposed project.

Phase	Start Date	Duration	End Date
1. ODOT Planning Phase	January 2023	24 months	December 2024
2. ODOT Preliminary Engineering Phase	July 2024	24 months	July 2026
3. Stage 1 Plans	July 2026	24 months	July 2028
4. ODOT NEPA Document	September 2027	9 months	July 2028

<sup>3</sup> “Rickenbacker Area Study: Map-Based Recommendations,” MORPC, last accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Mapped-Recommendations.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> A copy of the safety study is included in [Appendix 1 - SR317-US 33 Safety Study](#).

<sup>5</sup> A copy of the complaint and response is provided in [Appendix 1 - FCE Williams at Spangler](#).

<sup>6</sup> “PDP Phases & Paths,” Ohio Department of Transportation, last accessed April 4, 2022, <https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/working/pdp/pdp-phases-paths>.

<sup>7</sup> Both [CSX](#) and [Norfolk Southern Corporation](#) have provided letters of support that have been included.



## E. Project Partners

### 1. City of Columbus, lead-applicant

Columbus is the municipality in which the majority of the Williams Road right of way is situated. The Department of Public Service (DPS) is responsible for maintaining the Minor Collectors, Major Collectors, and Arterials within its corporate limits. DPS staff also have extensive experience coordinating planning studies – including corridor plans – and managing federal aid projects. Columbus has significant experience coordinating projects with ODOT, the Franklin County Engineer's Office (FCEO), and MORPC. It has the staff, resources, and experience necessary to successfully complete the proposed project.

### 2. Franklin County Engineer

The Franklin County Engineer is responsible for the maintenance and construction of 260 miles of county roadway and 365 bridges, including a portion of Williams Road and two bridges carrying Williams Road over Alum Creek and Big Walnut Creek. Improvements to county roads range from resurfacing, reconstruction and widening projects to Highway Maintenance Department operations. Like Columbus, FCEO staff have extensive experience managing federal aid projects. It has significant experience coordinating projects with ODOT, City of Columbus, and MORPC. It has the staff, resources, and experience necessary to successfully complete the proposed project.

### 3. Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission

MORPC serves as the local Metropolitan Planning Organization. MORPC coordinated the 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study that included a call for improving the Williams Road Corridor and it is included in the current Metropolitan Transportation Plan. It has the staff, resources, and experience necessary to support the proposed project.

## II. Project Location

The Williams Road corridor is located primarily in the City of Columbus, in the federally designated Columbus, Ohio Urbanized Area.<sup>8</sup> Maps of the corridor, and its relation to existing infrastructure, are provided in **Figures 1 & 2**, as well as in **Appendix 1**. The project is situated within Franklin County. Williams Road is designated as Franklin County Road 123. The geographical coordinates are: 39° 53' 21.56" N (39.889322), 82° 56' 32.22" W (-82.94228). While almost the entire right of way falls within Columbus' corporate limits, multiple jurisdictions touch the Williams Road corridor, including the City of Columbus, the City of Groveport, the City of Obetz, Hamilton Township, and Madison Township. The project lies within the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>



Figure 5 - Location of crossings and railyards. Parsons Yard is marked by a blue triangle, Watkins Yard by a purple triangle. Available at a larger scale in [Appendix 2 - Williams Road Railroad Map](#).

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<sup>8</sup> Urban Area map provided in [Appendix 2 - Urban Area Map](#).

US House Districts, the 6<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Ohio House Districts, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Ohio Senate Districts. The corridor serves three school districts: Columbus City School District, Groveport Madison Local School District, and Hamilton Local School District. The corridor also serves the Eastland Career Center and the Goodwill Learning Center, which are near the intersection of Williams Road and Hamilton Road.

The western limits of the proposed corridor study starts at the western terminus of Williams Road, just east of the Scioto River, and it extends east to the intersection of Williams Road at Hamilton Road (SR-317). The corridor provides an important east-west connection, and it intersects multiple north-south arterial routes, including High Street (US-23), Parsons Avenue, Lockbourne Road, Groveport Road, and Alum Creek Drive. Groveport Road and Alum Creek Drive connect the corridor to Rickenbacker International Airport and Foreign-Trade Zone 138. The corridor also provides roadway access to two railroad classification yards: Norfolk Southern's Watkins Yard, and CSX' Parsons Yard. The intersection of Williams Road at US-23 is approximately 1.2 miles from I-270; and the intersection Williams Road at Hamilton Road is less than 1,000 feet from US-33.

The corridor crosses or touches eight different census tracts,<sup>9</sup> including one historically disadvantaged census tract (Franklin County Census Tract 88.12),<sup>10</sup> two opportunity zone census tracts (Franklin County Census Tract 88.11 and 88.12),<sup>11</sup> and three persistent poverty census tracts (Franklin County Census Tracts 88.11, 88.13, and 88.22).<sup>12</sup> The geographic coordinates provided fall on Williams Road, on the border of Census Tracts 88.12 and 95.20. A significant amount of the total construction cost will be spent on the border of Census Tract 95.20 because this tract includes the intersection of Williams Road at Groveport Road, one grade-separated rail crossing that must be replaced, and two at-grade rail crossings that must be separated.

### III. Grant Funds, Sources and Uses of all Project Funding

The future eligible project cost for the Williams Road Corridor Plan is estimated to be approximately \$9.19 million. This estimate is based upon preliminary information provided in response to a City of Columbus Request for Information seeking guidance from consultants regarding the costs of a corridor plan for Williams Road that uses ODOT's Project Development Process. This RAISE application is seeking to obtain an award of \$7,000,000 spread equally across all components. This award would be leveraged to ensure the proposed planning work for Williams Road is fully funded. Columbus will commit \$1,890,000 in local funding towards future eligible costs; and the Franklin County Engineer will commit \$300,000 in local funding towards future eligible costs. A joint financial commitment letter is included in [Appendix 3 – Financial Commitment Letter](#).

Category	Total Cost	RAISE	% Total	Other Federal	% Total	Non-Federal	% Total
1. ODOT Planning Phase	\$200,000	\$152,340	1.7%	\$0	0.0%	\$47,660	0.5%
2. ODOT Preliminary Engineering Phase	\$3,890,000	\$2,963,003	32.2%	\$0	0.0%	\$926,997	10.1%
3. Stage 1 Plans	\$4,800,000	\$3,656,147	39.8%	\$0	0.0%	\$1,143,853	12.4%
4. ODOT NEPA Document	\$300,000	\$228,510	2.5%	\$0	0.0%	\$71,490	0.8%
Total:	\$9,190,000	\$7,000,000	76.2%	\$0	0.0%	\$2,190,000	23.8%

<sup>9</sup> Map of corridor and all census tracts is included in [Appendix 2 - Census Tract Map](#).

<sup>10</sup> Map of corridor and historically disadvantaged communities is included in [Appendix 2 - Historically Disadvantaged Communities Map](#).

<sup>11</sup> Map of corridor and opportunity zones is included in [Appendix 2 - Opportunity Zones Map](#).

<sup>12</sup> Map of corridor and areas of persistent poverty is included in [Appendix 2 - Persistent Poverty Areas Map](#).

#### IV. Merit Criteria

##### A. Safety

There are two distinct sets of safety concerns located within the Williams Road Corridor. The first set of safety concerns stem from the roadway itself, and how the roadway facilities impact motor vehicles, transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists. The second set of safety concerns stem from the two at-grade rail crossings that are less than 250 feet apart, and how these crossings impact corridor users.

- I. This project will study significant roadway safety concerns, including a fatality rate that is 6 times the general MPO fatality rate and 3 times the general MPO serious injury rate.

Compared to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) area, the Williams Road corridor exhibits a significantly higher fatality rate (6x) and serious injury rate (3x). This is based on ADT data from the mid-point of the 2016-2020 crash data period (2018). This data is shown in the table in **Figure 6**. The corridor between High Street / US23 and Hamilton Road / SR317 was identified as a High Injury Corridor in MORPC's 2019 Central Ohio Transportation Safety Plan; and portions of the corridor were also identified on Columbus' High Injury Network.

Figure 6 - Federal Performance Measures Comparison (2018)

Measure	MPO Area	Williams Road
Fatality Rate per 100 Million Vehicle Miles Travelled (MVMT)	.84	5.03
Serious Injury Rate per 100 MVMT	6.01	25.16
Number of Fatalities*	110	1
Number of Serious Injuries*	849	4
Number of Non-Motorized Fatalities and Serious Injuries*	148	1

\*5-year rolling averages

The majority of the Williams Road corridor today is a curb-less cross-section with no dedicated facilities for pedestrians or bicyclists. A short segment of the corridor (less than a half-mile) near the intersection with Alum Creek Drive has sidewalks that were installed as part of a recent improvement project on the approaches to that intersection. Pedestrian and bicycle related crashes along Williams Road accounted for only about 3% of all crashes, but approximately 16% of all fatal and serious injuries that were reported during this time period. This represents a fatal and serious injury (FSI) rate of more than 30%, which is significantly higher than the rate for Central Ohio (around 17%).<sup>13</sup> Williams Road was also identified as a high-stress corridor for bicyclists (Level of Traffic Stress 4) in the 2020-2050 Central Ohio Active Transportation Plan.<sup>14</sup> There have been two fatalities near intersections with Williams Road since the start of 2022: there was a fatal accident on Williams Road near its intersection with Groveport Road,<sup>15</sup> and there was a fatal accident on High Street just north of its intersection with Williams Road.<sup>16</sup>

Crash data for the Williams Road corridor was analyzed for the most recent 5-year time period available: 2016-2020. During this time period, 559 crashes were reported along the corridor. The

<sup>13</sup> "Transportation Safety," MORPC, last accessed April 12, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/safety>.

<sup>14</sup> "Active Transportation Plan," MORPC, last accessed April 12, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/atp>.

<sup>15</sup> "1 person killed in southeast Columbus crash," ABC 6, January 12, 2022, <https://abc6onyourside.com/news/local/fatal-crash-williams-road-southeast-columbus-1-12-2022>.

<sup>16</sup> "Police: 1 dead after crashing into south Columbus utility pole," 10 WBNS, March 31, 2022, <https://www.10tv.com/article/news/local/police-1-dead-after-crashing-south-columbus-utility-pole/530-b3e5d46d-8448-4dc3-b4ee-95a7de1f6d64>.



majority (63.5%) of these reported crashes resulted in property damage only (PDO), however at least one person was injured in 36.5% of crashes. This includes 5 individuals who were fatally injured and 26 who suffered serious injuries. Injury crashes along this corridor were more frequent than for similar corridors throughout the state of Ohio during the same time period. The statewide average for PDO crashes on similar corridors is 73.4%.

Figure 7 - Williams Road Crashes by Type and Severity 2016-2020

Crash Type	Injury Level						Total %
	Fatal	Serious Injury Suspected	Minor Injury Suspected	Injury Possible	PDO/No Injury	Grand Total	
Rear End	0	1	22	23	128	174	31.1%
Angle	0	3	32	19	71	125	22.4%
Left Turn	0	5	17	9	29	60	10.7%
Fixed Object	2	3	9	5	34	53	9.5%
Sideswipe - Passing	0	0	4	9	33	46	8.2%
Right Turn	1	1	3	3	20	28	5.0%
Head On	1	3	3	5	6	18	3.2%
Backing	0	0	1	0	15	16	2.9%
Pedestrian	0	3	2	4	1	10	1.8%
Parked Vehicle	0	1	1	1	6	9	1.6%
Pedalcycles	0	2	2	1	1	6	1.1%
Other Non-Collision	0	0	1	0	4	5	0.9%
Animal	0	0	0	0	5	5	0.9%
Unknown	0	0	1	0	2	3	0.5%
Sideswipe - Meeting	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.2%
Grand Total	5	22	98	79	355	559	

As shown in **Figure 7**, rear end and angle crashes were the two most prevalent crash types along the corridor during this time period. Together they accounted for more than 50% of all crashes. Rear end crashes on a primarily two-lane corridor such as Williams Road can often be attributed to a lack of dedicated lanes for turning movements. These crashes are often a result of one motorist stopping to make a turn, and a second motorist following behind not stopping in time. Widening Williams Road to accommodate a left-turn lane where necessary will help to mitigate this crash type. Installing a two-way left turn lane (TWLTL) on a two-lane road has a Crash Modification Factor (CMF) of 0.613 for rear end crashes, 0.797 for all crash types, and 0.739 for all fatal, serious injury, and minor injury crashes.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "Safety Evaluation of Installing Center Two-Way Left-Turn Lanes on Two-Lane Roads," Crash Modification Factors Clearinghouse, last accessed April 6, 2022, [http://www.cmfclearinghouse.org/study\\_detail.cfm?stid=141](http://www.cmfclearinghouse.org/study_detail.cfm?stid=141)

According to the Bikeway Selection Guide released by FHWA in 2019, the most appropriate bicycle facility for this corridor is a separated bike lane or shared use path.<sup>18</sup> A shared use path will provide needed accommodations for people walking and bicycling and will require less right-of-way than separate facilities for each user type. Walkways such as shared use paths have been identified by FHWA as a Proven Safety Countermeasure for pedestrians, resulting in a 65-89% reduction in pedestrian-involved crashes for corridors without such facilities.<sup>19</sup>

**2. This project will identify a plan to separate two at-grade rail crossings that are in the top 15 percent most hazardous crossings in Ohio.**

The at-grade rail crossings on Williams Road present their own set of safety challenges that this planning project will help address. There are two at-grade rail crossings less than 250 feet apart. According to data from the Ohio Rail Development Commission, the eastern crossing (481445B) is owned by Norfolk Southern, and it has a current hazard ranking of #577 out of 5,700 crossings in Ohio.<sup>20</sup> Its Safety Hazard Score from the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) is 3.6 out of 5.<sup>21</sup> The western crossing (228919S) is owned by CSX, and it has a current hazard ranking of #850 out of 5,700. Its Safety Hazard Score from PUCO is 3.49.<sup>22</sup> Complicating the hazard is the frequency and length of delays at these crossings for Williams Road travelers. Additional information provided by the ORDC indicates that Norfolk Southern's crossing (481445B) had 123 reported instances of stopped trains in 2021, with only 25 (20.33%) of these delays lasting less than 30 minutes duration; and that CSX's crossing (228919S) had 26 reported instance times in 2021, with only 6 (23.08%) lasting less than 30 minutes duration.<sup>23</sup> These frequent and unpredictable delays create additional unsafe conditions as motorists will make U-turns and execute other unsafe maneuvers in an effort to avoid being stuck waiting for a stopped train. Grade-separating these two crossings will have a significant, positive safety impact.



*Figure 8 - Car executing illegal U-turn to get out of stopped traffic due to train blocking the crossing.*

**B. Environmental Sustainability**

The Williams Road corridor plan will help Columbus and its partners plan corridor improvements that (1) support the City of Columbus' Climate Action Plan, (2) incorporate a strong environmental justice process, (3) examine the feasibility of demand management strategies, (4) improve corridor resiliency, (5) minimize adverse environmental impacts and encourages recycling, and (6) encourage energy efficiency and mode shift.

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<sup>18</sup> "Bikeway Selection Guide," Federal Highway Administration, last accessed April 6, 2022, [https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/tools\\_solve/docs/fhwasa18077.pdf](https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/tools_solve/docs/fhwasa18077.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> "Walkways," Proven Safety Countermeasures, FHWA, last accessed April 6, 2022, <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/walkways.cfm>.

<sup>20</sup> ORDC information provided by email included in [Appendix 4 - ORDC Information](#).

<sup>21</sup> According to information provided by ORDC, PUCO's safety scores range from 0 to 5, with 5 being the highest importance. Please see ORDC email provided in [Appendix 4 - ORDC Information](#).

<sup>22</sup> Please see ORDC email provided in [Appendix 4 - ORDC Information](#).

<sup>23</sup> Please see ORDC email provided in [Appendix 4 - ORDC Information](#).

### **I. This projects supports the City of Columbus' Climate Action Plan.**

Columbus recently released its first Climate Action Plan (CAP).<sup>24</sup> The CAP commits to a 45% greenhouse gas emissions reduction by 2030, and a 100% greenhouse gas emissions reduction by 2050. The Williams Road project will help advance several key goals from the CAP, including: (1) Goal 5.3 – increasing equitable access to green space;<sup>25</sup> (2) Goal 11.4 - support active transportation infrastructure;<sup>26</sup> and (3) Goal 6.2 - reduce urban heat with tree canopy cover.<sup>27</sup>

The project supports the CAP's goal to increasing equitable access to green space by providing improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the Williams Road corridor. There are two parks on Williams Road: Heer Park, at the western terminus of Williams Road; and Three Creeks Metro Park, towards the eastern terminus of Williams Road. There are also four parks within a mile buffer around the Williams Road corridor: Scioto Southland Park, Stockbridge Park, Williams Creek Park, and Elk Run Park. Both Heer Park and Scioto Southland Park are located in a census tract designated as an areas of persistent poverty by USDOT.<sup>28</sup> The planned bicycle and pedestrian facilities will allow residents throughout the corridor to access these parks. The improved corridor facilities will also allow residents access to major regional trails that provide access to additional parks throughout Columbus and the region. Williams Road currently intersects the Alum Creek Trail in Three Creeks Metro Park; and Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks is working with MORPC to extend the Scioto Trail south from the Scioto Audubon Metro Park to Heer Park in South Columbus.<sup>29</sup> The Central Ohio Greenways trail vision also includes an extension of the Big Walnut Trail south to Williams Road and beyond. While construction timeframes have not been established, the planned connections will significantly improve access to greenspace and parkland not only east-west on Williams Road, but also north-south along the Scioto River, Alum Creek, and Big Walnut Creek.<sup>30</sup>

The project also supports the Climate Action Plan's goal to support active transportation infrastructure within one mile of mass transit. Williams Road is an east-west corridor that intersects multiple roads with north-south transit lines: High Street, Parsons Avenue, and Alum Creek Drive. The Central Ohio Transit Authority's (COTA's) Line 8 serves both High Street and Parsons Avenue; and COTA's Lines 4 and 22 serve Alum Creek Drive; Parsons Avenue – COTA Line 8; Alum Creek Drive – COTA Lines 4 and 22. As shown on the bus line and stop map provided in [Appendix 5 - COTA Lines and Stops Map](#), all three streets have residential communities and/or employment destinations that will benefit from improved active transportation infrastructure.

The project also supports the CAP's goal to reduce urban heat with tree canopy cover. As part of Executive Order 2015-01,<sup>31</sup> Columbus has committed to preserving street trees when possible, and planting new street trees as part of all of its street reconstruction projects. This is particularly significant

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<sup>24</sup> "City of Columbus releases first-ever climate action plan," News Releases, City of Columbus, accessed March 16, 2022, <https://www.columbus.gov/Templates/Detail.aspx?id=2147522721>. Additional information on the Columbus Climate Action Plan can be found at <https://www.columbus.gov/sustainable/cap/>, and the full Columbus Climate Action Plan is available for download at <https://www.columbus.gov/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147522706>.

<sup>25</sup> See Columbus Climate Action Plan, page 60.

<sup>26</sup> See Columbus Climate Action Plan, page 89.

<sup>27</sup> See Columbus Climate Action Plan, page 64.

<sup>28</sup> Map showing park and greenway locations is provided in [Appendix 5 - Corridor Parks and Greenways Map](#).

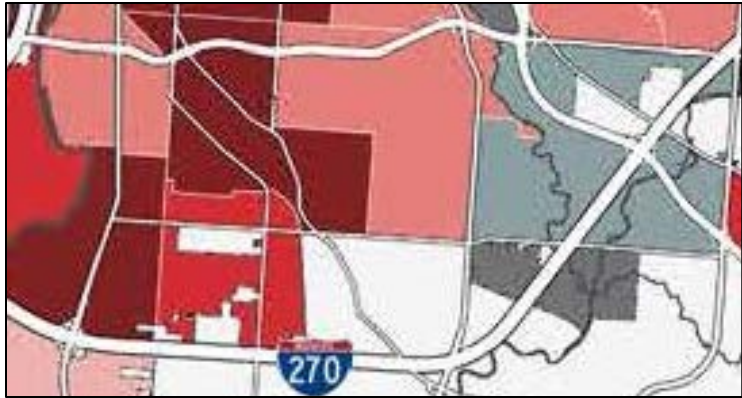
<sup>29</sup> For information on Metro Parks' partnership with MORPC to extend the Scioto Trail, please see "Technical Assistance Program," Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, last accessed April 8, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/program-service/technical-assistance-program/>.

<sup>30</sup> Please [Appendix 5 - Corridor Parks and Greenways Map](#).

<sup>31</sup> "Executive Order 2015-01 Tree Protection and Mitigation," Human Resources Department, City of Columbus, last accessed April 1, 2022, <https://staging.columbus.gov/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=85008>



because the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department has identified Williams Road, rest of Alum Creek Drive, as an area of the city that has a medium to high social equity index and low canopy percentage. A map comparing the canopy percentage and social equity index (shown in **Figure 9**) was developed as part of the Columbus Urban Forestry Master Plan.<sup>32</sup> The new trees that will be planted as Williams Road is reconstructed will (1) meet a significant need identified in the urban forestry master plan, and (2) support a the CAP's goal to increase tree canopy cover.



*Figure 9 - Urban forestry master plan social equity factors for the Williams Road corridor. The darker the red, the lower the canopy percentage and higher social equity index. Map also available online (see footnote below).*

In addition to these specific action items, the project will commit to further reviewing the CAP to study the feasibility of including other goals and benchmarks throughout the project planning and design process. These goals and benchmarks will include, but are not limited to, setting walkability goals, charging stations within the corridor, and mobility hubs.

**2. The Williams Road project is able to use the planning and design process to incorporate a strong environmental justice process and studying the feasibility project is an opportunity to commit to a strong environmental justice process**

Because planning and design for the project has not formally commenced, the project has not yet begun a formal environmental justice review. However, the project corridor includes multiple census tracts that have been designated either an area of persistent poverty or a historically disadvantaged community. The project will use tools like EJSCREEN to minimize adverse impacts. The project will also look to incorporate other equity initiatives that are currently being developed as part of the region's LinkUS initiative to help minimize any adverse impacts. The project will also minimize adverse impacts by actively engaging the surrounding community and stakeholders in the planning and design process. The community has voiced its concerns about the roadway over the years, and Columbus will use the relationships already established through these comments and the local area commission to provide additional community input and engagement.

**3. The project will explore the feasibility of using demand management strategies to reduce corridor congestion.**

The project will also study the feasibility of demand management strategies to reduce congestion within the corridor. The project will not add additional travel lanes to Williams Road due to right of way challenges along much of the corridor. Finding ways to incorporate demand management strategies will help ensure that one travel lane in each direction will be sufficient to handle current use and the area's projected growth. The planning process will explore the feasibility of connecting all the corridor's signals into the Columbus Traffic Signal System, and expand the existing freight signal priority system along the Williams Road corridor. This technology will reduce truck idling along the corridor and reduce emissions and congestion by allowing traffic to move more

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<sup>32</sup> "Columbus Urban Forestry Master Plan: Prioritizing Social Equity Factors," Columbus Recreation and Parks Department, accessed March 17, 2022, [https://www.columbusufmp.org/uploads/2/6/0/6/26062495/columbus\\_ufmp\\_final\\_low\\_res.pdf](https://www.columbusufmp.org/uploads/2/6/0/6/26062495/columbus_ufmp_final_low_res.pdf), p. XIII.

efficiently through the corridor. Please see Section IV(H)(1)(b) for additional information on this technology.

**4. The project will help improve corridor resiliency.**

The Williams Road corridor is one of the few east-west corridors on Columbus' south side that extends all the way between US-23 and US-33. As such, it is an important corridor. However, there are two areas involving rail crossings that create significant travel uncertainty. The first area is a grade-separated rail crossing (228608R) involving a bridge carrying rail tracks over Williams Road. This location has seen frequent flooding in the past and Columbus has installed a pump station at the location to help address the issue. However, as seen in **Figure 10**, it still has permanently installed roadway flooding signs and lights to warn motorists of high water. The planning project will be developing a more effective crossing at this location and explore ways to permanently resolve the flooding concerns. The second area is two at-grade rail crossings that are situated within 250 feet of one another. As Section D(2) discusses in greater detail, these crossings create significant, unpredictable delays that significantly impacts emergency response efforts in the corridor, as documented by the Columbus Division of Fire in [Appendix 5 - CFD Train Delay Concerns](#).<sup>33</sup> Part of



*Figure 10 - Warning signs advising motorists of roadway flooding issues.*

the planning project will address how to separate these crossings and address the response time concerns raised by emergency services. Addressing the flooding and at-grade rail crossing delays will improve the corridor's overall resiliency and its ability to move people, freight, and first responders across the entire corridor, regardless of weather conditions or trains stopped on the rail tracks.

**5. The City of Columbus design and construction standards incorporate designs and materials that minimize adverse environmental impacts; promote the use of recycled materials; and utilize new sealants and concrete intended to reduce air pollutants and carbon emissions.**

Columbus follows design standards that minimize adverse environmental impacts and meet or exceed standards for stormwater quality and quantity. All federal aid projects meet federal and state environmental requirements. Columbus, however, goes above and beyond state and federal requirements in its stormwater management practices. Its Department of Public Utilities requires transportation projects meet all state stormwater quality requirements; but it has also established stormwater quantity requirements that exceed federal and state requirements. The standards also exceed other local stormwater management requirements in Central Ohio, and are among the most rigorous in the state.<sup>34</sup>

Columbus also promotes the use of recycled materials in its projects, especially recycled asphalt pavement (RAP). Contractors can currently use 50% RAP in the base course of asphalt, and 20% in the surface course of asphalt. Columbus is currently piloting 50% RAP in the surface course, but those

<sup>33</sup> See, also, Columbus Division of Fire Memorandum provided in [Appendix 5 - CFD Train Delay Concerns](#).

<sup>34</sup> The 2021 Columbus Stormwater Drainage Manual is available at <https://www.columbus.gov/utilities/publications/2021-Columbus-Stormwater-Drainage-Manual/>

pilots are still being monitored and cannot yet be included as a common bid. It will continue to monitor the data and will increase the overall percentage of RAP in the surface course as it is able based on the data provided in the pilot areas.<sup>35</sup> While the RAP that will be used in the new asphalt for Williams Road may not come from Williams Road's old roadway asphalt, it will have been recycled from other roadways in the region; and the old asphalt from Williams Road will be collected and used as RAP in new asphalt for other roadway projects.

Columbus is also using new materials that will reduce air pollutants and carbon emissions from projects. It is currently piloting the use of a new asphalt sealant, PlusTI A.R.A.-1 Ti, as part of its American Addition Phase 4 project.<sup>36</sup> This sealant removes nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and other airborne pollutants. If the pilot is successful, Columbus intends to significantly expand the use of this sealant as part of its commitment to reduce harmful emissions. In addition to this sealant, concrete suppliers in Central Ohio have shifted from using Portland Cement to Portland Limestone Cement. Using this limestone concrete is projected to reduce carbon emissions for concrete by 10%.<sup>37</sup> The Williams Road project will incorporate the limestone concrete and, hopefully, the new asphalt sealant.

**6. The planning process will help identify ways to decrease transportation related energy expenditures, incorporate energy efficient components in the final corridor plans, and encourage modal shift.**

MORPC's 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study included an energy study that identified transportation use as one of the most energy intense uses in the area.<sup>38</sup> This project will evaluate multiple ways to reduce this intense level of energy use. First, any capital projects constructed as a result of the corridor planning process will use energy efficient LED lighting for street lights and traffic signals. Second, the planning process is an opportunity to examine the feasibility of extending the freight signal priority system down Williams Road; and this system would allow trucks to traverse the corridor more efficiently and use less fuel stopping and idling. Third, the planning process is also an opportunity to examine the feasibility of deploying electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the corridor; and this could help encourage residents and companies to switch to more energy efficient vehicles. Fourth, the planning process will evaluate the best way to construct multimodal mobility options throughout the corridor; and this will provide residents and employees opportunities to shift to more energy efficient modes. While it is difficult to project what the precise energy savings will be, this project is an opportunity to identify ways to address – and potentially reduce – one of the largest areas of energy use in the Rickenbacker area

**C. Quality of Life**

Developing multimodal options for the Williams Road corridor will significantly improve the quality of life for residents, employees, and others who travel through the corridor. Most of the corridor lacks pedestrian and bicyclist facilities, which is problematic, particularly along the western half of Williams Road. Within the western half of Williams Road (from the Scioto River to Alum Creek Drive), USDOT has identified one Census Tract (CT 88.12) as a historically disadvantaged community, and three census tracts (CTs 88.12, 88.13, and 88.22) as Persistent Poverty Areas. The

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<sup>35</sup> Please see [Appendix 5 - RAP Pilot Presentation](#) for more information about the City's RAP pilot.

<sup>36</sup> Please see [Appendix 5 - PlusTi information](#) for more information about the new asphalt sealant and its environmental benefits.

<sup>37</sup> Please see Feb. 16, 2022 letter from Anderson Concrete Corporation provided in [Appendix 5 - Limestone Concrete Information](#).

<sup>38</sup> "The 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study," Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, last accessed March 30, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/RICKENBACKER-AREA-STUDY-FINAL-PDF-Reduced-Size.pdf>, p. 51.



planning process is an opportunity to serve these communities and others along Williams Road by (1) incorporating an equity analysis into the planning and design process, (2) using these analyses to help guide multimodal investments in the corridor, and (3) using existing equity inclusion programs to ensure an equity-focused project delivery and implementation process.

**I. The City of Columbus, Franklin County Engineer, and Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission are committed to incorporating equity analyses into their development process for all projects, including the Williams Road corridor plan.**

The City of Columbus, the Franklin County Engineer, and MORPC commit to incorporating and supporting an equity impact analysis as part of Williams Road's planning and design process. This analysis is particularly important for ensuring the appropriate multi-modal mobility investments are made through the corridor, particularly in the western half of the corridor which has multiple census tracts that have been identified as either Persistent Poverty Areas and/or Historically Disadvantaged Communities. The corridor planning process will incorporate equity analysis guidance from USDOT, as well as guidance from the Justice40 initiative. Because the planning process has not yet commenced, there is time and opportunity to create an equity analysis process that builds on federal guidance, and efforts already underway at the city, county, and regional levels where Columbus, FCE, and MORPC incorporate it into their project selection and planning process.

As part of its Vision Zero Columbus initiative, Columbus is already using data to identify Communities of Interest (COI), which are block groups where people may have fewer choices about how, when, and where they travel, putting them at higher risk as they travel. Columbus uses a methodology based American Community Survey (ACS) block group data. Its analysis includes data for: (1) minority groups, (2) youth, (3) older adults, (4) poverty, (5) limited English proficiency, (6) zero vehicle households, and (7) persons with disabilities. Using this methodology, it has identified multiple block groups as Communities of Interest within the Williams Road corridor: Census Tract 88.13, BG 1; Census Tract 88.22, BG 1; Census Tract 88.22, BG 2).<sup>39</sup> Engaging residents in Census Tract 88.22 is particularly important due to the high level of zero-vehicle households.

As part of its Antiracism and Equity Program, the Franklin County Engineer's Office has begun to use equity considerations in both its outreach and project development process.<sup>40</sup> As part of this program, the FCEO has adopted a diverse outreach program to share FCEO's story and to search for areas where it can make positive contributions to the communities of Franklin County in an impactful and meaningful manner.<sup>41</sup> It has committed to focusing on projects that have first mile/last mile elements in areas of Franklin County that need to provide transportation systems in underrepresented communities, or otherwise, via the expertise of the Franklin County Engineer's Complete Streets Coordinator.

MORPC has long been a leader in Environmental Justice analysis with regard to their Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program. These techniques can be applied to corridors like Williams Road. Furthermore, MORPC has also included an equity analysis as part of its selection criteria for projects awarded the federal formula funding that is allocated by MORPC as part of its metropolitan planning organization process. It is currently updating the policies for managing this funding, including the equity component. Applicants are required to provide a description of how the project helps address the unmet needs of the population groups – with a focus

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<sup>39</sup> Map showing COI locations provided in [Appendix 6 - VZ Communities of Interest Map](#).

<sup>40</sup> See, generally, "Franklin County Engineer's Antiracism & Equity Program: June 30, 2020," Franklin County Engineer's Office. Provided in [Appendix 6 - FCE Antiracism and Equity Program](#).

<sup>41</sup> "Franklin County Engineer's Antiracism & Equity Program: June 30, 2020," p. 8. Provided in [Appendix 6 - FCE EBE Program](#).

on minority, low-income, elderly, disabled, or other historically underrepresented population groups – within the project area. The goal is to ensure a project in a specific community benefits that community, and help shift the benefits from commuters using the corridor to the community where the project is located.<sup>42</sup>

The planning process is an opportunity for Columbus, Franklin County Engineer, MORPC, and their partners to build upon the equity analyses they already complete by incorporating any additional relevant guidance from USDOT and the Justice40 initiative.

**2. The City of Columbus, Franklin County Engineer, and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission recognize the needs for significant multimodal mobility investments through the entire Williams Road corridor.**

A significant portion of the planning process will be focused on planning multimodal mobility investments throughout the corridor to connect the residents to transit, recreational, employment, and commercial opportunities that are within the corridor, as well as beyond it. These investments will include new multi-modal opportunities for three Transportation Disadvantaged Census Tracts in Franklin County: Census Tract 88.12, Census Tract 88.13, and Census Tract 88.22. 2020 ACS 5-year estimates indicate that Census Tract 88.22 has a no-vehicle household rate of 26.6%. This is significantly higher than Ohio's 7.8% average, Franklin County's 7.2% average, and Columbus' 8.5% average overall. While the planning process has not yet commenced, Columbus, the Franklin County Engineer, MORPC, and their partners anticipate separated facilities on both sides of the roadway, with a shared use path on one side and sidewalk or shared use path on the other side. Existing facilities are extremely limited, and limited to approximately 1,200' in either direction of the intersection of Williams Road and Alum Creek Drive. Columbus is planning on constructing a sidewalk on the north side of Williams Road, between High Street and Parsons Avenue. However, this project is limited to pedestrian facilities on one side of the road, and it does not extend towards the employment opportunities in the corridor's center.<sup>43</sup>

Adding bicycle and pedestrian facilities will provide multi-modal mobility options throughout the corridor. As mentioned in the project history section, MORPC included this recommendation in its 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study, and the improvements have been included on the current Metropolitan Transportation Plan. These recommendations and investments are particularly important because multi-modal mobility options will improve community placemaking, as well as improve access to ODW Logistics, a major employer located on the south side of Census Tract 88.13, as well as other employment centers in Census Tract 88.12. The project will also help provide multimodal options to residents living in Census Tract 88.12 and Census Tract 88.22, and help connect them to recreational facilities in the corridor and beyond via the planned Central Ohio Greenway trail, as well as transit stops on High Street, Parsons Avenue, and Alum Creek Drive. The transit connection is important for providing residents and employees meaningful commuting opportunities throughout the city. The recreational connection is important because access to greenspace is important for health and quality of life reasons. There are two parks on Williams Road: Heer Park, at the western terminus of Williams Road; and Three Creeks Metro Park, towards the eastern terminus of Williams Road. There are also four parks within a mile of Williams Road: Scioto Southland Park, Stockbridge Park, Williams Creek Park, and Elk Run Park. Both Heer Park and Scioto Southland Park are located in a census tract designated an areas of persistent poverty by USDOT. The planned bicycle and pedestrian

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<sup>42</sup> "Policies for Managing MORPC-Attributable Funds," MORPC, February 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Draft-Policies-for-Managing-MORPC-Attributable-Funds.pdf>, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Maps of existing facilities and the planned sidewalk project are provided in [Appendix 6 - Existing Facilities and Planned Sidewalk](#).

facilities will allow residents, particularly those in areas of persistent poverty or historically disadvantaged communities, with access to these parks. It will also provide access to the Central Ohio Greenways trail network, which includes the existing trail Alum Creek at Three Creeks Metro Park and a planned trail extensions along Big Walnut Creek at Three Creeks Metro Park and down the Scioto River to Heer Park. The Scioto Trail extension will ultimately provide residents with trail access north to Lou Berliner Sports Park, Scioto Audubon Metro Park, and Downtown Columbus.<sup>44</sup>

These multi-modal mobility investments are consistent with MORPC's recommendations in its 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study. This study revealed significant Housing & Transportation Cost Burdens, with a combined cost burden ranging from 45% to 89% of income in each census block group within the Williams Road corridor census tracts.<sup>45</sup> Because of the high combined burden throughout the corridor, offering effective multimodal transportation options becomes one way to significantly reduce this burden. This study identified the need for multimodal options along the corridor when it identified Williams Road as a high stress corridor for pedestrians and bicyclists.<sup>46</sup> The study proposed creating facilities for a low-stress bicycle-pedestrian route along Williams Road.<sup>47</sup> These low-stress pedestrian and bicycle routes provide immediate connections as well as essential first mile/last mile connections for transit users. MORPC's Rickenbacker Study also recommended improving transit options – particularly the frequency of fixed route services. Improving the first mile/last mile connections along Williams Road will help more people in the area benefit from transit, and significantly improve their employment opportunities.

Investing in multi-modal mobility will be an essential factor in the success of any corridor improvements and in the region's ability to lower the combined housing and transportation burden for people living within the corridor. The corridor is an important freight corridor, and the roadway needs to be improved for safety reasons. But it does not need to be widened in terms of additional through-lanes in order to make a significant, positive impact on the quality of life for resident and others who rely upon the corridor for travel and access. Making a significant multi-modal investment will allow Williams Road to carry freight and vehicles more safely and efficiently, while also allowing the corridor to become a low-stress bicycle and pedestrian route.

### **3. The City of Columbus, Franklin County Engineer, and Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission have adopted Equity Inclusion Programs.**

Columbus, the Franklin County Engineer, and MORPC have all adopted equity and inclusion programs/plans or has otherwise instituted equity-focused policies related to project procurement, material sourcing, construction, inspection, hiring, or other activities designed to ensure racial equity in the overall project delivery and implementation.

Columbus is committed to ensuring meaningful opportunities for Minority-Owned and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MBE/WBEs) and Small Local Business Enterprises (SLBEs) to participate in its construction, professional services, and goods and services contracts. In implementing and administering this Supplier Diversity Policy, Columbus will take all necessary and

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<sup>44</sup> Map of greenspace and parks provided in [Appendix 5 - Corridor Parks and Greenways Map](#). See also, "Central Ohio Greenways Interactive Map," Central Ohio Greenways, last accessed March 31, 2022, <http://centralohiogreenways.com/interactive-map/>.

<sup>45</sup> "The 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study," Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, last accessed March 30, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/RICKENBACKER-AREA-STUDY-FINAL-PDF-Reduced-Size.pdf>, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> "The 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study," Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, last accessed March 30, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/RICKENBACKER-AREA-STUDY-FINAL-PDF-Reduced-Size.pdf>, p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> "The 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study," p. 37.



reasonable steps to ensure that business enterprises certified as MBE/WBEs shall have an equal opportunity to participate in city contracts. It is the policy of Columbus to create contracting opportunities for MBE/WBEs and SLBEs in its construction, professional services, and goods and services contracts. The MBE/WBE and SLBE Programs shall ensure that its contracts are awarded in a manner that promotes the economic inclusion of MBE/WBEs and SLBEs. As part of this Supplier Diversity Policy commitment, Columbus will make every effort to achieve the following objectives:

- Ensure nondiscrimination in the award and administration of contracts
- Create a level playing field on which diverse suppliers can compete fairly for contracts
- Ensure that the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's MBE/WBE and SLBE Programs are narrowly tailored in accordance with applicable law
- Ensure that only business entities that fully meet eligibility standards are permitted to participate as diverse suppliers
- Help remove barriers to the participation of diverse suppliers in contracts
- Provide opportunity for SLBEs located in Columbus to participate in a sheltered market as prime contractors on city construction, professional services, and goods and services contracts

Implementation and administration of the MBE/WBE Program is afforded the same priority as compliance with all other legal obligations incurred by Columbus. The Mayor, Chief Diversity Officer of the City and Director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the Director of Finance and Management are delegated the responsibility to ensure inclusion of MBE/WBEs in the City's procurement process. Additionally, City Department Directors and their staff share in the responsibility for making the City's Supplier Diversity Policy a success. The city also offers free gender and race-based certification to make it easier to identify those ready, willing, and able to perform on city contracts.<sup>48</sup> Columbus will also show local preference when awarding construction contracts.<sup>49</sup>

The Franklin County Engineer also has an Equitable Business Enterprise (EBE) Program for Locally Funded Projects.<sup>50</sup> This program has three primary goals: (1) foster nondiscrimination in the award of and administration of FCE locally funded projects; (2) help remove barriers to the participation of disadvantaged businesses in FCE locally funded projects; and (3) assist the development of firms that can compete successfully in the marketplace outside of the FCE EBE program. The FCE has established a minimum ten percent (10%) EBE participation goal for engineering and design related services agreements that have sub-consulting opportunities, as deemed appropriate by the FCE.<sup>51</sup>

MORPC also has a well-established diversity and inclusion program, in addition to its Title VI plan. Its Title VI plan is publicly available on its website.<sup>52</sup> It also has adopted a Diversity and Inclusion work plan, which was partially developed based on the recommendations of a diversity in local government working group.<sup>53</sup> MORPC has also published a statement on racism. While Columbus and Franklin County will be the primary project sponsors for the construction of the corridor

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<sup>48</sup> "Minority, Women, and Veteran Business Enterprise Certification: Policy" City of Columbus, last accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.columbus.gov/odi/supplier-diversity/Business-Certifications/>

<sup>49</sup> See Columbus City Code § 329.212

<sup>50</sup> See, generally, "Franklin County Engineer's Equitable Business Enterprise Program for Locally Funded Projects," Franklin County Engineer's Office. Provided in [Appendix 6 - FCE EBE Program](#).

<sup>51</sup> See, generally, "Franklin County Engineer's Equitable Business Enterprise Program for Locally Funded Projects," p. 5. Provided in [Appendix 6 - FCE EBE Program](#).

<sup>52</sup> "Title VI," MORPC, last accessed April 12, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/title-vi/>.

<sup>53</sup> "Recommendations of the Diversity in Local Government Working Group," MORPC, last accessed April 12, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/30-18-Diversity-Inclusion-Recommendations.pdf>.

improvements, MORPC will remain a valued partner and supporter of these efforts; and, in some cases, potentially a financial participant through its attributable funding process. Its diversity and inclusion policies will help ensure participation at all stages of the planning and construction process.

#### **D. Mobility and Community Connectivity.**

Developing a plan for the entire Williams Road corridor is difficult due to the fact the corridor includes multiple, independent political subdivisions and serves a wide variety of land uses. Approaching the planning process as a collaborative process will help bring all subdivisions, stakeholders, and residents together to develop a plan that addresses the entire corridor. This approach will be very important for ensuring the corridor plan is able to improve corridor mobility and community connectedness. There is a significant opportunity to use the planning process to improve (1) the corridor's walkability and accessibility, and (2) improve the movement of people, EMS, and freight through the corridor by separating two at-grade rail crossings that create significant obstacles.

##### **I. The corridor plan will identify how to add the Williams Road corridor to the Central Ohio Greenways trail network – both planned and existing – and how to generally improve corridor walkability and accessibility.**

Addressing the lack of pedestrian and bicycle facilities along Williams Road is one of the primary goals for developing a Williams Road corridor plan. The current corridor is neither walkable nor accessible. The corridor's current lack of meaningful non-motorized connectivity is recognized by the surrounding community as well as the jurisdictions and regional stakeholders involved along the corridor.

The Central Ohio Greenways has identified the Williams Road corridor as one of its vision trails to connect the Scioto Trail to the west, to the Alum Creek Trail and Big Walnut Trail to the east.<sup>54</sup> This trail will be an ADA accessible shared-used path that will provide bicycle and pedestrian access along Williams Road. While the COG vision for the trail is between the Scioto Trail and the Alum Creek Trail, this project will use the planning process to extend this trail vision along the entire Williams Road corridor. Extending the trail vision will include a pedestrian and bicycle access across I-270, connection to I-270, and access to Hamilton Road. The project also envisions a complimentary bicycle and/or pedestrian facility on the opposite side of Williams Road for most of the corridor. Aside from the section through Three Creeks Metro Park, there are significant residential, commercial, and logistics developments on both sides of Williams Road that will all benefit from a significant investment in multimodal mobility options. The planning process will be used to identify where complimentary facilities are required on both sides, and the most appropriate type of facility for each side.

Providing separated, accessible facilities for pedestrians and bicycles along the corridor will significantly expand non-motorized mobility options as well as transit options. Williams Road intersects multiple north-south transit lines including High Street, Parsons Avenue, and Alum Creek Drive; and there are multiple bus stops at those intersections.<sup>55</sup> Providing east-west facilities along Williams Road will afford residents and employees greater opportunities to safely access and use public transit. Providing these facilities will also help residents and businesses on the corridor connect to a future Southeast Corridor rapid transit route. This corridor is currently part of the region's LinkUS Mobility Initiative.<sup>56</sup> The general route will go from Downtown Columbus to the Rickenbacker

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<sup>54</sup> See, generally, Alum Creek Trail, Big Walnut Trail, Scioto Trail, and Future Trails on "Central Ohio Greenways: Interactive Map," Central Ohio Greenways, last accessed March 31, 2022, <http://centralohiogreenways.com/interactive-map/>.

<sup>55</sup> See [Appendix 5 - COTA Lines and Stops Map](#).

<sup>56</sup> "Corridors" LinkUS Columbus, last accessed March 31, 2022, <https://linkuscolumbus.com/corridors/>.

Airport area, and it will intersect Williams Road. Adding multi-modal options to Williams Road will make this rapid transit corridor accessible to residents, employees, and other travelers throughout the corridor.

The addition of these facilities will also help connect a corridor that has been a historically disjointed corridor in terms of corporate boundaries and land uses. Even though the corridor plan will not shift corporate boundaries along the corridor, it will help create a more collaborative, common vision for the entire corridor. This process, combined with multimodal improvements that are walkable and accessible, will help the communities and businesses throughout the corridor feel more connected with one another.

**2. Separating two at-grade rail crossings will remove a significant barrier to mobility in the corridor, and allow people, first responders, and freight to move more efficiently through the corridor.**

The corridor's two at-grade rail crossings create a significant barrier to corridor mobility that is both significant and unpredictable. The crossings are on Williams Road, and within 250 feet of each other. The eastern crossing (481445B) involves two tracks owned by Norfolk Southern, while the western crossing (228919S) involves one track owned by CSX. According to data provided by the Ohio Rail Development Commission, there have been a significant number of stopped trains at both crossings. Reports for January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021 indicate that there were 123 reported stopped trains on Norfolk Southern's at-grade rail crossing. Of these 123 trains, 25 trains (20.33%) were stopped for thirty minutes or less; 42 trains (34.15%) were stopped for between thirty-one minutes and sixty minutes; and 56 trains (45.53%) were stopped for more than sixty minutes.<sup>57</sup> Reports for January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021 indicate that there were 26 reported stopped trains on CSX's at-grade rail crossing. Of these 26 trains, 6 trains (23.08%) were stopped for thirty minutes or less; 15 trains (57.69%) were stopped for between thirty-one minutes and sixty minutes; and 5 trains (19.23%) were stopped for more than sixty minutes. The at-grade rail crossings create unpredictable barriers that impact emergency response personnel as well as the free flow of freight through the corridor.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 11 - Aerial view showing the two crossings. CSX owns the western crossing, Norfolk Southern owns the eastern crossing.

Separating the at-grade rail crossings will remove a significant barrier to emergency services. The Columbus Division of Fire has provided information describing the difficulty created by the at-grade rail crossings.<sup>59</sup> There are alternative routes that units can take to respond, but those routes can add at least 10-15 minutes to a response. Time is precious when responding to an emergency, and responding 10-15 minutes earlier/later to an emergency can have a significant impact on outcomes. The Division of Fire notes that Hamilton Township also has issues with stopped trains impacting their ability to respond in a timely manner. Developing a plan to separate the crossings will be a

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<sup>57</sup> Please see ORDC email in [Appendix 4 - ORDC Information](#).

<sup>58</sup> Please see ORDC email in [Appendix 4 - ORDC Information](#).

<sup>59</sup> See CFD documentation provided in [Appendix 5 - CFD Train Delay Concerns](#).

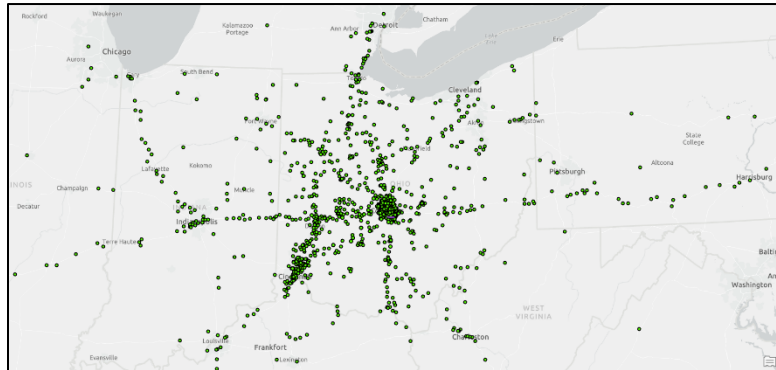


significant step forward in connecting the two sides of Williams Road and allowing emergency personnel to easily access the entire corridor without the need for significant detours.

Separating the at-grade rail crossings should also significantly improve the mobility of freight through the corridor for both (a) truck and (b) rail.

**a. Separating the crossings will remove barriers and improve truck freight mobility.**

Separating the at-grade rail crossings should significantly improve the mobility of truck freight through the corridor by removing a significant, unpredictable barrier and creating an opportunity to deploy additional technology to improve the flow of freight through intersections and traffic signals. The uncertainty created by stopped trains can make the corridor unreliable for freight moving by truck. Separating the crossings will significantly improve the corridor's reliability, and increase freight's ability to move efficiently by truck through the corridor and to destinations throughout the Midwest. Removing the train barriers will also allow the planning process to explore the deployment of a freight signal priority system. As discussed further in the Innovative Technology section, improving Williams Road is an opportunity to extend the current freight signal priority system on Alum Creek Drive from its current terminus to I-270 north to at least Williams Road, as well as east-west on Williams Road. ODW Logistics is already one of the companies making use of the existing corridor on Alum Creek Drive, and they have a major logistics center on Williams Road. Extending the system would be a significant benefit to their operations and the movement of freight through the corridor. It does not make sense, however, to deploy this technology if stopped trains continue to block the road for extended periods of time.



*Figure 12 - Origin/Destination analysis of trucks moving through the Williams Road corridor.*

**b. Separating the crossings will improve rail freight mobility.**

Separating the crossings should also improve the efficiency of rail operations at CSX's Parsons Yard and NS' Watkins Yard. Both companies will no longer be limited by when or how long trains were blocking the at-grade rail crossings, and they could each plan the freight and yard operations with a focus on maximizing their own efficiency and not worrying about blocking the at-grade rail crossings. This should improve the mobility of freight through these yards, which will have a regional and national impact. Watkins Yard helps handle freight moving through Central Ohio and Norfolk Southern's Rickenbacker Intermodal Terminal; while Parsons Yard helps freight moving through Central Ohio and CSX's Columbus Ohio Intermodal Terminal. Watkins Yard is particularly close to the at-grade rail crossing, and tracks start splitting less than 250 feet north of the crossing. Separating the crossing will



*Figure 13 - The two at-grade rail crossings with XPO Logistics (left) and ODW Logistics (right) in background.*

allow rail operations to focus on rail freight efficiencies without having to worry about blocking the roadway.

### **E. Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity**

The Williams Road corridor is an important corridor that carries a significant amount of freight and local traffic. The corridor serves a number of businesses and logistics centers, and reliable system operations is an important factor in supporting the current businesses and attracting redevelopment in the area. However, congestion and unreliable system operations hinder economic competitiveness and opportunities. Developing a consistent corridor plan will (1) improve system operations within the corridor, (2) provide timely access to employment centers/job opportunities at logistics centers within the corridor and improve transit access for commuters, (3) improve economic productivity, (4) create opportunities for regional tourism by adding a regional trail connection, and (5) support affordable housing and transportation needs by providing multimodal travel options.

#### **1. This planning project will improve system operations by focusing on areas of congestion and travel unreliability within the corridor.**

Congestion and at-grade rail crossings create significant delay and travel time unreliability on Williams Road. MORPC's 2018 Rickenbacker Study showed significant AM and PM peak hour congestion in the corridor.<sup>60</sup> This congestion negatively impacts system operations in the corridor. The corridor plan is an opportunity to look at the entire corridor and how the corridor is used in a holistic way to develop an approach to manage and improve system operations without assuming additional lane capacity is required. The corridor plan is also an opportunity to identify the best way to address the stopped trains on Williams Road that are causing significant but unpredictable delays. As already discussed in Section D(2), these crossings create significant delay and uncertainty. This creates unreliable travel time for both freight and businesses that must use the corridor. This unreliability makes it hard to accurately schedule or plan shipments or business activities, as it creates additional business costs associated with moving freight through the corridor or operating a business in the corridor. Separating the at-grade rail crossings will significantly improve system operations and lower operating costs for businesses. Improving the movement of freight through the corridor will also make it easier for Columbus to potentially pursue an intermodal corridor designation for the Williams Road corridor. Addressing system operations may also create opportunities to extend transit east-west on Williams Roads. The corridor is currently too unreliable for transit. But improving the corridor's reliability and predictability would provide COTA with an opportunity to consider potential transit lines moving east-west on Williams Road.

#### **2. Improving Williams Road's reliability and system operations will provide timely access to employment centers/job opportunities at logistics centers within the corridor, as well as employment opportunities beyond the corridor.**

Improving Williams Road's reliability and system operations will provide timely access to employment centers/job opportunities within the corridor, as well as employment opportunities beyond the corridor. There are a significant number of employers and job opportunities on Williams Road, particularly between Lockbourne Road and Alum Creek Drive. However, this is also the same section of Williams Road with the at-grade rail crossings that can create significant travel time delay and unreliability. Separating the crossings will provide timely and reliable motor vehicle access to the employment centers and job opportunities in this area. Constructing separated bicycle and pedestrian facilities in this corridor will further expand timely access to these locations for individuals who must

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<sup>60</sup> "The 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study," Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, last accessed March 30, 2022, <https://www.morpc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/RICKENBACKER-AREA-STUDY-FINAL-PDF-Reduced-Size.pdf>, pp. 39-40.

rely upon transit, walking, or bicycling in order to commute to work. Constructing the separated bicycle and pedestrian facilities will also expand access to employment opportunities beyond the corridor by providing essential first mile/last mile connections to transit options. Providing these connections will help create timely access to employment centers outside the corridor.

**3. Improving Williams Road's reliability and system operations will also improve short term and long term economic productivity within the corridor**

Improving reliability and system operations will also improve business productivity within the Williams Road corridor. Right now, there are approximately 584 businesses employing approximately 10,706 people within a mile of the Williams Road corridor.<sup>61</sup> Approximately 10% of all employees in this area work in transportation businesses. Addressing travel delays and uncertainty created by congestion and stopped trains ultimately will improve productivity within the corridor by allowing all businesses within the corridor – particularly transportation businesses – to plan routes and deliveries more efficiently. It will also encourage existing businesses to remain in the corridor by addressing current concerns regarding reliability, system operations, and access.



*Figure 14 - Drivers waiting outside their vehicles for the crossing to clear.*

The corridor improvements could encourage additional commercial redevelopment, particularly between Groveport Road and Alum Creek Drive. Industrial vacancy is extremely low within Columbus – approximately 1.5% – and the costs for this space continues to rise. The high demand for industrial space, combined with continued rising costs for the space is creating strong incentives for companies to consider redeveloping existing sites. Williams Road offers businesses a unique opportunity to lease existing space not readily available elsewhere in the city – industrial vacancy rates are slightly higher than the city average, at approximately 3.3% – or redevelop some of the corridor's underutilized. In either scenario, improving the corridor's safety and system reliability will be an additional incentive for businesses who are looking to operate in a corridor that can support their logistical needs in addition to being easily accessible to employees, regardless of travel mode.

**4. Improving system reliability and connectivity will create additional opportunities for local tourism.**

Improving the Williams Road corridor could also help support local tourism, particularly within the City of Obetz. Once the pedestrian and bicycle facilities are complete, Williams Road will become an essential east-west connection for the Central Ohio Greenways network, linking the Scioto Trail, Alum Creek Trail, and Big Walnut Trail. This regional trail connection will be an opportunity to

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<sup>61</sup> Business and employment information, along with map showing relevant area for which the data was collected, is provided in [Appendix 7 - Business and Jobs Information](#).



access local businesses and destinations within the corridor, particularly Fortress Obetz and the former Columbus Motor Speedway. Fortress Obetz is a lacrosse stadium that hosts multiple events throughout the year, and it is situated next to the racetrack.<sup>62</sup> A variety of events are held here throughout the year, and improving multimodal options on Williams Road will make it easier for trail users to also access these events, in addition to other areas along the corridor.

**5. Extending multimodal travel options through the corridor will support the development of affordable housing and transportation options.**

Creating a corridor plan that includes multimodal travel options will create opportunities for affordable housing and transportation options on Williams Road. The ability to develop affordable housing options on Williams Road is significantly limited by the lack of affordable transportation options. Adding multimodal transportation options throughout the corridor will address this limitation and, hopefully, provide opportunities for developing affordable housing options on Williams Road.

**F. State of Good Repair**

The Williams Road project will restore and modernize key physical infrastructure within the Williams Road corridor. Physical infrastructure within the corridor includes the following: the roadway itself; one bridge carrying railroad traffic over Williams Road; a culvert carrying the roadway; and two bridges carrying the roadway over Alum Creek and Big Walnut Creek. The project may impact the bridge carrying Williams Road across I-270. ODOT is repairing within the next year or two, but it is not replacing the deck during this round of repairs. The Franklin County Engineer has already requested ODOT include space for bicycle and pedestrian facilities on the bridge, and ODOT has expressed its willingness to work with local agencies to identify what can be included if and when the deck is replaced.

The Williams Road corridor project will modernize Williams Road, and incorporate modern safety features in the roadway and intersections. The majority of the corridor consists of one travel lane in either direction, separated by a double yellow line; and a majority of the corridor is uncurbed and lacks bicycle or pedestrian facilities. There is a limited portion of Williams Road that has sidewalks on both sides of the roadway for approximately 1,000 feet west of Alum Creek Drive and 1,200 feet east of Alum Creek Drive. The antiquated roadway characteristics are no longer sufficient to safely carry the number of personal and commercial vehicles that use the road, and they cannot meet the current and projected demand for bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the corridor.

The roadway has significant structural roadway issues that will require a very in-depth rehabilitation strategy that will provide the facility the structure needed to handle the mix of traffic that includes significant truck usage. This route has significant intermodal logistics activity which feeds the economic viability of the area. Due to the structural issues associated with the road the roadway has a ride quality that is poor and outside of the Federal levels of acceptable ride quality which also is a safety concern. The road will need a rehabilitation strategy that not only fixes the distress issues but this will also improve the ride quality of the roadway providing for safer ride for users. City of Columbus staff have reviewed current and projected traffic information and believe that a two to three



Figure 15 - Fortress Obetz and racetrack.

<sup>62</sup> See, generally, Fortress Obetz website, last accessed April 1, 2022, <http://fortressobetz.com/>.

lane section with separated facilities for bicycles and pedestrians should be sufficient to move people and freight through the corridor. The third lane would be a center turn lane in areas where dedicated turn lanes were not sufficient. Although this will need to be confirmed by a feasibility study during the planning process.

The roadway's current at-grade rail crossings are also a legacy of an older, less-travelled roadway. As mentioned in earlier sections, stopped trains are a significant issue on Williams Road that create significant delays and block the flow of vehicles and goods through a key logistics section on the corridor. Modernizing the roadway and separating these crossings will significantly improve the overall transportation network efficiency and reliability by removing the time delay variable created by stopped trains, and it will significantly increase the mobility of both goods and people through the corridor.

The other piece of physical infrastructure in need of modernizing is the bridge (228608R) carrying the CSX railroad lines over Williams Road. Although CSX has reported the bridge has the capacity to safely carry traffic being operated over the bridge,<sup>63</sup> Columbus bridge inspectors are concerned about the overall condition of the bridge, particularly its substructure. In its most recent 2021 inspection of the bridge, the city staff rated the bridge's overall general appraisal as a 3 on a 10 point scale.<sup>64</sup> The report notes significant damage and deterioration to the abutment walls.<sup>65</sup> The bridge's condition will be assessed as part of the proposed project, and it will ultimately be restored and modernized as the corridor plan is implemented.



Figure 16 - Google Street view picture of 228608R. Additional pictures available in the City's inspection report provided in Appendix 8 - Columbus Bridge Inspection Report.

The other pieces of physical infrastructure in the corridor are in relatively good condition. Columbus maintains a culvert carrying the roadway that is in good condition. ODOT is independently planning repairs to its bridge over I-270, with construction starting within two years. Franklin County maintains two bridges carrying the roadway over Alum Creek and Big Walnut Creek that are also in relatively good condition – the Alum Creek Bridge has a general appraisal rating of 8, and the Big Walnut Creek Bridge has a general appraisal rating of 7. However, despite their relative condition, all of these facilities will still need to be evaluated as part of the planning process to determine whether they need to be replaced or modified in order to support the corridor's planned roadway improvements – including separated bicycle and pedestrian features.

The plan to rehabilitate the roadway structure will renew the life of the pavement section allowing for a normal life cycle which will include preventive and corrective maintenance schedules that will extend the roadway to its most optimal life. Not adequately rehabilitating the roadway will ensure a shorter life cycle costing more money, disrupting vehicle flow, and further increasing the cost to fully rehabilitate the roadway exponentially. With Columbus' Asset Management program, the life cycle of the roadway will be significantly improved due to the management of the whole life with

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<sup>63</sup> See CSX inspection report provided in [Appendix 8 - CSX Inspection Report](#).

<sup>64</sup> See City of Columbus inspection report provided in [Appendix 8 - Columbus Bridge Inspection Report](#).

<sup>65</sup> See City of Columbus inspection report provided in [Appendix 8 - Columbus Bridge Inspection Report](#).

considerations for preservation strategies which are predictable, and will keep the roadway in a state of good repair.

Once construction is complete, the facilities will be maintained primarily by Columbus and Franklin County, with ODOT responsible for its bridge over I-270. Updated Maintenance agreements will be executed as needed to clearly establish each entity's roles and responsibilities. These agreements will ensure that all parties understand what funds or services they are obligated to provide. In addition to these formal protections, all entities have significant experience coordinating maintenance and preservation tasks, individually and jointly; and all three entities have established processes and guidelines for maintaining assets. Finally, parties have the funding sufficient for the maintenance and preservation needs: Columbus can draw funds from multiple sources, including its Street and Highways Bond Fund; Franklin County can draw funds from multiple sources, including Franklin County Motor Vehicle Registration and Gas User Fees; and ODOT can draw funds from multiple sources, including its State Surface Transportation Preservation funds.

#### **G. Partnership and Collaboration**

Williams Road offers a unique opportunity for regional partnership and collaboration. The sheer size of the project and its challenges provides multiple opportunities, including: (1) multiple agency collaboration, (2) private stakeholder collaboration, (3) community engagement and equity input, and (4) integration of MBE's and WBE's in the planning and construction process.

##### **I. The Williams Road Multimodal Corridor plan will require significant collaboration by multiple public agencies.**

Developing a successful corridor plan for Williams Road will require significant regional coordination and collaboration. The Williams Road corridor impacts multiple agencies and jurisdictions. The corridor passes through or is immediately adjacent to multiple political subdivisions, including the City of Columbus, the City of Obetz, the City of Groveport, Franklin County, Madison Township, and Hamilton Township. The corridor also passes through the middle Three Creeks Metro Parks, which involves another independent political subdivision – Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks. In addition to these political subdivisions, improvements on the corridor impact three different local school districts, which are also their own independent political subdivisions: Columbus City Schools, Hamilton Local School District, and Groveport Madison School District-Groveport. The project also anticipates close coordination with MORPC, and multiple state agencies.

The project will also be closely coordinated with ODOT and the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC). In addition its regulatory oversight of federally funded projects in Ohio, ODOT also owns and maintains the bridge that carries Williams Road across I-270. Close coordination will be required from a planning perspective to identify what impacts the corridor plan will have on ODOT's bridge and its current lack of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. Columbus also anticipates working closely with ORDC during the planning process to identify the most effective ways to address the corridor's two at-grade rail crossings and one grade-separated rail crossing. Columbus also anticipates ORDC will be a valuable resource when engaging CSX and Norfolk Southern regarding the project's impact on their rail crossings and rail yards.

A consistent corridor plan for Williams Road will be a benefit for all. However, the scale and scope of the corridor's challenges are such that no single agency can pursue a solution on its own. A RAISE planning grant will provide the opportunity and venue for significant regional collaboration among a diverse range of agencies and jurisdictions.



**2. The Williams Road Multimodal Corridor plan will require significant collaboration with private stakeholders, including railroad and logistics companies.**

In addition to collaborating with multiple agencies and political subdivisions, the planning process will also require close collaboration with private stakeholders throughout the corridor, particularly between Lockbourne Road and Alum Creek Drive. This portion of Williams Road includes the three rail crossings, two yards, and numerous commercial businesses. Separating the at-grade rail crossings will directly impact and benefit not just CSX and Norfolk Southern,<sup>66</sup> but also companies such as ODW Logistics, XPO Logistics, and Honeywell. Columbus, the Franklin County Engineer, MORPC, and their partners anticipate closely working with these private stakeholders to develop a corridor plan for a multimodal freight corridor that can reliably move freight, employees, residents, and others regardless of travel mode. Close stakeholder coordination will be expected as part of the corridor planning and design process.

**3. The Williams Road Multimodal Corridor plan will require significant community engagement and equity input to ensure the project removes existing transportation barriers and invests equitably in effective multimodal mobility options and opportunities for the entire corridor.**

All the partners in this project have already received significant feedback from their constituents in the surrounding communities regarding the need for corridor improvements; and they expect to actively involve these community members. Officials from the City of Obetz and the Franklin County Engineer's Office have already shared complaints and concerns they have received; and the City of Columbus has received numerous requests and comments from citizens and the Far South Columbus Area Commission. Area commissions are advisory bodies committed to the preservation, development, and enhancements of local neighborhoods and communities; and the Columbus portions of Williams Road falls within the Far South Columbus Area Commission's boundary.<sup>67</sup> Area commissions have regular meetings to provide opportunities for residents, businesses, and others to share problems, concerns, ideas, and solutions; and city staff often use these meetings as one way to engage the local community in the project planning and implementation process. Columbus expects to actively engage the Far South Columbus Area Commission throughout the corridor planning process. Columbus, the Franklin County Engineer, MORPC, and their partners will also reach out to other community groups in the corridor, and directly to residents.

Directly engaging residents is particularly important to ensure an equity-focused community outreach and public engagement in underserved communities. The western half of Williams Road in Columbus includes one Census Tract (CT 88.12) that USDOT has designated as HDC; three census tracts (CTs 88.12, 88.13, and 88.22) that USDOT has designated as Persistent Poverty Areas, and three block groups that Columbus has identified as Communities of Interest (CT 88.13, BG 1; CT 88.22, BG 1; CT 88.22, BG 2). Engaging residents in Census Tract 88.22 is particularly important due to the high level of zero-vehicle households. Columbus has significant experience with community outreach and public engagement in underserved communities, and it will use that experience during the corridor planning process.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Letters of support from both [CSX](#) and [Norfolk Southern Corporation](#) have been included with this application.

<sup>67</sup> "Area Commission Map," Department of Neighborhoods, City of Columbus, last accessed March 29, 2022, <https://www.columbus.gov/neighborhoods/neighborhood-liaison-program/Area-Commission-Map/>.

<sup>68</sup> One example of the city's recent experience the current process to develop a multi-year Mobility and Safety Action Plan for its Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor. This planning process has included significant engagement through public meetings and community surveys, as well as stakeholder working groups. The website for this process can be found at <https://bronzevillemoves.com/>.

**4. The City of Columbus' contract process for planning and construction contracts already integrates MBE/WBE Program participation into the planning, development, and implementation of transportation investments.**

Columbus will review all contracts that it advertises related to the Williams Road corridor planning initiative and its ultimate construction and set contract specific MBE/WBE Program participation goals. As mentioned in Section IV(C)(3), the City's Office of Diversity and Inclusion sets specific target goals for the participation of women-owned and minority owned business enterprises. These goals generally range from 11 percent to 25 percent.<sup>69</sup> This process will ensure MBE/WBE Program participation is integrated in both the planning and ultimate construction of the corridor improvements.

**H. Innovation**

The Williams Road Corridor planning process offers an opportunity for Columbus, the Franklin County Engineer, MORPC, and their partners to explore incorporating (1) Innovative Technologies, (2) Innovative Project Delivery, and (3) Innovative Financing as part of the ultimate construction of the Williams Road corridor improvements.

**I. Innovative Technologies**

The Williams Road corridor plan presents an opportunity for Columbus, the Franklin County Engineer, MORPC, and their partners to study the feasibility of deploying two innovative technologies: (1) extending the Columbus Traffic Signal System (CTSS) through the entire Williams Road corridor; and (2) extending the Freight Signal Priority System up Alum Creek Drive and through the Williams Road corridor.

**a. This project is an opportunity to study the feasibility of extending fiber cable along Williams Road and connecting the corridor's signal infrastructure to the Columbus Traffic Signal System.**

This project is an opportunity to study the feasibility of connecting the corridor's signal infrastructure to the Columbus Traffic Signal System. The system allows for monitoring and operating more than 1,000 signalized intersections, co-existence/operation of traffic surveillance cameras, and emergency pre-emption. Columbus is implementing infrastructure changes to migrate the CTSS to an open architecture that can serve central Ohio stakeholders with system connectivity and interoperability. The corridor already has an aerial fiber cable on Williams Road from Parsons Avenue to Groveport Road; and it will use this project to plan for installing additional fiber cable through the entire corridor. Extending fiber through the entire corridor will provide the fiber infrastructure necessary to coordinate signals through the entire corridor and deploy additional technology to improve safety and travel reliability.

**b. The project is an opportunity to study the feasibility of extending Alum Creek Drive's Freight Signal Priority technology north on Alum Creek and east-west on Williams Road.**

The planning process will also look at the feasibility and benefit of potentially extending Alum Creek Drive's Freight Signal Priority (FSP) technology north on Alum Creek Drive to Williams Road, and then down the Williams Road corridor, using the new fiber that could be installed as part of this project. As part of the Smart Columbus Connected Vehicle project, Columbus demonstrated FSP using V2I wireless communications to allow freight vehicles to request signal priority at equipped intersections. The system can then adjust signal phase and timing as allowed by signal priority settings

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<sup>69</sup> Erica Thompson, "An Ohio entrepreneur's guide to certification for women- and minority-owned businesses," *The Columbus Dispatch*, March 29, 2022, <https://www.dispatch.com/story/business/2022/03/29/guide-certification-ohios-women-and-minority-owned-businesses/6795146001/>.

(set by each jurisdiction, respectively), with the intent of smoothing traffic flows for freight and reducing stop/start cycles, which reduces emissions. Trucks are given priority where feasible and only if there is no other overriding priority or preemption, for example an emergency vehicle. The demonstration project showed the distribution of average vehicle approach speeds along Alum Creek drive when priority was granted versus not granted passes peaked at the five percent significance level – an indication that the observed speed distributions are very likely not to be the result of random chance.

The current system is on Alum Creek Drive, from SR-317 to I-270. It was originally planned to extend the FSP system to Williams Road, but project time constraints did not allow it. Extending the project north on Alum Creek Drive to Williams Road, and then Williams Road would significantly expand the system and its ability to positively impact the movement of freight on both Alum Creek Drive and Williams Road. The technology (DSRC) for the current system on Alum Creek is set to sunset in 2024, so this project would need to evaluate the existing FSP infrastructure to assure that there is interoperability between the existing system, and modify it as necessary to have a seamless operations along Alum Creek Drive and Williams Road.

While this will add additional cost to the project, these costs could be justified by the potential benefit of improving the flow of truck freight on both corridors. Adding FSP would also benefit existing freight companies operating along the Williams Road corridor and in the Rickenbacker area. ODW Logistics is a freight company with the ability to utilize FSP, and it is one of the largest businesses and employers on Williams Road. XPO Logistics is another freight company with a large center of operations on the south side of Williams Road. Extending FSP capabilities would offer both economic/travel reliability benefits by making it easier to move freight through the corridors, while also providing environmental benefits by reducing the amount of time trucks spend idling at intersections.

## **2. Innovative Project Delivery**

The Williams Road corridor will benefit from two innovative approaches to project delivery and long-term operations and maintenance: (a) ODOT NEPA assignment, and (b) Columbus' Asset Information Management System (AIMS).

### **a. This project will benefit from ODOT's NEPA Assignment**

The Williams Road Corridor Plan anticipates clearing the NEPA process as part of the proposed planning project, and benefiting from ODOT's ability to perform FHWA's NEPA's responsibilities. ODOT is one of a handful of states nationwide that has, under NEPA Assignment, the authority to assume the FHWA's NEPA responsibilities. ODOT's NEPA Assignment ensures a single point of contact that understands both project details and the regulatory process. This innovative delivery method allows ODOT to streamline the environmental approval process for this reevaluation. When ODOT entered into the NEPA Assignment Program, it estimated the reduction will equate to approximately 20% time savings for our overall program. Since implementation of NEPA Assignment in Ohio, ODOT has saved approximately 8,550 days of review time and approximately \$32.42 million dollars. This assignment should allow the Williams Road Corridor project to clear the NEPA process more efficiently in terms of time and money.

### **b. The City of Columbus will use its Asset Information Management System (AIMS) to maintain Williams Road once the improvements are completed.**

Asset management is another are of innovative project delivery that Columbus is developing. Its Asset Information Management System (AIMS) will provide access to foundational data and analytics needed to perform Asset Life Cycle Planning to support decision making at the Capital and Operational levels. The systems will provide for cross asset planning supporting trade off analysis

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needed to determine what mix of investments into Infrastructure Systems that will allow for the greatest return on the life of the assets and the impact to the residents of Columbus. It is being developed by City of Columbus Department of Public Service Assistant Director Andrew Williams, who helped develop and manage ODOT's asset management program. This system is expected to significantly improve how Columbus is able to maintain its roadways and other assets; and it will be used to maintain the Williams Road corridor improvements once they are ultimately constructed.

### 3. Innovative Financing

State and local governments have been working diligently to implement innovative funding and financing for future projects, including (a) gas tax increases at the state level, and (b) transportation improvement districts at the regional level. These funding sources are helping Columbus, Franklin County, and other partners to raise significant new revenue for transportation investment.

#### a. This project will likely benefit from new transportation revenues created by Ohio's 2019 gas tax increase.

The State of Ohio has prioritized raising additional non-federal revenue for transportation infrastructure investment. Governor DeWine created the Governor's Advisory Committee on Transportation Infrastructure in January 2019. The Governor instructed the committee to "study the current conditions of Ohio's roadways and recommend options for maintaining and enhancing the state's transportation infrastructure."<sup>70</sup> The Advisory Committee recommended increasing the gas tax.<sup>71</sup> Governor DeWine adopted the committee's recommendation, and was instrumental in guiding a significant fuel tax increase through the state legislature. The Ohio General Assembly approved to increase the state tax on gasoline by 10.5-cents per gallon and the state tax on diesel fuel by 19-cents per gallon. The full increase went into effect July 1, 2019 and was projected to generate an estimated \$865 million in additional gas tax revenue, with 55% of the funds going to the state **and 45% going to local government entities**.<sup>72</sup> It has proven vital in mitigating COVID-19's budgetary impact, and allowing both ODOT and local agencies to continue numerous projects throughout the region. Columbus anticipates some of the local funding it receives from this tax increase will support either the initial reconstruction of Williams Road or its subsequent maintenance.

#### b. Future construction phases will likely benefit from funding opportunities created by the Franklin County Transportation Improvement District.

Efforts to create new non-federal revenue for transportation infrastructure investment are not limited to Columbus' corporate limits. Regional efforts in Franklin County, where Williams Road is located, have included the recent creation of a Transportation Improvement District (TID). A TID is an innovative and collaborative government body authorized by Ohio Revised Code 5540, and it is able to provide funds to be leveraged with other federal resources to complete larger, more impactful projects on a shorter timeframe. In addition to being able to raise its own funding, TIDs are also eligible for up to \$500,000 per year in funding from the State of Ohio.<sup>73</sup> These efforts have provided Franklin County with the ability to create significant new revenue across its program, which is a benefit

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<sup>70</sup> "Governor DeWine Announces Creation of Governor's Advisory Committee on Transportation Infrastructure," Office of the Governor, State of Ohio, January 28, 2019, <https://governor.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/governor/media/news-and-media/012819b>.

<sup>71</sup> Marty Schladen, "Governor's panel recommends Ohio gas tax hike, but no amount given," The Columbus Dispatch, February 15, 2019, <https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/politics/elections/2019/02/15/governor-s-panel-recommends-ohio/5966101007/>.

<sup>72</sup> Jim Siegel, "10.5 cent gas-tax increase, 19 cents for diesel," The Columbus Dispatch, last updated April 3, 2019, <https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/politics/state/2019/04/02/10-5-cent-gas-tax/5542926007/>.

<sup>73</sup> "TID (Transportation Improvement District)," Ohio Department of Transportation, last accessed March 29, 2022, <https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/programs/jobs-commerce/03-transportation-improvement-districts>.

to the entire region. This revenue will help improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the movement of freight and people throughout Franklin County. As the corridor plan proceeds, it is anticipated that at least portions of the corridor will be eligible for state funding provided to the Franklin County TID.