

WILLIAMS ROAD

Multimodal Corridor Planning

RAISE Discretionary Grant Application | Submitted February 28, 2023

Project Description



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Project application, appendices, and letters of support are available online:

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

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.

This project requires 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.

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. In addition to completing the initial Planning Phase, the project will also complete the following for the entire Williams Road corridor:

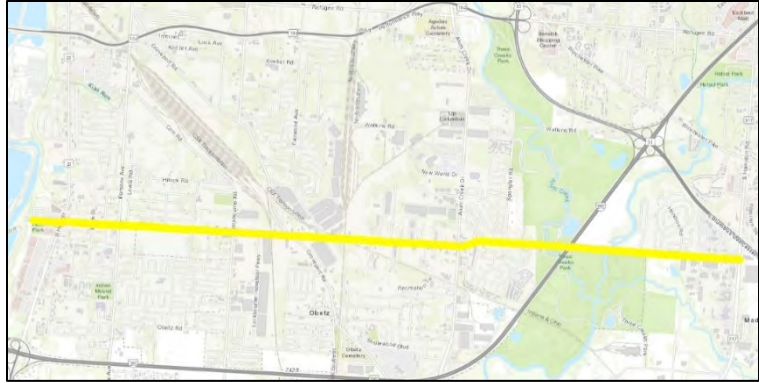


Fig. 1 - Project corridor. Larger scale available in [Appendix 1 – Corridor Map](#).

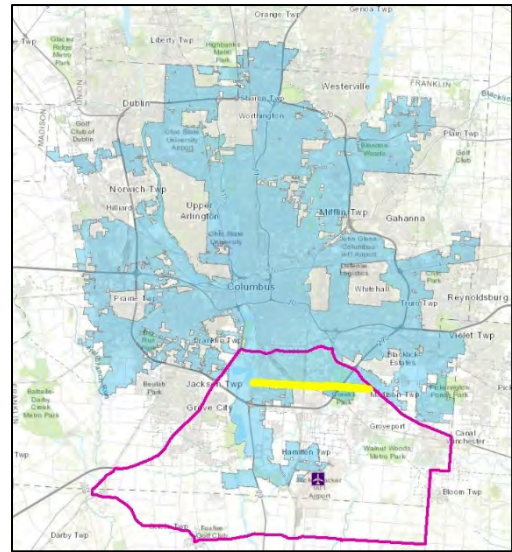


Figure 2 - Regional map, showing corridor, Rickenbacker International Airport, and the Rickenbacker study area. Available at a larger scale in [Appendix 1 – Regional Map](#).

Preliminary Engineering Phase, Stage 1 Plans, and all required environmental studies and NEPA documentation. Columbus, the Franklin County Engineer (FCE), Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), and their partners intend to pursue additional design and construction funding once the corridor plan is complete. The total project is approximately \$9.19 million.

B. Transportation Challenges Addressed

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. FTZ 138 was ranked 7th out of 195 active zones for the amount of merchandise received in 2018, handling approximately \$10.4 billion worth of goods in 2018.¹ 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. 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) planning a consistent roadway is difficult due to 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.



Figure 3 - Traffic stopped on Williams Road due to stopped train blocking crossing. [Appendix 8 – 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 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

¹ 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>

include residential, commercial, parkland, two railroad classification yards (CSX's Parsons Yard and Norfolk Southern's Watkins Yard) and multiple logistics centers. Columbus, FCE, 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 8 – 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 provides an important east-west connection, and corridor improvements are included in the regional Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's (MORPC's) 2018 Rickenbacker Study, and regional trail plans. The 2020-2050 MTP includes multiple segments and intersections on Williams Road:² Project ID 1469 – Williams Rd. from Lockbourne Rd. to Libby Dr., Multiuse path; Project ID 62 – Williams Rd. from Corr Rd./Lockbourne Rd. to Alum Creek Dr., Add turn lanes and complete street facilities to 2 lane roadway; Project ID 3 – Williams Rd. from Alum Creek Dr. to Hamilton Rd., Add turn lanes and complete street facilities to 2 lane roadway; Project ID 159 – Williams Rd. at Lockbourne Rd./Corr Rd., Add/Modify turn lanes and add complete street facilities, and Project ID 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.³ 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

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

³ "Rickenbacker Area Study: Map-Based Recommendations," MORPC, <https://www.morpc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Mapped-Recommendations.pdf>

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.⁴ 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.⁵

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, as well as additional federal funding opportunities, have prompted the City and other regional stakeholders to reexamine the corridor.

D. Proposed Schedule

The corridor plan’s schedule is based on ODOT’s Project Development Process.⁶ The schedule takes into account the length of the corridor, as well as the challenges that have already

Phase	Start Date	Duration	End Date
1. Planning Phase	Jan. 2024	24 months	Dec. 2025
2. Preliminary Engineering Phase	July 2025	24 months	July 2027
3. Stage 1 Plans	July 2027	24 months	July 2029
4. NEPA Document	Sept. 2028	9 months	July 2029

been identified. It also takes into account the project’s need to coordinate with multiple railroad companies, 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.

E. Project Partners

1. City of Columbus, 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. ODOT named Columbus LPA of the Year in 2022.⁷ It has the staff, resources, and experience necessary to successfully complete the proposed project.

2. Franklin County Engineer

Columbus expects to collaborate significantly with the Franklin County Engineer’s Office, even though the FCEO will not be participating financially in this project. Franklin County is responsible for the maintenance and construction of 260 miles of county roadway and 365 bridges,

⁴ A copy of the safety study is included in [Appendix 1 - SR317-US 33 Safety Study](#).
⁵ A copy of the complaint and response is provided in [Appendix 1 - FCE Williams at Spangler](#).
⁶ “PDP Phases & Paths,” ODOT, <https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/working/pdp/pdp-phases-paths>.
⁷ See [Appendix 1 – LPA of the Year](#).

including a portion of Williams Road and two bridges carrying Williams Road over Alum Creek and Big Walnut Creek. FCEO staff have extensive experience managing federal aid projects, and significant experience coordinating projects with ODOT, City of Columbus, and MORPC.

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 within Franklin County, primarily in the City of Columbus. It is in the federally designated Columbus, Ohio Urbanized Area.⁸ Maps of the corridor, and its relation to existing infrastructure, are provided in **Figures 1 & 2**, as well as in **Appendix 1**. 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 cities of Columbus, Groveport, and Obetz; Hamilton Township; and Madison Township. The project lies within the 15th US House District; the 2nd, 5th, and 10th Ohio House Districts; and the 3rd and 15th 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.



Figure 5 - Location of rail infrastructure. Parsons Yard is marked by a blue triangle, Watkins Yard by a purple triangle. Larger scale available in [Appendix 2 - Williams Road Railroad Map](#).

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's 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,⁹ including two historically disadvantaged census tracts (Franklin County Census Tracts 88.12 and 88.13),¹⁰ two opportunity zone census tracts (Franklin County Census Tracts 88.11 and 88.12),¹¹ and three persistent poverty census tracts (Franklin County Census Tracts 88.11, 88.13, and 88.22).¹²

⁸ Urban Area map provided in [Appendix 2 - Urban Area Map](#).
⁹ Map of corridor and all census tracts is included in [Appendix 2 - Census Tract Map](#).
¹⁰ Map of corridor and historically disadvantaged communities is included in [Appendix 2 - Historically Disadvantaged Communities Map](#).
¹¹ Map of corridor and opportunity zones is included in [Appendix 2 - Opportunity Zones Map](#).
¹² Map of corridor and areas of persistent poverty is included in [Appendix 2 - Persistent Poverty Areas Map](#).