Beth Liston, M.D., Ph. D.
Assistant Minority Whip
16th Senate District

Committees:
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Small Business and Economic Opportunity
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David Fink
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: Heartland Rail Connectivity Initiative – Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) Program Application

Administrator Fink,

I write to encourage full and fair consideration of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and its partners as applicants for the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) Program. Central Ohio is the fastest-growing region in the Midwest and remains the largest region in the nation without passenger rail service, having lacked intercity rail since 1979 despite sustained growth.

The Heartland Rail Connectivity Initiative is a practical, market-oriented effort to restore modern passenger rail service in Central Ohio and the broader Midwest. Structured as a public-private partnership, the initiative leverages federal investment to attract private capital, support job creation, and strengthen long-term economic competitiveness, while improving mobility and reliability across rural, suburban, and urban communities.

Safety is a core priority. The freight derailment in East Palestine underscored the importance of careful planning and risk reduction. This initiative responds through corridor planning, safety reviews, and efforts to reduce conflicts between passenger and freight rail, particularly near stations and populated areas.

The project would advance two corridors currently in Step 2 of the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program: Midwest Connect (Chicago–Fort Wayne–Columbus–Pittsburgh) and 3C+D (Cleveland–Columbus–Dayton–Cincinnati). MORPC and its partners are seeking funding for a $6 million planning initiative to move these corridors toward implementation, including early design for a proposed passenger rail station at the Greater Columbus Convention Center; analysis of non-freight corridors for future passenger and private rail service; safety reviews of rail crossings near the Columbus station; evaluation of rail-oriented development to support ridership and station operations; and development of a clear governance framework for future service.

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This effort builds on demonstrated bipartisan engagement. Members of the Central Ohio congressional delegation, including Congressman Mike Carey and Congresswoman Joyce Beatty, have previously supported passenger rail planning in the region. In addition, then-Senator J.D. Vance supported prior Federal Railroad Administration Corridor Identification and Development Program applications for the 3C+D and Midwest Connect corridors, reflecting recognition of the importance of strategic passenger rail investment to Ohio's long-term mobility and economic growth. Ohioans deserve reliable transportation options for business, major events, and family travel. With strong demand potential and successful private rail models in other states, now is the right time to advance a safety-focused, fiscally responsible approach that delivers value for taxpayers.

Thank you for your consideration. I strongly support this application and believe the Heartland Rail Connectivity Initiative represents a smart investment in safety, mobility, and long-term economic growth.

Sincerely,



Beth Liston, M.D., Ph.D.
State Senator, Ohio Senate Distrct 16

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