



FUTURE FORWARD

BUILDING A REGION READY TO COMPETE

2026 STATE OF THE REGION

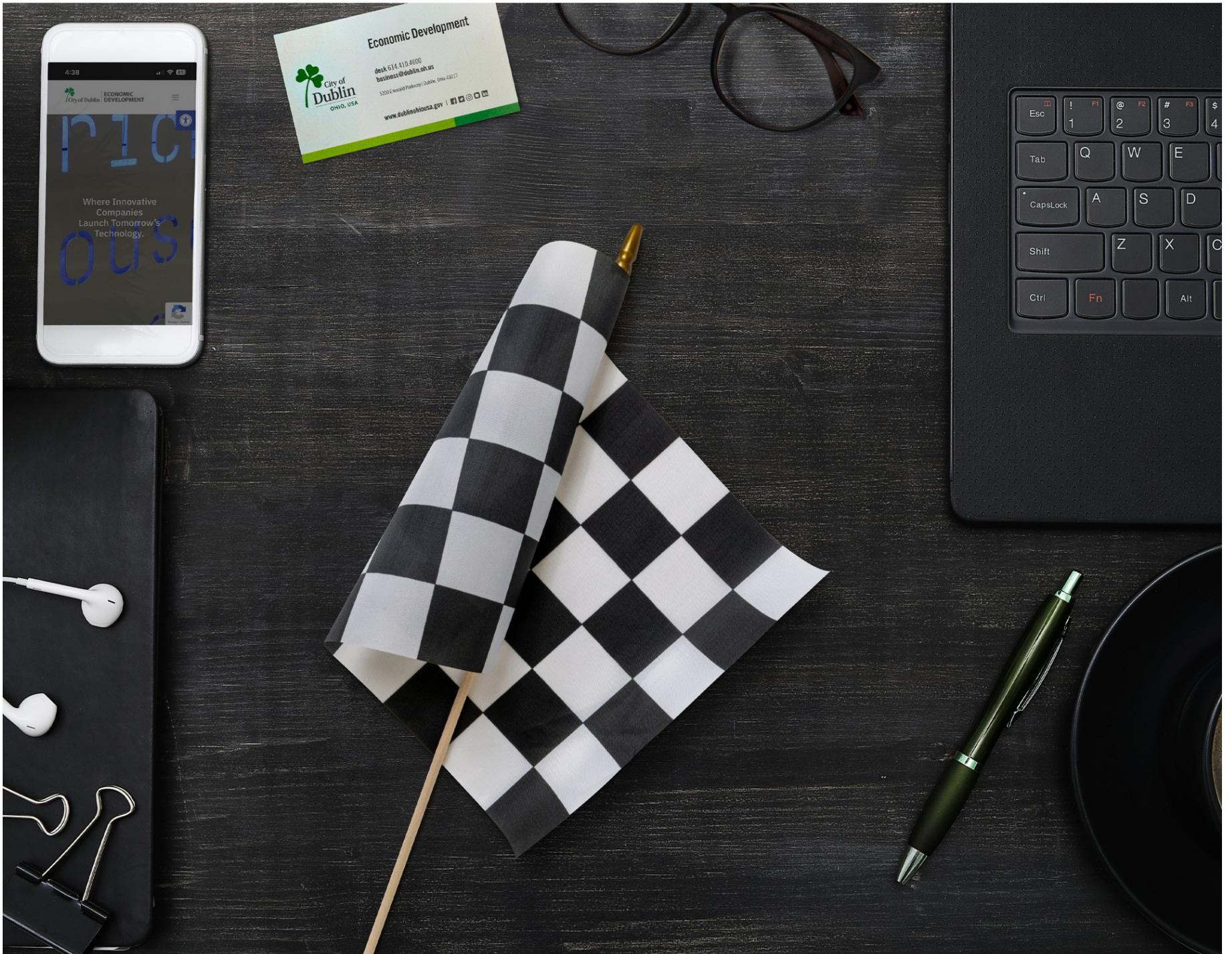
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FUTURE FORWARD

BUILDING A REGION READY TO COMPETE

Welcome to the 2026 State of the Region: Building a Central Ohio Ready to Compete

Central Ohio is experiencing a profound moment – another 600,000 people will call the region home by 2050. We can build an even better region for the future: a Central Ohio ready to compete. Strategic planning creates the opportunity to have a lasting impact by moving big plans to implementation.

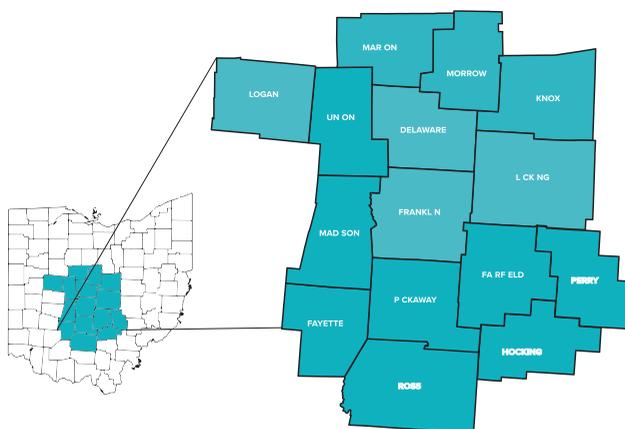
At the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), we work with communities to create an environment for prosperity. Central Ohio's success is rooted in a spirit of collaboration.

We know that no single community, business or government can shape the future alone. That's why we bring together 95 local governments—urban, suburban and rural—to plan alongside businesses and community partners. Preparing for long-term success is essential to developing a resilient region, one that leverages collective expertise and creates solutions to improve our quality of life.

In our growing region, issues that affect each of us directly - like housing, transportation and economic development - are all interconnected. The choices we make today will build upon our momentum to shape a future where everyone can thrive.

MORPC is committed to driving the investments needed for communities to prosper such as expanding quality housing, enhancing transportation, preserving water resources, and improving air quality. It's how we welcome new neighbors and ensure no one is left behind.

"Future Forward: Building a Region Ready to Compete", means planning for what lies ahead



and taking proactive steps, today, to strengthen our strong foundation and traditions. In an increasingly competitive environment, this is how we make certain our region is positioned not only nationally, but also globally.

Right now, Central Ohio is building that future with bold, transformative initiatives that are shaping how we live, move and thrive.

Together we're investing in housing choices at every level, ensuring families can afford a home today while preparing for the 200,000 new homes needed for growth. We are expanding transportation options with efforts like the \$8 billion LinkUS Initiative, which is improving public transit and adding 500 miles of sidewalks and trails, creating more walkable communities. We're working to bring passenger rail back to Columbus for the first time in 45 years, connecting residents to jobs, sporting events and opportunities in cities like Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Chicago. And we're enhancing our regional trail network, linking communities, supporting recreation and health, and strengthening our economy.

Lasting success won't be the work of one person or community. It will require all of us. We invite you to be part of this important work by helping to shape policies and plans and sharing your ideas. Your voice matters in shaping the future of our region.

Central Ohio's future is bright. Our region is a welcoming place that leads with forward-thinking ideas. This is our time to make big moves and invest in a region built to compete for a future that works for all of us!



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



William Murdock, AICP
Executive Director, MORPC



MORPC State of the Region 2026: Future Forward: Building A Region Ready to Compete

As Central Ohio's momentum did not just continue in 2026—it zoomed ahead with purpose, focus, and a shared sense of ambition.

From bold infrastructure commitments, to sustainability breakthroughs and regional collaboration at its finest, 2026 will highlight how one of the fastest-growing regions in the Midwest is shaping tomorrow with innovation, energy, vision and purpose.

This year's theme, Future Forward: Building a Region Ready to Compete, serves as a timely call to action. As Central Ohio experiences historic growth and increasing global attention, the choices made today will determine whether the region simply expands—or truly excels. Competing in the decades ahead means planning beyond jurisdictional boundaries, investing with intention, and aligning around a shared regional vision that prioritizes people, prosperity, and performance.

Being "Future Forward" requires anticipating change rather than reacting to it. Central Ohio is navigating rapid population growth, evolving workforce demands, and transformational shifts in how people move, live, work and play. A region ready to compete uses data to see around corners, invest in infrastructure that supports both economic vitality and quality of life, and build communities that attract and retain talent at every stage of life.

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission welcomed keynote speaker Greg Lindsay, a nonresident senior fellow with Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Future Urban Collectives Lab, Arizona State University's Threatcasting Lab, and the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security. A former urban tech fellow at Cornell Tech's Jacobs Institute, Lindsay explores the future of cities at the intersection of technology, real estate, and work, with a particular focus on the implications of artificial intelligence at urban scale. He speaks frequently to audiences around the world.

In addition to the featured keynote remarks from Greg Lindsay, the State of the Region also included a fireside chat with special guest Ray LaHood, Former United States Secretary of Transportation, moderated by Marcia Hale, a nationally recognized infrastructure leader.

Central Ohio leaders were recognized with special honors as MORPC presented the William H. Anderson Excellence in Public Service Award, the Regional Leadership Award, and the William C. Habig Collaborative Achievement Award.

The William H. Anderson Excellence in Public Service Award honors a MORPC board member who demonstrates exceptional leadership, regional vision, and a strong commitment to MORPC's mission. Named for longtime board member William H. Anderson, the award recognizes a model civic volunteer remembered for his passion, dedication, and unwavering advocacy for regional collaboration. **This year's award was presented to Delaware County Commissioner Jeff Benton.** Commissioner Benton has served as commissioner since 2015 and has played an integral part in Delaware County's smart growth and long-term planning.



The William C. Habig Collaborative Achievement Award recognizes an individual or organization that has advanced an effective or innovative collaborative effort in Central Ohio. Honorees demonstrate success in developing initiatives that value broad inclusion, diverse perspectives, and tangible results addressing key regional challenges.

This year's award was presented to the Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County for the Franklin County Crisis Center. The Center is a first-of-its-kind, 72,000-square-foot facility to provide a 24/7 'no-wrong-door' approach for adults experiencing mental health or addiction related crises.



The Regional Leadership Award reflects MORPC's commitment to addressing issues that transcend community boundaries and inspire visionary thinking. **This year's award was presented to Dublin Mayor Chris Amorose Groomes.** In addition to her role as Mayor, Amorose Groomes serves as the Chair of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission and is also a key advocate for municipal interests on federal technology and infrastructure committees.



To watch a recap of the 2026 State of the Region visit, www.morpc.org/sotr.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Greg Lindsay
Generalist, Urbanist, Futurist

FIRESIDE CHAT

Marcia Hale
Public Policy Leader

Ray LaHood
Former United States Secretary of Transportation



NEW LINE 30

38 NEW BUSES



8 SIDEWALK AND TRAIL PROJECTS



15

NEW COTA MAINSTREAM VEHICLES

WHAT'S COMING IN 2026?

**MORE.
MORE.
MORE.**

42
NEW OPERATORS



+94,000
SERVICE HOURS



NEW ZONE IN 2026

\$51M FOR SIDEWALKS AND BIKEWAYS

30 NEW COTA//PLUS VANS

COTA | Link US



Capacity Building and Preparedness Frame MORPC’s Economic Development Work

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (U.S. EDA) approved the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission’s (MORPC) application to designate the 11-county region as an Economic Development

District (EDD) in the Fall 2023. MORPC’s Economic Development office’s mission is to empower communities to acquire resources that drive investment to the region. The office celebrated its second year in 2025 with new program

launches, stakeholder engagements, and the agency’s first economic development Leaders Listen survey. The year began with the reauthorization of the U.S. EDA by Congress for the first time in 20 Years.

Regional Economic Development Academy

Last year, MORPC launched a new capacity building initiative, Economic Development Academy, designed to train public officials and their staff on foundational community and economic development topics. Two major employers in the private and civic sector, Huntington Bank and Ohio Health, sponsored the Academy during its pilot year. The final program design included six in-person, half-day workshops taught by 16 practitioners and specialists. Over 200 participants attended the

Academy, and individuals completed the program with a keen understanding of enhanced community prosperity and long-term competitiveness.

Central Ohio is one of the fastest growing regions in the Midwest and the content for this year’s Academy will draw on the developments occurring in the region to best equip government and community leaders on how to leverage and manage expected growth for their communities.

Economic Development District

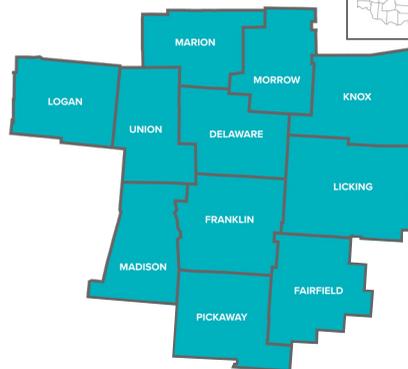
The CEDS Committee met quarterly in 2025 to share unique approaches to comprehensive planning and funding infrastructure developments, approve the committee bylaws, learn more about One Columbus’ workforce development efforts.

The U.S. EDA requires all EDDs to update their CEDS every five years. The region’s current CEDS expires in early 2027, and work is underway on this vital update.

The U.S. EDA awarded MORPC’s EDD a \$70,000 Partnership Planning grant that will fund short-term planning efforts, including the revision of the CEDS document.

Partners and interested stakeholders are now able to access a new webmap that showcases major economic development projects and assets in the region layered with approved transportation projects.

CENTRAL OHIO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT



Competitive Advantage Projects

Last year, MORPC refreshed its Competitive Advantage Projects program to better position Central Ohio for catalytic investment. The updates aligned the program with EDA priorities, established clear pillars centered on jobs and infrastructure, and introduced a nomination process to document community support and readiness.

review, the CEDS Committee and the Central Ohio Economic Development Board approved a final slate of large-scale, regionally significant projects. The program now serves as a vetted portfolio our congressional delegation can use to help drive federal investment and strengthen the region’s economic competitiveness.

Eight counties submitted 33 projects spanning transportation, affordable housing, infrastructure, and economic development. Following internal



Leaders Listen

MORPC’s Leaders Listen – Economic Development Survey captured feedback on the region’s economic growth and development. 73% of the respondents identified “housing is too expensive,” “Too few job opportunities,” and “Lack of affordable childcare option,” were the other top concerns. Learn more about the actionable insights by viewing the full report www.morpc.org/leaderslisten.



Freight Planning

MORPC, the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), and the Rickenbacker Employer Assistance Network hosted a tour of the Rickenbacker Area to give transit and transportation stakeholders firsthand insights from the area’s businesses.

The second Rickenbacker Area Freight Alliance convened in May 2025. Representatives from Senator Moreno and Congressman Taylor shared their office’s legislative priorities along with updates from the 121st Air Refueling Wing, the Ohio Department of Transportation, Columbus Region Logistics Council, and others. This working group will play a key role in MORPC’s regional freight study when it launches.

For more information about MORPC’s efforts to drive investment and development in the Central Ohio region, visit:

www.morpc.org/economicdevelopment



Sustainable Central Ohio: A Vision for Regional Prosperity

Sustainability is more than an environmental goal. It is a practical investment in Central Ohio's long term economic strength and quality of life. As the region grows, residents and businesses alike depend on steady progress toward outcomes that support affordability, reliability, and resilience. That includes addressing energy costs, preparing for extreme weather, ensuring adequate housing, and protecting the natural assets that underpin our competitiveness.

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) serves as a regional convener and resource to help communities navigate these opportunities. Through the Regional Sustainability Agenda, MORPC aligns partners around shared priorities and measurable outcomes. The Sustainable2050 program includes 39 local governments working to advance goals ranging from air quality improvement to responsible development. MORPC supports participating communities through peer forums, technical assistance, and recognition. To date, 20 members have achieved silver, gold, or platinum status based on demonstrated progress under the Regional Sustainability Agenda.

Water remains one of Central Ohio's greatest competitive advantages, and public support for protecting this resource is strong. MORPC's Leaders Listen survey showed broad agreement on the importance of waterway conservation. To support long term planning, MORPC convened the Central Ohio Water Advisory Council, building on the Central Ohio Regional Water Study. Launched in 2025, the study evaluates future demand, infrastructure needs, and strategies such as water reuse to help ensure reliable and abundant supply for residents and employers.

Regional growth is also driving increased energy demand, particularly from large scale industrial

users. With demand projected to outpace supply later this decade, planning a secure and affordable energy future is essential. MORPC has advanced this dialogue through its Securing Our Energy Future series, highlighting the importance of a diverse and reliable energy portfolio.

Air quality continues to be a priority for public health and economic vitality. According to the Leaders Listen survey, 84 percent of respondents supported stronger pollution reduction efforts. MORPC provides daily air quality forecasts and neighborhood level monitoring to equip residents and local leaders with actionable information. These efforts complement the Central Ohio Climate Action Plan, which offers practical strategies to reduce energy waste, lower operating costs, and support job creation in emerging sectors.

As Central Ohio prepares for more frequent extreme weather events, resilience planning is increasingly important. Practical approaches such as expanding tree canopy, incorporating permeable pavement and rain gardens, improving building weatherization, and investing in efficient infrastructure can protect assets while supporting long term cost stability.

Taken together, these initiatives reflect a balanced approach to growth that protects key resources, strengthens economic competitiveness, and maintains Central Ohio's standing as a leading region in the country. MORPC welcomes continued collaboration to help shape a prosperous and sustainable future for the region.

To learn more about MORPC's sustainability efforts, visit:

www.morpc.org/sustainability





Sustaining Affordable Housing the MORPC Way

There is widespread recognition that Central Ohio continues to face a housing crisis that requires sustained, coordinated action.

Soaring housing costs, rapidly rising rents, an increase in evictions, limited housing supply, and increasing demand have placed significant pressure on households across income levels, particularly in low-and moderate-income families. The demand for new construction is undeniable. However, what is often not considered is the need to sustain the existing affordable housing units that many in our community currently live in. Sustaining progress means not only expanding the current housing supply but also preserving existing units. For more than 30 years, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) has provided weatherization and home repair services to low-and moderate-income families in central Ohio.

These services provide urgently needed repairs as well as safety and energy savings measures to the homes of families who might otherwise not be able to afford these improvements.

The repair or replacement of unsafe or inefficient furnaces and hot water tanks through MORPC's weatherization program allows families to safely stay cool in the summer and warm in the winter, all while reducing their energy cost burden.



MORPC's Home Repair Programs allow a myriad of issues from lead remediation to handicap accessibility to be addressed at no cost to the homeowner. These programs allow many moderate to low-income families to remain safe in their homes when they

otherwise might have to search for other housing options in an extremely scarce affordable housing market.

MORPC has also been creative in finding non-traditional ways to expand available opportunities to communities in our region to take advantage of these weatherization and home repair programs.



In partnership with the City of Westerville, MORPC was able to create a home repair program specific to the residents of Westerville. Through a grant opportunity provided by the Columbus Green Fund and Google Grid, MORPC developed a weatherization program that focuses on serving even more at-risk families by providing higher income limits and additional energy efficient measures like tankless hot water heaters. Through these programs, MORPC was able to help nearly 400 families in Central Ohio reduce energy costs, as well as maintain and sustain their affordable home.

Weatherization and home repair play critical roles in helping to sustain existing affordable housing units, and MORPC looks forward to continuing to provide these services to the residents of Central Ohio.

Through intentional planning, partnerships, and long-term strategies, Central Ohio can protect housing affordability and support economic mobility to ensure that residents are not left behind as the region continues to thrive.

For more information about MORPC's weatherization and home repair program visit:

www.morpc.org/weatherization



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No matter where you are in life, there's a place for you here. New Albany offers award-winning schools, scenic parks, and a vibrant civic life—all grounded in the pillars that shape our identity: lifelong learning, health and wellness, arts and culture, and environmental sustainability. It's not just a place to live. It's a place to grow, connect, and truly belong. **Here in New Albany, you're always welcome.**



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Momentum in Motion: Refreshing our Regional Vision in 2026

In 2026, the way we move is undergoing a fundamental shift. With the return of office workers, the explosion of micromobility, and a growing demand for integrated service, the need for proactive regional planning has never been more vital. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) serving as the strategic “connective tissue,” strives to ensure that as our region grows, our transportation network remains seamless, accessible, and forward-looking.

This year marks a pivotal milestone: the comprehensive update of our regional transportation vision. This isn’t a start from scratch; it is an intentional evolution. We are building a foundation of proven success, most recently the passage of our region’s landmark LinkUS mobility initiative. That victory was a clear signal from our residents that they value a modern, connected network and investments in sidewalks, bikeways and trails. This year, we are taking that mandate and scaling it to meet the challenges of the next decades.

The Value of a Regional Perspective

While individual jurisdictions manage their own infrastructure, mobility doesn’t stop at municipal borders. MORPC brings partners together to look at the “big picture,” through a continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative planning process. By coordinating across jurisdictions, we can prioritize and advance projects with the highest regional impact. Whether it’s ensuring a trail network connects three different counties or optimizing a freight corridor like Alum Creek Drive, that fuels the local economy, MORPC makes sure we move forward as one unified region.

2026: A Landmark Year for Strategic Updates

Following our previous infrastructure wins, 2026 is the year we calibrate our next chapter. MORPC is kicking off the development and update of several foundational “pillar,” plans that will directly inform the broader regional vision identified in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP):

- **Regional Transportation Goals and Objectives**
Revisiting the broad vision statements that guide the development of transportation strategies, project evaluation, and programming in our region.
- **Active Transportation Plan (ATP)**
Taking the success of our initial bike and pedestrian investments and planning a fully integrated, regional “all-ages-and-abilities” network.
- **Safety Action Plan**
Doubling down on our commitment to the “Safe System Approach.” We are using new data to identify and prioritize high-injury corridors and protect our most vulnerable road users.
- **Freight Plan**
Modernizing how goods move to ensure our region thrives in a global market while protecting the quiet and safety of residential neighborhoods.

These updates ensure that our long-range goals aren’t just sitting on a shelf—they are living documents that reflect the current needs of our growing population and the increased capacity provided by our recent successes.



The most sophisticated data models cannot replace the lived experience of the people who use our transportation system every day. You showed up at the ballot box to support this momentum; now, we need you to help us direct it.

Throughout 2026, there will be numerous opportunities for residents, business owners, and community advocates to help refresh this regional vision.

How to get involved:

- **Visioning Workshops**
Join us for “big picture,” sessions to help set the priorities for the next 25 years.
- **Interactive Mapping and Digital Tools**
Provide real-time feedback on proposed routes for the Active Transportation and Freight plans.
- **Stakeholder Panels**
Contribute your expertise to specialized committees focused on guiding the plans’ development.

This is a defining moment where public involvement, funding opportunities, and strategic planning have aligned. By participating in these opportunities, you are helping to ensure that the momentum we’ve built together continues to move us toward a safer, smarter, and more connected future.

Visit www.morpc.org/mtp to stay engaged. ■



Pay It Forward – Building a Talent Pool for the Next Generation of Public Servants



Our region's future depends on the leaders we cultivate today. That's why the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) continues to elevate "Paying It Forward," as one of its signature strategic pillars - an investment in not just people, but the long-term vitality of our communities.

MORPC's commitment to developing the next generation of public servants took shape in 2015, when Eileen Leuby, MORPC's Membership Services Officer, worked with partners to establish a nine-student pilot program designed to give aspiring planners hands on experience in local government. What began as a small, targeted initiative has since grown into a robust, regionwide talent pipeline.



The pilot has since grown into MORPC's Local Government Summer Internship Program, a regionwide talent pool that has served more than 300 college students from a variety of universities. Today, the program is coordinated by Alli Mancz, who helps manage and advance the effort across our 15-county region.

The program provides qualified college students with meaningful, hands-on experience in local governments throughout MORPC's 15 county footprint, preparing them for careers in public service and strengthening the capacity of our communities.

Interns contribute fresh ideas, curiosity, and a passion for public service while gaining real-world experience that often shapes their career path trajectories. Together, these experiences help build essential skills as well as equip students with the confidence and practical knowledge needed to transition from learning to leading.

In 2025, a record-750 applications were received, and 50 students were placed throughout 10 of MORPC's 15 counties. Those interns represented disciplines from engineering and

sustainability to communications, GIS, and public administration. Students stepped into meaningful work within local governments while developing a deeper understanding of how their work can create meaningful community impact.

20% of the participants were invited to intern beyond the summer season, and many are still employed by their hosts today, including Curtis Nutter and Zoe Blank.

Curtis Nutter, MPA Student at the John Glenn College of Public Affairs and 2025 summer intern, was assigned to the City of Whitehall, serving under Mayor Michael T. Bivens to tackle special initiatives for the community. "Whitehall is intern gold," Nutter said. "From workforce development to city planning and community engagement, I have learned so much from this experience and have been asked to continue my internship."



Zoe Blank, a Miami University graduate and 2024 summer intern, was hired by the Mid-Ohio Water & Sewer District (MOWSD). As a GIS intern, she discovered a passion for project management and soon advanced to Project Coordinator and GIS Manager. "Because of the support of the MORPC team, I had a successful summer and was hired full-time," she said. "This program ignited my love for local government and allowed me to explore my interests beyond what I had studied in college." Blank now supervises the district's interns, including multiple MORPC interns, and she finds mentoring equally rewarding.

Participating students earn between \$15–\$20 per hour and receive mentorship from public-sector professionals on MORPC's staff. MORPC provides professional development, supplemental options to expand their network, and learning opportunities including career search preparation.

Beyond internships, MORPC continues strengthening partnerships with regional colleges and universities. Today, more than 25,000 employees across MORPC member organizations—and in many cases, their families—have access to significant tuition discounts, expanding pathways to higher education and workforce development.

To learn more about the MORPC Local Government Summer Internship Program, contact Alli Mancz, MORPC Intern Program Coordinator at amancz@morpc.org.



The Future of Rail in Central Ohio: Expanding Regional Connectivity

Central Ohio is positioned in 2026 to take important next steps in advancing passenger rail planning, strengthening the region's long term connectivity and economic competitiveness.

For decades, the region has been one of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States without passenger rail service. However, 2026 marks a year of significant momentum as local and federal partners move from conceptual frameworks toward concrete engineering and design.

In December 2023, Central Ohio learned that two potential passenger rail routes were selected for the federal Corridor Identification and Development Program (Corridor ID). This three-step federal framework is designed to guide the development of new passenger rail services across the country, ensuring that projects are financially viable, technically sound, and integrated into the national network.



Two Paths to Connectivity: 3C+D and Midwest Connect

Since the initial selection, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) has worked in close coordination with the City of Fort Wayne, Ind., and the Ohio Rail Development Commission to advance two distinct but complementary corridors:

- The 3C + D Corridor**
 This north-south route is designed to link Ohio's four largest metro areas—Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati. Beyond intra-state travel, this corridor will provide a vital "spine" for Ohio, allowing residents to plug into Amtrak's existing long-distance network and reach destinations across the country.
- The Midwest Connect**
 This corridor focuses on an east-west trajectory, linking Pittsburgh, Columbus, Lima, Fort Wayne, and Chicago. By re-establishing this cross-country route through the heart of the Midwest, the project aims to bridge the gap between major industrial and economic hubs, significantly enhancing the region's economic reach and providing an alternative to congested highway travel.

Progress and the Road Ahead

In 2025, both corridors successfully completed Step 1 of the Corridor ID process. This milestone involved defining the scope of the projects and establishing a formal partnership with the FRA. As we move through 2026, the corridors have transitioned into Step 2. This phase is critical for the curious resident and the commuter alike, as it begins to address the "where" and "how" of the service. During this stage, project partners will refine station locations, determine the frequency of daily trains, and establish preliminary service schedules. These elements are the foundation of the Service Development Plan, a document that is crucial for passenger rail implementation in the Corridor ID program.



Opportunities Ahead in 2026

MORPC is pursuing new opportunities to strengthen connectivity for Central Ohio through expanded passenger rail. The agency has applied to the Federal Railroad Administration's Federal State Partnership program for the Heartland Rail Connectivity Initiative. If awarded, the funding would allow Ohio to advance critical planning work, including right of way coordination and safety improvements, while positioning the state to be more competitive for private sector investment. Proposed project components include advancing station design at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, studying new rail corridors, and partnering with local communities to prepare for successful passenger rail implementation.

Conclusion

Through the 3C+D and Midwest Connect routes, MORPC and its partners are strengthening the connections that power Ohio's economy. These corridors link our major cities to each other and to key Midwest markets, making it easier for businesses to access talent, customers, and new opportunities. As the work advances, the goal is clear: deliver a reliable passenger rail option that supports job growth, attracts investment, and gives employers and workers more flexibility in how they move across the region and beyond.





Central Ohio Greenways: Where Trails Tell Stories and Rivers Invite You In

Long before GPS enabled trail maps, fitness tracking watches, automated trail counters, and shared e-scooters, Central Ohio’s park and trail planners were already dreaming up ways to step out into our neighborhoods to wander through nature and connect with each other. Decades ago, these visionaries began carving out the Olentangy Trail, one of our region’s most beloved trails that hugs the river and gently suggests a bigger idea: What if nature could stitch people, neighborhoods, history, and landscapes together?

Decades later, that idea has flourished into the Central Ohio Greenways (COG) network, now stretching more than 400 miles across 15 counties. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission’s (MORPC) COG Program has grown into a vision for more than one thousand miles of connected trails. Remarkably, with more funding than ever before, much of this vision is already moving from dream to reality. The network’s implementation is guided by a shared belief that trails aren’t just places to pass through. Trails are places to be; places to meet a neighbor and pause to admire our state wildflower – the Great White Trillium – or pedal into a small town you’ve never had a reason to visit before.

Trail Towns Are Where Nature, People, and Places Come Together

Trail Towns of Central Ohio celebrates communities as destinations, not just dots along a route. These towns understand that a trailhead can also be a front porch, and that cafes, parks, murals, and main streets become brighter when locals and visitors alike arrive on foot or by bike.

Launched in January 2026, Trail Towns of Central Ohio welcomes a diverse cohort of six rural, suburban, and urban communities into a network of trail friendly communities. Over 12 months, each community will be leaning into its unique character while committing to promoting a shared culture of mobility, hospitality, and outdoor connection. Year after year, new communities will join in, building a network where regional exploration is encouraged, and local pride runs deep.



Blueways: Following the Current

Of course, some of Central Ohio’s most meaningful paths flow, rather than wind. In 2026, the Central Ohio Blueways initiative will expand the Greenways Vision to the water, inviting residents and visitors to experience the region by kayak, canoe, or fishing line. Long before recreation maps and designated water trails, these rivers served as essential travel corridors for Indigenous peoples, many of whom lent their names to the waterways we know today. Recognizing this history adds depth and meaning to how we engage with our rivers. They are not just places of recreation and beautiful backdrops, but they are living landscapes shaped by centuries of movement, connection, and stewardship.

Guided by the expertise and ideas of regional stakeholders, a water recreation vision will be woven into the longstanding Greenways Plan. These Blueways imagine a future where outdoor recreation and conservation are intertwined, encouraging deeper connections to rivers and streams while protecting sensitive ecosystems.

The Greenway Planning Studio: Dream It, Plan It, Build It

Supporting all of this creativity is MORPC’s Greenway Planning Studio, launched in 2024. The Studio pairs bold greenspace ideas with practical pathways to implementation, offering technical assistance to communities as they move from ideas to impact.

In 2026, Central Ohio’s local governments and all community members are welcome to join the Central Ohio Greenways movement by sharing local ideas, tackling regional initiatives collectively, and supporting a culture of connection through walking, biking, and connecting with nature.

So, lace up, launch a boat, or stroll into a Trail Town café. Central Ohio’s paths are ready to welcome you. And we are ready to build a bigger, more connected network as our region grows together.





One Region, One Voice: Collaboration that Helps Central Ohio Go Big

The Central Ohio region continues to grow bigger each day – and it's only through strong community partnerships and collaborations that we will continue to thrive. Our 15 counties are home to major economic development projects, a thriving business community, renowned educational institutions, world-class healthcare facilities, and more than 90 members of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). Together, these coveted assets place Central Ohio among the fastest growing and most desirable region in the Midwest.

Our partnerships with these institutions cannot – and do not – end when pursuing major funding opportunities. While each of Central Ohio's institutions and communities have their own priorities, support for each other is what makes the difference when we dream big. At MORPC, we pride ourselves on being the region's foremost collaborator, convener, and idea laboratory – which is why we are also proud to be a member and convener of the Columbus Region Coalition (CRC).

Formed over 20 years ago, the CRC is a group of local governments, business leaders, community stakeholders, higher education and health care institutions, that represent

the collective interests of Central Ohio. The CRC epitomizes the Columbus Way by partnering with federal leaders in advocating the region's strategic investment priorities together. Often, this is demonstrated when seeking federal funding for major projects. Not only do CRC members support each other; they elevate major projects to Congressional leaders and help bring back the needed investment to the region.

Most recently, the CRC helped secure funding for 12 projects in the FY 2026 federal budget. These investments include new buses for the Central Ohio Transit Authority, key roadway and transportation infrastructure improvements, Columbus State Community College's Ohio Center for Advanced Technologies, research laboratories at The Ohio State University, and critical housing and community development initiatives across the region.

But the work of MORPC and the CRC doesn't stop there. With a new federal transportation bill on the horizon and major opportunities for grant funding at the U.S. Department of Transportation, local leaders continue to support needed projects throughout the region. Currently, the CRC is collaborating with The Ohio State University and other key

partners to facilitate a major highway improvement along State Route 315, where on- and off-ramp layouts impede local traffic flow near the newly constructed University Hospital and planned university developments west of the Olentangy River. MORPC is also meeting with federal officials ahead of the forthcoming surface transportation reauthorization, supporting better tools for local governments in rural areas, less reliance on discretionary grants, and enhanced safety across all transportation systems.

This collaborative spirit is essential to securing a vibrant and prosperous future, and it continues to prove that together we are greater than the sum of our parts. Through MORPC and the CRC, local governments, institutions, and community partners are transforming these efforts into meaningful investments for residents in rural, urban, and suburban communities alike. This united approach has already yielded significant successes, and it positions the region to capitalize on big opportunities. By continuing to plan boldly, advocate strategically, and work collectively, Central Ohio will ensure that as we grow bigger, we will grow better.





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Leaders Listen Survey: Strong Support for Sustainability

Each year, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) develops and analyzes public opinion polling focused on one of our agency’s core work areas. This year’s Leaders Listen: Sustainability survey captured residents’ sentiments and priorities related to conservation, environmental protection, waste reduction and more.

Across a broad array of sustainability topics, the message from the public was clear: Central Ohioans expect leaders to preserve and protect the environment, while ensuring that residents have reliable and affordable energy.

Among all issues included in the survey, the exceptionally high agreement was for “preventing blackouts or brownouts,” and “keeping my energy costs low,” with more than 95% of residents indicating those outcomes should be prioritized as the region works to address a potential energy shortage. When asked which power generation sources should be prioritized to increase supply, 75% of respondents indicated “increasing sustainable or renewal energy generation,” should be a “high priority,” with another 16% indicating it is a “medium priority,” and only 9% suggesting it is a “low priority.” Notably, support for increasing sustainable generation slightly increased, when “small-scale nuclear” was explicitly listed as an option.

Survey respondents expressed strong support (“moderate” to “extreme”) for reducing energy demand by “expanding energy efficiency programs and policies,” (91%) and to “slow down development of energy intensive industries,” (76%). These results show that Central Ohioans are ready to embrace sustainable energy generation and greater

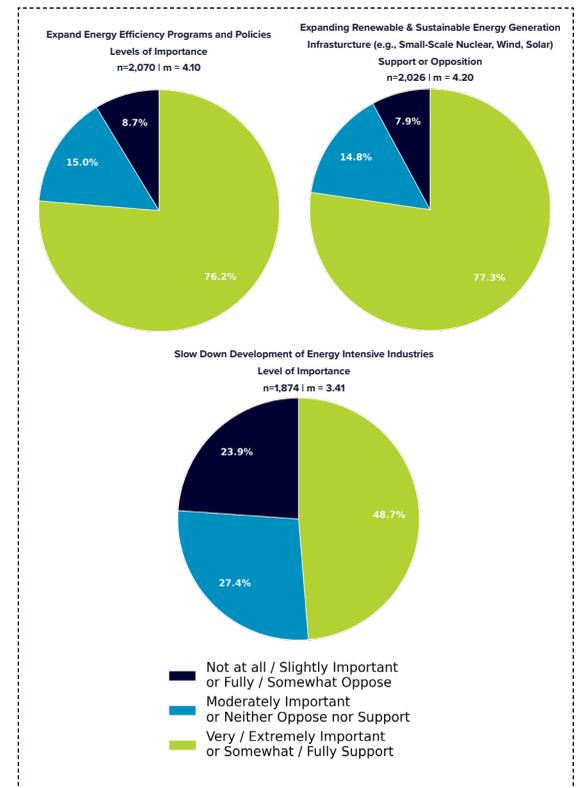
efficiency measures. Area residents would prefer to slow down development of energy intensive industries, such as data centers, rather than risk blackouts or incur higher energy costs.

Outside of our energy supply challenges and opportunities, the next highest level of agreement was found in an overwhelming agreement for the conservation and protection of waterways (90%) and greenspaces (87%).

Central Ohioans largely support steps to improve air quality via measures such as higher energy efficiency standards (91%), and deprioritizing natural gas and coal power generation. This holds true in rural counties, where the importance of investing natural gas and coal generation trailed support for renewables by about 20 percentage points.

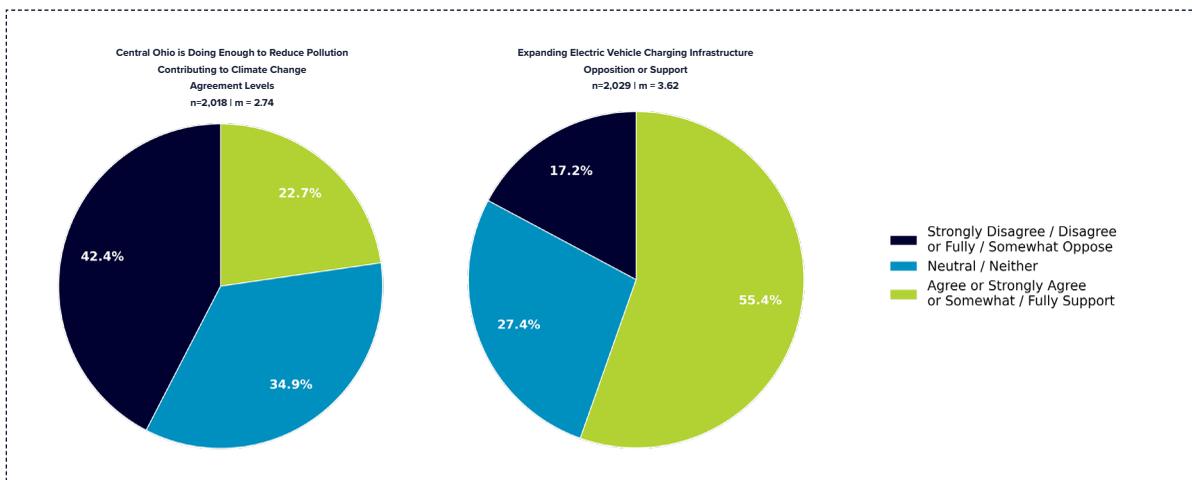
Vehicle emissions are a major contributor to airborne particulate matter in Central Ohio. Overall support for expanding electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure (55%) clearly outweighs opposition (17%). Even in rural counties, where we have found higher EV skepticism, residents are more likely to support than oppose EV charging infrastructure expansion by a ratio of 2 to 1.

When it comes to reducing harmful emissions, improving air quality is an important driver, but climate change worry continues to loom large as well, with just 23% of respondents agreeing that our region is “doing enough” to curb climate emissions. Residents are willing to embrace stronger environmental policies and utilization of lower emission technologies for a healthier environment and to combat climate change.



MORPC works with local governments and regional partners to support thoughtful growth across Central Ohio. As the region continues to expand, there is broad interest in ensuring development meets long term economic and infrastructure needs while also conserving greenspace, air, and water, which contribute to quality of life and competitiveness. MORPC partnered with independent third-party experts to implement survey best practices and collect responses from more than 2,000 residents across all 15 counties. The results are consistent with other recent surveys and demonstrate broad support across demographic groups, including income levels, political orientation, and urban and rural communities, for responsible growth and environmental stewardship.

For more details on the latest sustainability survey findings, as well as prior surveys and topics, visit the Leaders Listen webpage to access MORPC’s full reports here:
morpc.org/LeadersListen.





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