



MID-OHIO REGIONAL
MORPC
PLANNING COMMISSION

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May 24, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Re: Support for the Hilliard Rome Road Grade Separation Project CRISI Application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), I am writing this letter to express our strong support for the City of Columbus' Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) application for the Hilliard Rome Road Grade Separation Project. The requested CRISI funding will allow Columbus to separate a hazardous at-grade railroad crossing on Hilliard Rome Road, improve transportation insecurity in two census tracts, and extend the impact and benefit of federal and local rapid transit investments.

MOPRC serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the metropolitan Columbus planning area. As an MPO, MORPC is required to conduct a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process. The 2024 – 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) was created by MORPC as a result of these requirements. This MTP was adopted in May of 2024 and accounts for the Hilliard Rome Road Grade Separation project from two long range planning perspectives. The MTP makes the greater Columbus region eligible to receive federal funding for various transportation projects.


The at-grade crossing (513244C) on Hilliard Rome Road is one of the busier and more hazardous at-grade crossings in Ohio. This crossing sees an average of approximately 26,575 motor vehicles and 19 trains per day; and its hazard ranking is currently ranked 384th out of more than 5,600 at-grade crossings statewide. The Federal Rail Administration has received multiple reports of stopped trains blocking the crossing for extended periods of time since 2022. Pedestrians have been observed climbing on, over, or through the train cars during multiple reported incidents; and emergency responders have been observed unable to cross the tracks during one of the reported incidents. Project ID 1781 of the MTP identifies the need for stand-alone sidewalks throughout the entirety of Hilliard Rome Road.

William Murdock, AICP
Executive Director

Chris Amorose Grooms
Chair

Michelle Crandall
Vice Chair

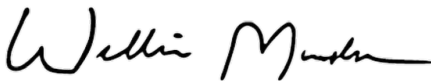
Ben Kessler
Secretary



The Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) is a vested partner in this project. ORDC is leading a passenger rail study to better connect Ohio's major metropolitan areas. The potential route, called "3C+D", could use the identified rail line in the Hilliard Rome Road Grade Separation Project. Project ID 1933 of the MTP identifies this rail line as a rail corridor from Cleveland to Cincinnati that is in study. To further this, ORDC awarded this project \$3.3 million from Ohio's Rail Crossing Elimination Program. A CRISI award will continue the momentum to address the need for this grade separation project.

Investing in this project will have a significant impact on two disadvantaged census tracts as, identified by USDOT's Justice40 Rail Explorer (39049008165 & 39049008171). This project will help connect these residents and others to the LinkUS West Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Corridor, which is less than a mile south of the at-grade crossing on Hilliard Rome Road. Awarding this project will support the development of multiple Central Ohio initiatives. We respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Transportation consider the transportation challenges created by the current crossing, and the need to separate it.

Kind Regards,



William Murdock, AICP
Executive Director, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission

