



Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission Regional Policy Roundtable Meeting Minutes

Date: May 23, 2024

Time: 11:30 a.m.

Location: Central Ohio Transit Authority

Members Present in Person

Lourdes Barroso de Padilla (Chair)

Todd Bailey

Gerard Basalla

Patrick Harris

Megan O'Callaghan

Lauren Rummel

Steve Tugend

Jason Warner

MORPC Staff Present in Person

Joseph Garrity

William Murdock

Eileen Leuby

Amanda McEldowney

Kyle Probert

Guests Present in Person

Peter Marbach

Attending Remotely

None

The meeting was called to order at 11:45 a.m.

The Chair asked members to introduce themselves.

The Chair recognized Mr. Harris and Ms. Rodriguez for a LinkUS update from COTA.

Mr. Harris highlighted the new COTA facility, which was a result of federal funding, and thanked members of the Roundtable for their support. LinkUS is incredibly important and impactful for the region, for people all over the city. More than 300 projects are in the pipeline for TSI funds through LinkUS. COTA moved yesterday to put LinkUS on the ballot in November. Mr. Harris encouraged members to reach out if they need COTA representatives to give updates at meetings and events around the city.

Ms. Rodriguez also highlighted features of the new facility, and encouraged members to participate in augmented reality tours. She then provided an update on the LinkUS initiative, which will feature modernized transit options, trails, and other infrastructure. Additional 0.5% sales tax, which will not automatically renew. \$4.3 billion of the 8 billion will be for BRT corridors. The Northwest, West Broad, and East Main corridors are in design.

The Chair asked how far out of the city the lines go.

Ms. Rodriguez replied that the West Broad line goes from Prairie Township to downtown, East Main goes all the way to the Licking County line in Reynoldsburg. The Northwest line extends from downtown Columbus to Bridge Park in Dublin. BRT infrastructure includes dedicated traffic lanes, synchronized traffic lights, and rail-style boarding platforms with off-board payment.

Mr. Harris added that one of the biggest question they face is “why not light rail?” BRT is more affordable, which allows COTA to do more. We also lack the density to support light rail from a federal funding perspective. We do not qualify. This is not a second-class transportation mode. Everything except the wheels vs. rail is the same as light rail. COTA is happy to provide talking points to anyone who may need them when discussing with community members.

Mr. Tugend asked if BRT attracts the same private investment as light rail lines.

Mr. Harris replied there is; Ohio State did a study. The same type of economic development was spurred in Cleveland with a BRT line (Health Line).

Ms. Rodriguez showcased the example of the Northwest BRT corridor. 30% of jobs and 50% of population growth in Franklin County are on that line. \$1.6 billion will also be dedicatd to more than 500 miles of new sidewalks, multi-use paths, and trails.

Mr. Murdock added that 40-some communities are involved in project identification for this initiative.

Ms. Rodriguez added \$1.3 billion will also be invested in enhancing the current transit system with more frequency.

Mr. Harris added that this will mean more 15-minute lines and 24 hour lines.

Ms. Rodriguez and Mr. Harris both reiterated that Franklin County does not invest as much as Cuyahoga and Hamilton counties, despite Franklin County’s rapid growth.

Mr. Harris highlighted regionalism and transit, and the need to get the state to think differently about transit.

Mr. Basalla asked what narratives are successful when speaking with state leaders.

Mr. Harris said to always highlight economic development and workforce. Workforce mobility was a successful narrative during the last transportation budget.

Ms. Rodriguez added that it is important to demonstrate COTA is not the only entity in the effort – the County, MORPC, and other community organizations are involved. There is community buy-in.

Mr. Harris added that further advocacy is needed to maintain available funding in the next surface transportation reauthorization.

Mr. Warner asked whether COTA anticipates more TRAC requests.

Mr. Harris responded that yes, East Main and Northwest will likely go back, but COTA must make sure West Broad is successful so that success can be demonstrated.

The Chair thanked COTA for hosting and leading the discussion.

The Chair recognized Mr. Murdock for a MORPC update.

Mr. Murdock thanked COTA for their presentation. He also shared that MORPC has established a new Passenger Rail Working Group with Marysville City Manager Terry Emery as the chair. The Midwest Connect line is also moving forward quickly. The State of Ohio also released their RFQ for 3C&D. He also shared about his trip to Washington, D.C. for Infrastructure Week and advocacy in Congress.

The Chair recognized Mr. Probert for an update on the Public Policy Agenda.

Mr. Probert shared that the 2025-2026 Public Policy Agenda Working Group will begin meeting in the coming months. Meeting dates are forthcoming. There will be three working group meetings, followed by full Roundtable approval before sending the Agenda to the Commission. Discussions on changes are expected to include housing and community development, MORPC's role as an economic development district, tax policy, passenger rail, and data and technology. Members were encouraged to sign up to participate in the working group online.

The Chair recognized Mr. Garrity and Mr. Tugend for the legislative update and defense update.

Mr. Garrity shared that the Columbus Region Coalition endorsed 19 projects for funding in the federal budget for FY 2025. Those projects were shared with U.S. House members last week during the Infrastructure Week visit. MORPC also recently won a USDOT Safe Streets for All grant worth \$2 million in partnership with The Ohio State University which will fund motor vehicle crash and safety analyses. Additionally, legislation has been introduced that would have Ohio re-join the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC).

Mr. Tugend shared that a Housing Technical Assistance Grant appropriation is in House Bill 315, which passed a House committee this week. He also shared House Bill 340 got an initial hearing this week. The bill would create a grant program through the Department of Development that for employers to contract with fleet vehicle services to transport workers. A commitment from the bill sponsor and Ohio Chamber was secured to allow GOHIO access to the grant program as well.

Mayor Michael Bivens will be leading a delegation to Washington. Last month, LTG Mark Simerly, Director of the Defense Supply Agency, was in town and met with local leaders and established a working relationship. There will be two Central Ohio applications for defense community grants – one from Whitehall, one from Columbus Regional Airport Authority. Central Ohio Defense Group will be supporting both of them.

Mr. Garrity added Mayor Bivens and Mayor Ward served on a panel at a pre-commission luncheon with Col. Powers, who has been very engaged with MORPC and local governments in the region.

The Chair opened the floor for updates from individual members and guests.

Mr. Marbach shared Senator Vance has been working to secure funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program and rail safety, and has sponsored bills to examine capacity of the United States' defense industrial base.

Mr. Garrity invited members to Riverfest on June 8th-9th during the Columbus Arts Festival at the Scioto Mile. Kayaks will be provided free of charge by Metro Parks.

The Chair invited members to Columbus's Open Concept events, where streets are blocked to make for more pedestrian-friendly environments. The first event is in the Short North on June 1st. She also shared that transit and mobility efforts will be highlighted for 614 day, and that today is Bike to Work Day, and encouraged members to utilize alternative transportation modes for their commutes.

Ms. Rummel shared that federal reauthorization legislation for workforce development boards is making its way through Congress. 20 workforce boards are in Ohio.

Mr. Pangrace shared that Franklin County is putting the final touches on two 30-foot mobile offices. If their programs could be useful at events, they are happy to drive out.

Ms. Leuby shared that over 50 interns will be a part of MORPC's 2024 Summer Internship Program.

The Chair encouraged members to give presentations or suggest speakers or host meetings.

Mr. Bailey moved to approve the minutes of the prior meeting. Mr. Basalla seconded the motion. The minutes were approved without objection.

The meeting adjourned at 1:02 p.m.