

GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER:

BUILDING A THRIVING REGION

2025 STATE OF THE REGION HOSTED BY:



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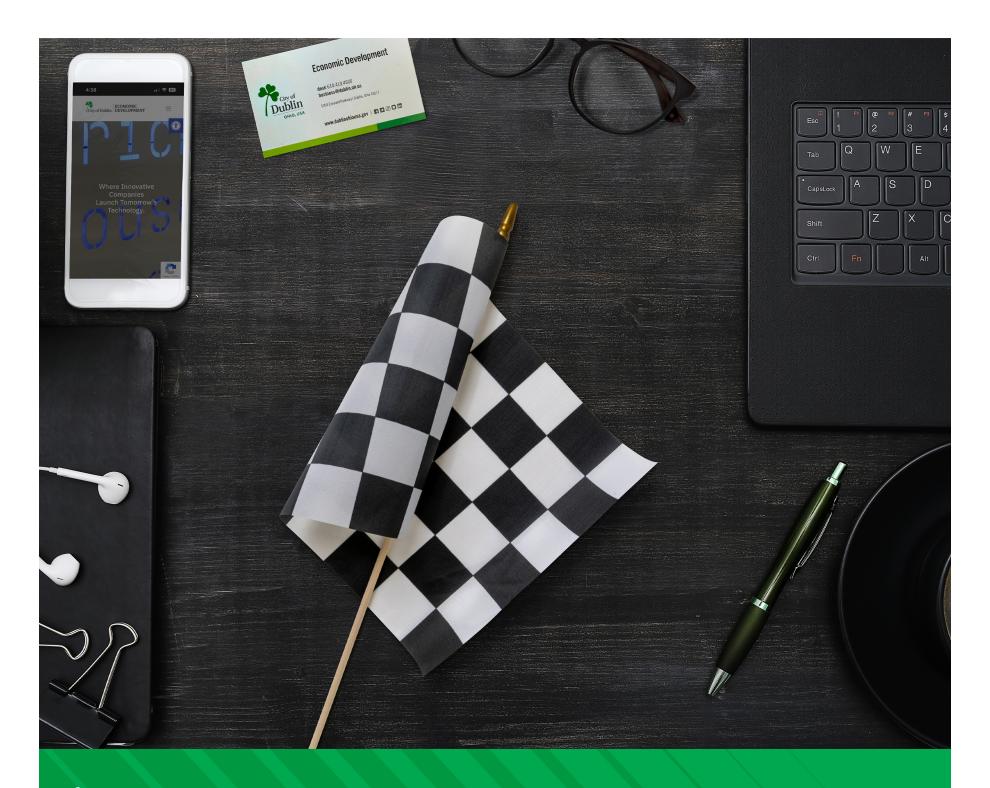














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GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER: **BUILDING A THRIVING REGION**

Welcome to the 2025 State of the Region Where We Are Growing Stronger Together

entral Ohio is growing at an incredible pace—another 750,000 people are expected to call this region home by 2050. But growth alone isn't the goal. The real measure of success is how we grow—can we grow better as we grow bigger?

At the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), we know that no single community, business or government can shape the future alone. That's why we bring together 90 local governments urban, suburban and rural—to plan for the future alongside businesses and community partners. Issues like housing, transportation and economic development are all interconnected, and the choices we make today will define the region we become tomorrow.

Right now, Central Ohio is making big moves—bold, transformative initiatives that are shaping how we live. move and thrive.

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 to prepare for growth. We are expanding transportation options with efforts like the \$8 billion LinkUS Initiative, which will improve public transit and add 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.

MORPC's commitment to sustainability ensures that as Central Ohio grows, we protect the resources needed for our communities to thrive. Through clean air initiatives and water resource management, we are preserving what makes our region strong—now and for future generations.

These big moves aren't just about infrastructure. They're about people—giving everyone in every neighborhood in Central Ohio the freedom of more choices in transportation and housing. These are investments in an even better quality of life.

"Growing Stronger Together: Building a Thriving Community" is about ensuring that residents have the power to choose how they live, work and thrive. Whether it's choosing a walkable neighborhood, a clean-energy vehicle or a new job opportunity connected by safer roads or rapid transit, we're putting possibilities within reach.

We invite you to be part of this effort. Whether by shaping policies, engaging us on planning initiatives or sharing your perspective. Your voice matters in shaping the future of our region.

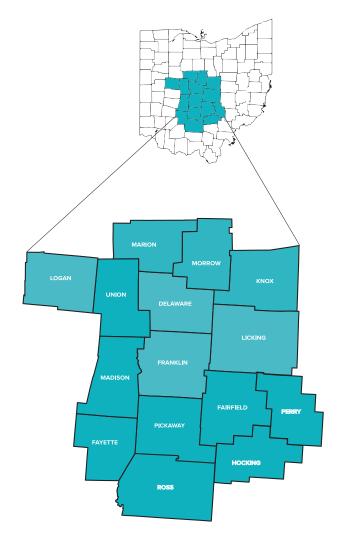
This is our time to make big moves and invest in the future prosperity of Central Ohio. Together, let's shape the future—one that works for all of us.



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



William Murdock, AICP Executive Director, MORPO









Central Ohio Leaders Celebrate Growing Stronger Together, Regional Successes at the 2025 MORPC State of the Region

s Central Ohio continues to grow at a rapid pace, regional leaders gathered for the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's (MORPC) 2025 State of the Region to celebrate progress and outline a vision for the future. Nearly 1,000 top elected officials, business and civic leaders from across Central Ohio joined this event to celebrate the region's shared accomplishments and innovative strategies regarding planning for the future.

This year's theme, Growing Stronger Together: Building a Thriving Region, emphasized a holistic approach to meeting residents' needs today and in the future. Discussions focused on expanding housing and transportation choices tailored to diverse communities, from urban neighborhoods to growing suburbs.

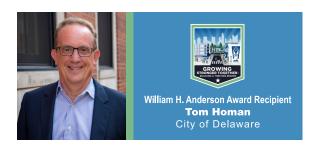


MORPC welcomed keynote speaker Bruce Katz, Founding Director of the Nowak Metro Finance Lab at Drexel University and Founder of New Localism Associates. Katz advises leaders on leveraging the competitive advantages of their cities and metropolitan areas. He is co-author of The New Localism: How Cities Can Thrive in the Age of Populism and The Metropolitan Revolution: How Cities and Metros are Fixing our Broken Politics and Fragile Economy.

Additionally, MORPC unveiled the preliminary results of the Leaders Listen Survey Series, developed in partnership with Measurement Resources Company, to obtain residents' opinions on experiences and services in the region. The Leaders Listen Series is a set of short surveys produced by MORPC that periodically invites residents within the Central Ohio region to share their input. The most current survey topic

in this series is Economic Development.

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



The William H. Anderson Award recognizes a MORPC board member who exemplifies outstanding leadership, a vision for the community and the region, and a commitment to MORPC. The award honors longtime MORPC board member, William H. Anderson, who was the epitome of a civic volunteer, remembered for the zeal with which he championed MORPC's mission and goals. This year the award was presented to Thomas Homan, city manager for the City of Delaware, who held the role for 26 years, making him the longest-serving city manager in the city's history.

From 1999 to 2024, Homan led Delaware through transformative changes, revitalizing its downtown, spurring new neighborhood development, and launching key economic initiatives. He championed the modernization of water treatment and sewer plants, the opening of the Delaware Community Center/YMCA, and earned national recognition, including two Ohio Magazine Best Hometown honors and a spot in Money Magazine's Top 50 Best Places to Live. The city's downtown also received national praise for its historic preservation.

Homan also played a key regional leadership role, serving as MORPC Chair in 2002 and securing the 2022 ICMA Conference for Columbus. After his tenure, he continued to serve as a consultant at Ohio University's Voinovich School and as MORPC's 208 Process Review Committee Chair. His leadership has left a lasting impact on Delaware and the region. MORPC's Regional Leadership Award recognizes individuals making extraordinary efforts to ensure the future viability of the region's communities.

The William C. Habig Collaborative Achievement Award is presented to an individual or organization that has achieved

an effective effort or innovative collaborative project in Central Ohio. Honorees have demonstrated success in developing a specific initiative or entity that supports broad inclusion, diverse thoughts in the process, and delivers tangible results addressing key challenges facing the region. This award was presented to Drive Investment in Central Ohio: War Room Collaborative.

Founded by the Columbus Partnership, the Drive Investment Partnership unites public, private, higher education and nonprofit leaders to pursue funding opportunities. In 2024, their efforts secured a record \$116 million in federal funding for Central Ohio, more than half of the state's total.

These funds support key projects like Lancaster's Industrial Complex, the Columbus Regional Airport Authority's Terminal Grant and COTA's West Broad Corridor expansion. Intel also received federal support for its semiconductor facilities.

This collaborative model is modernizing infrastructure, enhancing public transit, and strengthening the regional economy, positioning Central Ohio as a leader in securing federal investments for growth.





The Regional Leadership Award

originates from MORPC's continuing dedication to addressing issues that transcend community boundaries and stimulate visionary thinking. This year, MORPC honored Sandy Doyle-Ahern and Commissioner Jeff Fix for their leadership and impact.

President of EMH&T since 2012, Doyle-Ahern leads more than 350 professionals in engineering, planning, and design. As the company's first female shareholder and president, she has overseen its growth, more than doubling its size and significantly impacting Central Ohio's development.

A prominent figure in Central Ohio's business community, she advocates on key issues like housing and transportation. As a Columbus

Partnership member, she collaborates with leaders to improve the region's business climate and quality of life. She also supports regional projects like LinkUS to enhance connectivity and efforts to address housing.

Doyle-Ahern contributes to organizations such as the Columbus Metropolitan Library, Columbus State Community College, and the Affordable Housing Trust of Columbus and Franklin County.

Also honored, Commissioner Jeff Fix was elected to the Fairfield County Commission in 2018. He has played a key role in shaping regional growth. Previously, he served on the City of Pickerington's City Council, focusing on building resilient communities and long-term, practical solutions.

As commissioner, he led the creation of the county's Comprehensive Land Use Plan, balancing new housing needs with preserving community character. His leadership in housing and zoning decisions has promoted responsible growth while upholding shared values.

Fix emphasizes collaboration, ensuring diverse voices shape regional solutions. His work exemplifies how strategic planning and unity strengthen communities.

To watch a recap of the 2025 State of the Region visit, www.morpc.org/sotr. Also, be sure to save the date for the 2026 SOTR – March 20, 2026, at the Columbus Downtown Hilton.

Regional Leadership Award Recipients

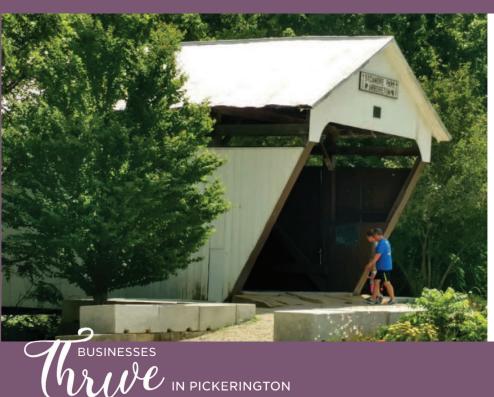








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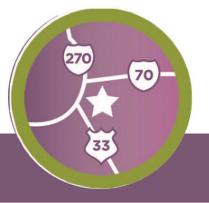
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Advocacy for Investment: Catalyzing Growth and Prosperity in Central Ohio

he year 2024 was a banner year for MORPC's public policy and "Drive Investment" efforts. In collaboration with the Columbus Partnership and other community partners, MORPC helped secure over \$140 million in One-Time Strategic Community Investment Funds at the Statehouse last summer. Through our partnership with the Columbus Region Coalition, we also supported over \$25 million in community projects in the

federal appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2025. In addition, MORPC launched a new Economic Development District and its related committees, secured a new state program for housing technical assistance and much more. These successes were driven by a unified, collaborative, member-driven approach. By placing members from across the region at the forefront, we highlighted the region's diverse assets and culture of collaboration.

As we move through the first quarter of 2025, the government affairs landscape continues to evolve significantly. With a new president and administration, a new member of Congress, two new U.S. Senators, and new leadership in both chambers of the Ohio General Assembly, a wide-ranging shift in policy preferences and leadership has occurred. The influx of new leaders presents an opportunity for our region to forge productive new relationships and advance key initiatives. To

navigate this evolving political environment, MORPC has published its 2025-2026 Public Policy Agenda, outlining priorities for the new General Assembly and Congress. As policies and leaders evolve, MORPC remains committed to promoting regionalism, mobility, sustainable growth, and economic prosperity for all Central Ohio residents.

Advancing Passenger Rail in Central Ohio

Ohio has a unique opportunity to restore and expand passenger rail service. Passenger rail is not just about transportation—it's about economic development, workforce mobility, and quality of life. The Federal Rail Administration has already approved four key corridors in Ohio, including the 3C+D (Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati) and the Midwest Connect (Chicago, Lima, Columbus, Pittsburgh). These routes will link our communities, urban and rural alike, creating new economic and travel opportunities for millions of Ohioans.

These corridors are now advancing to the second of three phases in the Corridor ID Program, where plans for routes, stations, service, upgrades, and financial plans will be developed. This initiative could not only restore passenger rail service to Central Ohio for the first time in 40 years but also establish the region as a hub for Midwest rail travel.

A key priority for the current state budget is securing a \$5 million appropriation for the next phase of the Corridor ID process. This funding will unlock federal dollars, advancing us to the next stage of development. The state appropriation would also enable the Ohio Rail Development Commission to establish an Office of Passenger Rail with staff dedicated to representing Ohio as these projects move forward. MORPC also supports re-instituting Ohio's membership in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC), fostering multi-state collaboration on passenger rail service and improvements.

The Central Ohio community is already stepping up—local governments have pledged over \$200,000 in matching funds. Business groups like the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, The Columbus Partnership, and Ohio Chamber of Commerce have also lent their support to this effort. Additionally, the Rail Executive Network — a public-private coalition established in 2021 — has been bringing together key stakeholders from business, government, and non-profits to share expertise and advance this initiative together.

Getting Better as we Grow Bigger

In addition to passenger rail, MORPC remains committed to supporting other transformative investments that enhance Central Ohio's overall quality of life. By leveraging partnerships and support from key leaders and stakeholders, and advocating with one voice, MORPC takes Central Ohio's communities to new heights. Through our Regional Policy Roundtable, we continue to foster productive dialogue with legislative leaders at the state and federal levels. These partnerships are vital as we and our partners pursue key projects like:

- John Glenn International Airport Terminal Improvements: The new \$2 billion terminal will expand to 36 gates, allowing for 25 percent more flights, connecting our region to the world
- Roadway Improvements Near Megaprojects: Key projects near major economic development sites like Intel, Anduril, and Honda
 are critical to maintaining sustainable commute times
- Central Ohio Greenways (COG) Trail Network Expansion: In partnership with RAPID 5, COG continues to connect our region
 with trails and greenways, including a proposed expansion of the Heritage Trail, connecting Hilliard to Downtown Columbus and rural
 connections across the region.
- Housing Technical Assistance Funding: MORPC successfully advocated to create a \$1.5 million grant to help local governments
 plan for growth
- Strengthening Defense Assets: The Central Ohio Defense Group, co-led by MORPC, works to attract federal resources for Rickenbacker ANGB and Defense Supply Center of Columbus.

Through strong partnerships and strategic advocacy, we will continue driving investment and shaping policies that benefit our communities. To learn more about our government affairs work, visit www.MORPC.org/GovAffairs.

PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

REGIONAL ADVOCACY FOR CENTRAL OHIO AT THE STATE AND FEDE







The Central Ohio Greenways Board Celebrates 10 Years With Bold Plans for 600+ Mile Trail Network

ne decade ago, MORPC's Central Ohio Greenways (COG) Board was established to build on the momentum created by the region's iconic trail-building champions, including Columbus & Franklin County Metro Parks, Columbus Recreation & Parks, and the cities of Westerville, Hilliard and others. The earliest trail visionaries laid the foundation in the 1960s with the creation of the beloved Olentangy Trail, paving the way for the Central Ohio Greenways network, which now spans more than

In 2015, passionate trail-building partners from organizations and local governments across Central Ohio recognized the opportunity to unify their efforts and established what we now know as the COG Board. Over the past decade, the COG Board has developed an ambitious vision to add more than 500 additional miles of trails to the region. More importantly, they have cultivated a culture of transforming what once seemed like an impossible vision into a tangible reality. Today, there is more optimism than ever that this trail vision will become reality in the near future.

The COG Board has been a steadfast advocate for increased funding for trails, as well as the sidewalks and bikeways that connect to them. Thanks to COG's advocacy and regional collaboration, Central Ohio is entering a transformational era of trail and greenspace building. Over a quarter of the COG vision for Franklin County is currently funded and slated for completion within the next five years. This progress is largely due to MORPC's Attributable Funding Committee, which is prioritizing standalone bike and pedestrian infrastructure projects like never before, and voter support for COTA's most recent levy, which includes the innovative Transit Supportive Infrastructure (TSI) funding program. TSI will provide approximately \$60 million annually for sidewalks, bikeways, and trails near transit stops. Notable projects include the sevenmile linear park through Linden, known as the Greenline; the Heritage Trail, connecting Hilliard to Downtown Columbus; and expansions of the Scioto and Big Walnut trails, among others.

Inspired by Franklin County's momentum, the 14 counties surrounding it have united to expand the 500-mile trail vision by proposing an additional 167 miles of trails. These new miles will connect rural small towns, state parks such as Buckeye

Lake, Indian Lake, and Delaware Lake, the newest UNESCO World Heritage Site in Ross County, and numerous other culturally significant destinations.

Beyond trail development, the COG Board has been proactively curating a Trail Town program designed to welcome residents and visitors alike to explore Central Ohio through its trails and outdoor experiences. This year, MORPC launched the Greenway Planning Studio – an effort to encourage creative greenspace visioning paired with pathways to implementation. Over the next decade, the COG Board, through the Trail Town program and the Greenways Planning Studio, will continue to foster a culture that places nature at the forefront of the region's collective identity.

Happy 10th Birthday, COG Board!

To learn more about COG, visit:

www.morpc.org/central-ohio-greenways





Driving Economic Growth in Central Ohio Through Strategic Investments

he Central Ohio region took a major step forward in advancing its economic prosperity with the approval of MORPC's application to designate the 11-county area as an Economic Development District (EDD) by the U.S. Economic Development Administration in Fall 2023.

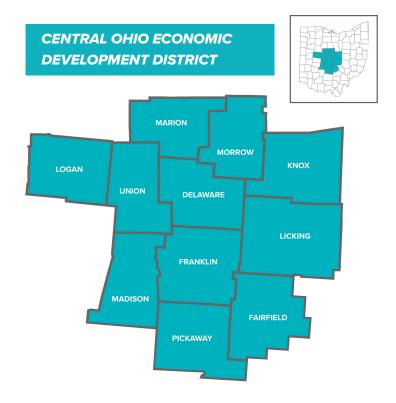
Since achieving this designation, MORPC has created its inaugural Economic Development office within the department of Mobility and Development. This office is dedicated to empowering communities of Central Ohio to secure resources that drive investments and enhance economic prosperity.

In its first year, the Economic
Development office established
a Comprehensive Economic
Development Strategy (CEDS)
Committee comprised of 32
public and private leaders
representing the region's
broad economic interests.
The committee oversees the
development, implementation
and ongoing updates to the
regional blueprint for economic
development.

The CEDS Committee held its kickoff meeting on Aug. 22 featuring speakers including Susan Brehm, U.S. EDA's Regional Director of the Chicago Regional Office; Kenny McDonald, CEO of One Columbus; and Committee

Chair Daryl Hennessy, Sunbury's city administrator. Brehm noted the EDD designation positions MORPC and the U.S. EDA as "institutional partners" to strengthen economic development efforts at the local, state, and national levels.

The U.S. EDA awarded MORPC a \$70,000 Partnership Planning Grant to continue implementing the priorities outlined in the CEDS. This award will allow MORPC to pursue initiatives that will boost labor force participation, prepare communities for growth, and align regional infrastructure development.



MORPC's Economic Development Programs and Resources

In addition to its work on the CEDS, MORPC continues to deliver impactful programs and resources to drive economic growth in Central Ohio:

Brownfield Remediation: MORPC collaborates with stakeholders to revitalize priority brownfield sites in Central Ohio. In fall 2024, MORPC applied for a \$500,000 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Community Wide Assessment grant to support cleanup and planning efforts.

Freight Coordination: MORPC bridges transportation planning and economic development through freight planning initiatives. Aimed at enhancing the region's competitive advantage in logistics and supply chain. Recently, MOPRC partnered with the Ohio Department of Transportation to host a Rickenbacker Area Freight Alliance Workshop, bringing together representatives from the Columbus Regional Logistics Council, the Central Ohio Transit Authority, the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, One Columbus and other key stakeholders from the Rickenbacker area.

Grants Assistance: MORPC assists members by identifying grant opportunities, determining eligibility and match requirements, creating templates, and review services for final applications.

Competitive Advantage Projects: This program identifies and promotes priority county projects to foster advocacy with legislators and advance economic vitality, infrastructure, and innovation-related investments. The initiative will be refreshed and refocused in 2025.

Drive Investment Portal: This online resource helps communities identify and leverage funding opportunities aligned with regional priorities across diverse program areas.



Events

This summer, MORPC hosted an Economic Development Forum featuring Lee Shirey, U.S. EDA's Ohio Program Representative, for stakeholders and partners within the 11-county EDD. Such forums allow the U.S. EDA to better understand regional priorities and challenges.

MORPC, in partnership with One Columbus, hosted a panel at ED411 this year titled, "The Future of Infrastructure: Building a Blueprint for Tomorrow." Panelists from Maricopa Council of Governments (MAG), Pheonix, AZ; North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), Arlington, TX; and Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County (RTC), Reno, NV spoke about lessons learned in securing mega projects, navigating challenges that follow and sustaining transformative growth. Key takeaways included the importance of land-use planning, building strategic partnerships between economic development officials and public leaders, and maintaining momentum during transformative growth initiatives.

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

 $www.morpc.org/economic development \blacksquare$





Planning for the Future: Why Regional Water Studies Matter

entral Ohio has long been recognized as a water-rich region. While this reputation is a source of pride, it comes with the responsibility of ensuring the longevity, protection and availability of water resources. As one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the country, Central Ohio must take proactive measures to safeguard this finite source, which is essential to the region's growth.

In 2024, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, in collaboration with other state agencies and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) initiated a Regional Water Study for the 15-county Central Ohio area. Funded by the Ohio Water Development Authority and led by consulting firm Hazen & Sawyer, the study examined existing and future water supply and demand to identify gaps and priority areas for water and sewer infrastructure investments. Additionally, it explored creative strategies to capture, conserve, and reuse water while preserving the environmental integrity of natural resources.

Assessing both surface and ground water resources allows the region to establish a baseline of available supply today and forecast availability into the future. This data-driven assessment ensures informed decision making about the capacity of water systems to support residential, agricultural and industrial consumption. By proactively identifying potential threats, including urban and agricultural runoff, and natural causes such as changes in precipitation, the region can develop strategies to control, mitigate, and adapt to these risks.

The water study also provides insights into how much water is needed to meet the region's current and future needs. According to the recently released U.S. Geological Survey's National Water Availability Assessment, 90% of water withdrawals in the Midwest are attributed to public supply, crop irrigation and thermoelectric power constitute. This information, coupled with a region-focused demand assessment from the Regional Water study, allows Central Ohio to better plan for sustainable water reuse. This includes identifying strategies for water reuse, reducing withdrawal rates and supporting recharge rates, all of which lay the foundation for effective resource management and long-term sustainable use.

The regional water study will inform data-driven actions around infrastructure investment, including the location and capacity of water supply and wastewater systems. As the region grows, this information will be critical to meeting future development needs. Additionally, the study will provide regional leaders with the tools to establish regulations and policies around equitable water access, pollution control, and water quality management.

MORPC and its partners are committed to advancing the outcomes of the Regional Water Study and developing long-range planning programs needed to prepare the region for a future defined by clean, abundant, and well-managed water resources. By taking these steps today, Central Ohio is ensuring a sustainable water future for generations to come.

For more information on MORPC's Water Resources Planning programs, visit www. morpc.org.





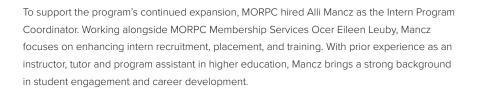


Pay It Forward – Building a Talent Pool for the Next Generation of Public Servants

s Central Ohio continues to grow, its success depends on cultivating the next generation of public servants. Recognizing this need, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) has made "Paying It Forward" one of its four strategic pillars. A key initiative under this effort is the MORPC Local Government Summer Internship Program, which launched in 2015 as a small pilot project for nine students studying city and regional planning. Since then, the program has flourished into a dynamic and comprehensive internship experience, serving more than 300 college students to date.



The program offers students—whether local to the region or from colleges across the state—an opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the public sector. With majors ranging from engineering and sustainability to communications, geographic information science, and public administration, interns bring fresh perspectives to local governments while simultaneously exploring potential careers in public service. Today, MORPC hosts an average of more than 50 interns each summer, reflecting the program's growing impact.



"My favorite part of my job—past and present—has always been working with students," Mancz said. "At MORPC, I have the opportunity to help undergraduate and graduate students prepare for their careers through networking and professional development opportunities."

MORPC ensures interns receive competitive pay, ranging from \$15 to \$22 per hour, by leveraging scholarships and investments from local governments. Additionally, MORPC professionals serve as mentors throughout the 14-week program, providing guidance, answering questions, and connecting students to valuable resources. Through Leuby's encouragement interns attend MORPC commission meetings and networking events, culminating in final presentations where they showcase their summer projects to MORPC leadership and peers.

"We benefit by creating opportunities for interns to demonstrate their abilities, gain a competitive edge, and hopefully choose a career in public service," Leuby said. "I love seeing how much experience students gain and the impact they are already making in our community."

Beyond internships, MORPC has expanded its educational partnerships with area colleges and universities, offering significant tuition discounts to MORPC's 25,000+ member employees—and, in some cases, their spouses and children.

For more information about MORPC member benefits, visit www.morpc.org/about-morpc/morpc-member-benefits or contact Eileen Leuby, MORPC Membership Services Officer, at eleuby@morpc.org. To learn more about the Intern Program, contact Alli Mancz at amancz@morpc.org.







Building More Inclusive Communities: Engaging Underrepresented Groups in the Public Involvement Process

entral Ohio is on track to reach a population of 3 million by 2050, with much of this growth driven by population migration. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Columbus ranks among the nation's fastest-growing large metropolitan areas, fueled by diverse populations, including immigrants, refugees, and new Americans. Immigration remains a vital component of Ohio's expansion and vibrancy.

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) recognizes the pervasive impacts of institutional systems, particularly in housing and transportation, which have disproportionally affected historically marginalized communities. To foster a more resilient region, MORPC collaborates with its members and partners to provide fair opportunities in housing, transportation, and sustainability. Achieving this vision requires intentional actions and purposeful strategies.

critical planning stages, MORPC ensures that public influence is meaningful and impactful. This promotes transparency and empowers residents – particularly those affected by transportation initiatives - to shape decisions that impact their lives

Public participation has been proven to drive meaningful changes in the planning process. MORPC's Public Participation Plan serves as a guiding framework for connecting with individuals for input while conducting its transportation planning process for the metropolitan planning organization area. The plan emphasizes compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and nondiscrimination procedures.

To address the disproportionate disparities affecting marginalized communities, MORPC has implemented targeted initiatives to advance environmental health, such as



together to collaborate on the future of economic growth, development, transportation, energy, and environmental stability in Central Ohio.

Having a wide range of public opinions leads to better decision making and policy discussions, which also increases the potential for successful implementation of plans, projects, and programs due to the entire community feeling heard and valued.

To get engaged, connect with MORPC on YouTube, Facebook, X and LinkedIn @MORPC. Threads and Instagram @MORPC_.

To learn more about MORPC's Public Participation Plan visit Public Participation – www.morpc.org. ■

Together, we can create a more inclusive and prosperous future for Central Ohio.



Decades of exclusionary practices have left many communities out of the public decision-making process, resulting in plans that fail to meet their unique needs.

MORPC is committed to removing these barriers by fostering collaboration and ensuring that strategies reflect the voices and values of all Central Ohio residents. As part of this commitment, MORPC adheres to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, denied benefits of, or subjected to discrimination in its programs and activities based on race, color, or national origin.

Public engagement is at the heart of MORPC's approach.

By soliciting community input and fostering outreach during

the Neighborhood Air Quality program and Weatherization program. In partnership with Franklin County Public Health, MORPC established an air quality monitoring network in Franklin County, providing critical data to guide strategies for cleaner air and healthier neighborhoods.

Through intentional public engagement, MORPC builds strong relationships that capture a wide range of perspectives, leading to more informed decisions and effective policies. These efforts ensure plans, projects, and programs are representative and poised for success because communities feel heard and valued.

Recognizing existing barriers, MORPC has been intentional about bringing communities of all sizes and interests





Turning Plans into Projects: Funding Transportation Projects from the 2024-2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan

he 2024-2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), adopted by MORPC in May of 2024, identified nearly \$35 billion in transportation investments needed in Central Ohio. Now MORPC is turning its attention to implementing this ambitious plan. Funding these significant improvements requires a combination of federal, state, local and private funding sources. MORPC is actively working to help Central Ohio communities navigate this complex funding landscape and move projects toward construction.

For each transportation project and funding program, the approach can vary. MORPC convenes partners and stakeholders to pursue local funding resources and public-private partnerships. MORPC also is uniquely positioned to facilitate and administer certain infrastructure funding sources, such as Ohio Public Works Commission programs and Transportation Improvement Districts. MORPC is also dedicated to exploring innovative funding and financing options, as well as efficient project delivery tools like state and federal credit programs, through creative partnerships.

Key considerations when pursuing funding for infrastructure projects:

- Matching Requirements: Many federal and state programs require local governments to provide a matching percentage of the funding.
- Eligibility Criteria: Each funding source has specific requirements, such as project type, regional impact or environmental considerations.
- Stakeholder and Public Engagement: Successful projects require stakeholder support and alignment with regional priorities.

MORPC Attributable Funding

As the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Columbus area, MORPC allocates around \$50 million in federal funding annually toward the region's transportation priorities. Since the demand for this funding exceeds its availability, MORPC works with the Attributable Funds Committee, comprised of technical experts and local leaders from across the region, to ensure these dollars are directed toward the projects that best advance the goals of the MTP. In recent years, this has included a strong focus on improving safety, equity and access to opportunity for Central Ohio residents. All projects receiving MORPC Attributable Funding aim to provide transportation improvements for all

users, including pedestrians and cyclists. MORPC currently has committed funding to more than 40 projects across the region, totaling nearly \$340 million through 2031. While this represents a relatively small portion of the funding needed to fully implement the MTP, MORPC Attributable Funding remains a key resource for local governments to advance their transportation priorities



Federal Funding Support

Implementing a plan as extensive as the MTP requires local jurisdictions to pursue larger federal funding opportunities, and MORPC actively supports these efforts. Through identifying funding opportunities, providing technical support, and advocating for Central Ohio with our lawmakers, MORPC strives to drive investment in the region. Securing federal discretionary funding is no small task and requires ongoing regional collaboration to maximize the impact of advocacy efforts. In 2024, Central Ohio successfully secured more than \$116 million in federal discretionary funding for critical infrastructure projects including:

• Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) — \$2.12 million

- The Crash Analytics and Injury Research (CAIR) project focuses on a Safe System Approach to minimize traffic fatalities and serious injuries on Central Ohio roadways through safer road infrastructure, safe speeds, improved vehicle design, post-crash care, and user behavior.
- Prioritization Process Pilot Program \$1.4 million
 - MORPC's Building Equitable & Safe Transportation (BEST) initiative enhances project evaluation, incorporates inclusive community input, and applies a data-driven approach to long-term transportation planning, primarily to regional safety analysis and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

Regional Funding Success

Local agencies in Central Ohio also achieved big wins:

Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA)

- ▲ Low and No Emissions: \$22.85 million: This grant will enable COTA to expand its fleet of low- and no-emission vehicles, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality across Central Ohio.
- Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods: \$41.9 million: This project focuses on reconnecting communities along West Broad Street by creating safe and affordable transportation options. It will include infrastructure improvements such as pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, upgraded transit stops, and enhanced multimodal connections to foster accessibility and equity in the region.

Delaware County

■ East Orange Road underpass: This project secured \$21 million from the USDOT's Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program. This award also leverages a regional commitment of \$8.38 million in MORPC-Attributable Funding.

City of Circleville

■ South Court Street Grade Separation: The project obtained a \$20 million award from the USDOT's Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program. Approximately forty trains pass through the city daily. Eliminating the railroad crossing on South Court Street in Circleville will enhance safety, traffic flow, emergency service response times, and overall mobility within the city.

MORPC's dedication to collaboration and strategic funding ensures Central Ohio is well-positioned to implement its long-term transportation vision, addressing critical infrastructure needs while advancing equity, safety and opportunity for all residents.

To learn more, visit us online at www.morpc.org/MTP



The Beta District: Pioneering Innovation and Smart Mobility in Central Ohio

he Beta District is Central Ohio's premier hub for innovation and economic development. Spanning Columbus, Dublin, Marysville and Union County, The Beta District serves as a real-world testing ground to deploy, refine and scale cutting-edge technologies along the US 33 Smart Mobility Corridor.

Doug McCollough, a high-tech industry veteran, was named The Beta District's first Executive Director last year. He is driving collaboration across the tech, automotive and advanced air mobility industries to fuel innovation in the region.

The Beta District is launching a new business advisory group and hosting Ohio's Future of Mobility Conference in May, bringing together top execs from the smart mobility, automotive, fiber and high-tech industries. These collaborative efforts are designed to break down barriers between industries, giving diverse businesses and public leaders a place to partner and make big ideas happen.



"Innovation doesn't happen in a vacuum it takes ongoing conversations across industries to spark new ideas and publicprivate partnerships,"

said McCollough. "We're bringing together some of the brightest minds to foster and beta test those ideas that will drive progress in smart mobility technologies and related infrastructure."

The Beta District also offers 100 gig fiber connections along the US 33 Smart Mobility Corridor—from Dublin to the Transportation Research Center (TRC) in East Liberty— allowing businesses and organizations to connect to fast and reliable transport. Those who are interested in leasing fiber should go to **thebetadistrict.com**.

OHIO'S FUTURE OF MOBILITY CONFERENCE

The Beta District is excited to host Ohio's Future of Mobility Conference from May 13-15, 2025.

Partners include the City of Dublin, the City of Marysville, Union County, the Intelligent Community Forum Institute, DriveOhio, TNL, Transportation Research Center, Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) and the Consulate General of the Netherlands in Chicago.

The conference will provide a space for discussions on expanding broadband access, progress in advanced air mobility, workforce development, smart mobility, safety and accessibility—key components of building intelligent communities. Whether you are a business leader, policymaker or technology innovator, The Beta District invites you to take part in this important event.

Register at the QR code below!







Working Together to Solve Central Ohio's Housing Crisis

any are familiar with the famous adage,
"Home is where the heart is." Originating from
Roman times, this saying reflects the idea that
homes are more than structures – they are
places of belonging, comfort, and affection. Unfortunately, in
recent years, finding a "home" in Central Ohio has become
increasingly difficult and, for many, unattainable.

Home prices have risen, in part, due to lagging residential construction. According to a report released this year by the Building Industry Association (BIA) of Central Ohio, the region averaged 8,214 building permits per year between 2010 and 2021. During roughly the same period (2012 to 2021), vacancy rates for owner-occupied units dropped from 2.6% to 0.7%, while renter-occupied unit vacancies fell from 9.0% to 4.3%. With new construction lagging behind population growth, housing availability has become increasingly sparse, resulting in more home-seekers competing for fewer available units— a major factor contributing to rising housing prices.

Looking ahead, Central Ohio is projected to grow to 1.2 million households between 2020 and 2050, requiring 282,000 new housing units to maintain a healthy vacancy rate. However, the

region is already experiencing a shortage due to the slow rate of construction following the 2008 market crash. To restore a healthy housing market with a 5% vacancy rate), Central Ohio must add 337,000 new housing units by 2050 – an average of 11,233 units annually. This represents a 37% increase in annual residential construction over the next 30 years.

This projected demand presents significant planning challenges. Communities must determine the most suitable housing types, identify optimal locations, update zoning codes, and revise long-range plans and development regulations, all while balancing an increased volume of permits and development applications. To assist communities in addressing these challenges, MORPC initiated a suite of community assistance services at the end of 2023 under the programmatic umbrella of Community-Based Planning Assistance.

MORPC offers a range of direct, indirect, and supportive services for member communities. The Planner Pool provides direct assistance with smaller projects that may otherwise be delayed due to heavy workloads, while the Consultant Services program helps communities find and secure external

consultants. Through these programs, MORPC has assisted communities with projects like neighborhood and area plans, development reviews, and the creation of design guides to streamline approval processes, allowing new housing units to be built more quickly.

Community-Based Planning Assistance also provides indirect support through workshops that help communities better understand the development review process and the steps developers take when creating project plans. By improving planning processes and fostering a deeper understanding of the development process, communities can be more effective in their planning and reviews, reducing delays and costly plan revisions, ultimately accelerating housing construction.

As housing challenges continue to impact Central Ohio residents and their communities, MORPC continues to monitor development and population trends, prioritizing innovative solutions. By working closely with local governments, MORPC aims to address these challenges and ensure Central Ohio remains a vibrant and affordable place to call home.









Survey Finds Housing, Jobs and Childcare Top Economic Concerns

ousing affordability, job opportunities and access to affordable childcare are the top economic concerns for Central Ohio residents, according to the latest Leaders Listen survey conducted by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). The Leaders Listen: Economic Development survey, part of a series launched in 2023, gathered insights from residents across the 15-county Central Ohio region. The goal is to help local leaders better understand public priorities related to economic development, particularly as the region experiences high-profile announcements of large employers expanding or starting large operations.

Housing Tops the List of Economic Challenges

Housing affordability emerged as the leading concern, with 73% of respondents citing "housing is too expensive" as one of their top three economic challenges. As well, 31% pointed to "limited housing options" as a major issue.

Many residents expressed frustration with rising costs, as more households become cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Optimism about the region's cost of living is low, with 62% feeling pessimistic. While 47% were pessimistic about the future of the housing market.

When asked which initiatives would most strengthen the economy, 51% of respondents prioritized increasing the supply of affordable housing. This outpaced traditional economic development strategies like business attraction and small business support by more than 20 percentage points, signaling a strong desire for regional planners to focus on housing availability.

The data shows the awareness that housing isn't just a quality-of-life issue—it's an economic one, with affordable housing being key to retaining and attracting a skilled workforce.

CENTRAL OHIOANS' CONCERNS WITH HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

73%

31%

51%

Housing is too expensive

Limited housing options

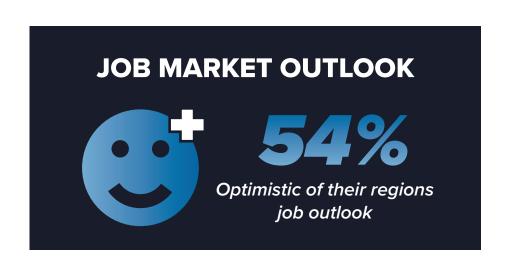
Increasing the supply of affordable housing

Job Market Sees Optimism Despite Current Concerns

Jobs were another top concern, with 36% of respondents citing a lack of high-paying opportunities, and 26% pointing to an overall shortage of jobs. Over half reported having to sacrifice necessities or miss payments on bills to cover housing costs.

Despite these challenges, more than half of respondents (54%) said they are optimistic about the region's job outlook, compared to only 21% who were pessimistic. This optimism is likely fueled by recent job announcements from major employers.

When asked about initiatives that would most strengthen the economy, residents emphasized supporting small businesses (31%), attracting new industries (28%) and backing existing local businesses (27%).



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The cost and availability of childcare is also ranked high among resident concerns, with 27% listing it as one of the top three economic challenges.

Among families with children under five, 20% reported sacrificing childcare expenses to cover housing costs—an issue that can limit employment opportunities for primary caregivers, especially women.

"Affordable childcare is a critical component of a thriving economy" according to MORPC's Director of Data Analytics and Strategy Dave Dixon. "If families can't find or afford childcare, it directly affects workforce participation and regional productivity."

Infrastructure and Utilities Get Broad Support—But Tax Hesitation Remains

Infrastructure improvements are also on residents' minds. Two-thirds of respondents agreed that investments in built infrastructure and utilities capacity are needed to support the region's growth, while 54% supported expanding green energy.

However, only 42% of residents said they would support higher taxes to fund initiatives. This may indicate a public desire for local governments to find more efficient ways to finance improvements or to prioritize these investments over other expenditures.

Despite the hesitancy, voters approved a permanent sales tax increase last November to fund COTA's LinkUS initiative, which will enhance bus service, sidewalks, and bikeways. This demonstrated that residents are willing to fund infrastructure projects that offer clear benefits.

The survey results come as MORPC continues to implement its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which provides an 11-county roadmap for fostering sustainable economic growth. The commission's economic development efforts focus on collaboration between public and private sectors, ensuring that resident needs play a central role in planning decisions.

The Leaders Listen survey series is part of MORPC's broader community engagement strategy, which aims to gather diverse perspectives from residents across Central Ohio. The economic development survey was made possible through partnerships with The Columbus Dispatch and Measurement Resources Company, who helped MORPC reach a broad cross-section of residents.

To view the complete results of the Leaders Listen: Economic Development visit www.morpc.org/leaderslisten/

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT PRIORITY

TWO-THIRDS

OF RESPONDENTS

Want more investments in built infrastructure and utilities capacity



When people come together, GREAT THINGS HAPPEN!

As partners in a strategically-planned community, New Albany collaborates with our residents and businesses to create a shared vision for the future that brings people together to do more than just live and work. It's a friendly, inclusive community that makes you feel at home, encourages a healthy, active lifestyle, nurtures the creative spirit, invests in lifelong learning, supports business and protects the environment for future generations. It's more than a place, it's a way of life.

















Big Moves: Better Travel Options on the Horizon

entral Ohio is poised to make significant strides in reimagining how we travel. From faster, more modern buses to safer and more connected greenways, navigating the region will soon be more convenient, affordable and enjoyable. For visitors to Central Ohio and residents traveling elsewhere, new projects will elevate both air and rail travel, making the future of mobility even brighter.

LinkUS

In November, voters approved the transformative, \$8 billion LinkUS mobility initiative, which includes:

- Five bus rapid transit (BRT) corridors offer fast, frequent service just like many modern metro systems.
- New or extended routes with later hours and shorter wait times across the system.
- Expansion of the on-demand COTA/Plus service.
- More than 500 miles of transit-supportive infrastructure like sidewalks, bikeways and other pedestrian connections.



This unprecedented commitment to the region's transit system will begin delivering results in 2025. Late-night service will expand, and buses will run more frequently. By 2030, three of the five planned BRT routes will be in operation or under construction, accompanied by nearly 150 miles of new sidewalks and bikeways to bridge the gap between homes and bus stops.

Passenger Rail

In December 2023, Central Ohio learned that two potential passenger rail routes were selected for the federal Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP), which guides new passenger rail planning across the country.

Since then, MORPC has partnered with the City of Fort Wayne, Indiana and coordinated with the Ohio Rail Development Commission on potential routes connecting Columbus to Cincinnati, Cleveland, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and beyond. In 2025, the region will embark on a multi-year effort to assess the trains, speeds and stations that will best set these routes up for success. Later this year, MORPC and the study team will conduct extensive stakeholder engagement as part of the planning process.





New Airport Terminal

It's not just mobility improvements on the ground that are taking off. The Columbus Regional Airport Authority recently broke ground on a \$2 billion terminal at John Glenn Columbus International Airport. The new terminal will accommodate more flights and larger aircraft while enhancing the travel experience for travelers with a spacious concourse filled with local and national restaurants and shops. The project is slated for completion in 2029, coinciding with the airport's centennial celebration.

While these advancements signal an exciting time for regional mobility, much work remains. MORPC will continue collaborating with partners to ensure the future of transportation is faster, safer and more convenient for all.



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Delaware | Dublin | Gahanna | Grandview Heights | Grove City | Groveport
Heath | Hilliard | Johnstown | Lancaster | London | Marion | Marysville
Mount Vernon | New Albany | Newark | Obetz | Pataskala | Pickerington | Powell
Reynoldsburg | Sunbury | Upper Arlington | Westerville | Whitehall | Worthington

VILLAGES

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Columbus Metropolitan Library
Educational Service Center of Central Ohio
Franklin Soil & Water Conservation District
Licking County Soil & Water Conservation District
META Solutions
Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio