



Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission Regional Policy Roundtable Meeting Minutes

Date: February 18, 2025

Time: 11:30 a.m.

Location: Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission

Members Present in Person

Sloan Spalding (Vice Chair)
Todd Bailey
Gerard Basalla
Robert Bitzenhofer
Sheila Willamowski Boehner
Ben Collins
Kristen Easterday
Kelsey Ellingsen
Kevin Pangrace
Jason Warner
Trenton Weaver

MORPC Staff Present in Person

Joseph Garrity
William Murdock
Kyle Probert

Guests Present in Person

Elizabeth Brown
James Coyne
Rachel Lustig

Attending Remotely

None

The meeting was called to order at 11:39am by Vice Chair Spalding.

Vice Chair Spalding provided a brief overview of the meeting and introduction of guests.

Mr. Murdock provided a director's update. He noted MORPC recently met with members of Congress, and he thanked the Roundtable for their work on the Public Policy Agenda. MORPC also met with Amtrak, who are very supportive of our work. They have taken a stronger interest in the Midwest Connect line in addition to the 3C+D. Tomorrow, MORPC will provide testimony on the state transportation budget before the House Finance Committee.

Vice Chair Spalding thanked the MORPC Communications & Engagement team for their graphic design work on the Public Policy Agenda.

Vice Chair Spalding recognized special guests for their update.

Ms. Brown and Ms. Lustig shared an update on homelessness in Central Ohio. They called out seven organizations providing services to unhoused people. This group coalesced because of the winding down of ARPA funding. 9,500 people were served last year in Franklin County by these seven organizations. This group is looking for a dedicated funding stream. The Community Shelter Board is generating larger conversations about homelessness in general via their Homelessness Assessment. Homelessness is most pronounced in places of growth, because housing does not keep up. The cost of housing then becomes out

of reach in these places. However, supply solutions alone are not enough as affordability slips away for low-income earners.

Vice Chair Spalding asked how much per year is required to sustain the shelters.

Ms. Brown responded that about \$24 million per year is required to sustain the current level of services.

Mr. Spalding thanked Ms. Brown and Ms. Lustig for their presentation.

Mr. Spalding recognized Mr. Garrity and Ms. Boehner for the legislative update.

Mr. Garrity began the legislative update highlighting the MORPC trip to Washington, D.C. for the National Conference of Regions. He also highlighted that 19 different community projects were approved by federal budget committees and are awaiting action by Congress. If there is not a budget passed in March, all of those projects will need to be resubmitted. A transportation reauthorization bill is also coming. We will have key Ohio leaders on key committees, including Congressman Dave Taylor on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Mr. Garrity recognized Mr. Coyne for an update from the office of Senator Moreno.

Mr. Coyne introduced himself and gave an update on the new Senator. Senator Moreno has placed a focus on immigration, trade policy in the auto industry, and being a champion for Ohio in D.C. So many of the economic development needs of the community depend on transportation. The Senator wants to have an open dialogue with members of the community. Senator Moreno will be participating in Congressionally Directed Spending.

Mr. Basalla asked how the Senator believes regional offices should be plugged in with local partners.

Mr. Coyne replied that their district director should be reaching out to keep the office connected.

Mr. Basalla replied he wants to ensure the right people are getting into the right places to communicate.

Vice Chair Spalding mentioned he heard Senator Moreno has an ambitious number of offices to be set up around the state.

Mr. Coyne said that the Senator intends to increase the number of regional offices to more than the previous four.

Vice Chair Spalding asked what the Senator's plans or interests in energy policy issues may be.

Mr. Coyne replied it is an important issue and to the extent there are federal roadblocks, Senator Moreno wants to advocate for American energy production expansion and infrastructure.

Mr. Garrity relayed information to Mr. Coyne regarding the region's Congressionally Directed Spending list. He also relayed that there were several major grants in the region that were awarded from the last administration, and MORPC is working with the Congressional delegation to navigate the environment. Also, two key BUILD grant applications were submitted – Alum Creek Drive and the Thornwood Corridor. Former Rep. Sean Duffy is now Secretary of Transportation. When MORPC is looking at funding, we will be monitoring developments on impoundment authority of the White House. MORPC also had a very impactful meeting with Amtrak and strong support from our Congressional delegation on passenger rail. Mr. Murdock is testifying tomorrow on the state transportation budget to ask for a \$5 million appropriation. MORPC has support from the Ohio Chamber of Commerce and the Columbus Partnership. MORPC is also advocating for Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) funding – the latest version of the budget zeroed out the \$5 million earmark for this program. There may also be further discussion on indexing the motor fuel tax to inflation.

Ms. Boehner noted Matt Huffman is now speaker and Rob McColley is now Senate President. They have a good working relationship. Jim Tressel was appointed Lt. Governor. Republicans are gearing up for the next

statewide election. Vivek Ramaswamy will be announcing a run for Governor soon. Robert Sprague will be running for Secretary of State. Frank LaRose will be running for Auditor. Keith Faber will be running for Attorney General. Two candidates have announced intention to run for Treasurer – former State Senator Niraj Antani and State Senator Kristina Roegner. For the Democrats, Amy Acton announced a run for Governor. Bryan Hambley, a cancer doctor, has announced a run for Secretary of State.

Ms. Boeher continued, noting the operating and transportation budgets are running parallel. Rep. Willis is Chair of the Transportation Committee, along with Vice Chair Jack Daniels, who has expressed interest in passenger rail. Rep. Michele Grim – a member of the Rail Development Commission, is the Ranking Member. Senator Tom Patton chairs the Senate Transportation Committee. Senator Tim Schaffer is the Vice Chair and Minority Leader Nickie Antonio is the Ranking Member. The process will conclude in April. The current transportation budget has doubled the funding for TIDs to \$9 million and makes Ohio a member of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission. The state operating budget should be done by the end of June. Historically, there have been budget subcommittees, but this General Assembly they are utilizing standing committees for the budget process. Rep. Brian Stewart is chair of the House Finance Committee, Mike Dovilla is the Vice Chair, Bride Rose Sweeney is Ranking Member. Some budget highlights include a modest increase in the Local Government Fund to a 1.75% revenue share, \$8 million for local cybersecurity, and an expansion of the Historic Preservation Tax Credit from \$60 million to \$120 million.

Ms. Boehner also noted The Ohio Rail Development Commission's Executive Director, Matt Dietrich, testified on February 6 regarding the As-Introduced version of the Transportation Budget and its impact in the rail space. Questions were raised by committee members, including Rep. Grim, regarding passenger rail. Efforts are being made to ask for Operating Budget dollars to secure funding for the studies necessary to continue these projects, specifically as it pertains to 3C+D.

Mr. Garrity encouraged members to support the passenger rail efforts at the Statehouse.

Ms. Boehner provided a defense update, noting the next meeting of the Central Ohio Defense Group is Friday, February 28 at 9:00 AM in the offices of Kegler Brown. With the announcement of Anduril opening a significant manufacturing plant at Rickenbacker International Airport, Steve Tugend has been in discussions with One Columbus on how to support this new employer and welcome the ring of suppliers that the new employer is expected to attract to our region.

Vice Chair Spalding requested a motion to approve the minutes of the prior meeting.

Mr. Bailey moved to approve the minutes.

Ms. Ellingsen seconded the motion.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved without objection.

Mr. Garrity noted the State of the Region will be held on Friday, March 21st and tickets are expected to sell out. Bruce Katz will be the keynote speaker.

The meeting adjourned at 12:48 p.m.