
II. Introduction: The Public And Their Leaders Are Invited Aboard

A. Background

Identifying a growing need to move people and goods faster and more efficiently, in 2001 the Ohio Rail Development Commission kicked off the "Ohio & Lake Erie Regional Rail Cleveland Hub Study", later re-named the "Ohio Hub Passenger and Freight Rail Study." This effort was designed to assess potential passenger rail markets and associated freight railroad improvements in the following corridors: Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati; Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit; Cleveland-Pittsburgh; and Cleveland-Buffalo-Niagara Falls-Toronto.

The draft Ohio Hub report summarizes the findings of the passenger and freight rail feasibility study. The findings on potential riders, costs, travel times, train operations and economic benefits of the four above-mentioned rail corridors are fully documented in the draft study. These results greatly expand on the findings from a conceptual Cincinnati-Columbus-Cleveland "3C" study completed in July 2001. A key difference between the 3C study and the Ohio Hub is that the more recent ORDC planning effort broadens the study area and involves many more study partners, including the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), Amtrak, Canada's VIA Rail, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), and the CSX and Norfolk-Southern freight railroad companies. From the outset, ORDC recognized the importance of railroad participation and encouraged the Class I freight railroads to contribute to the study. As a result, the study's technical analysis and conceptual capital plan have benefited from significant railroad input. It has also served to address and answer most of the railroads' concerns and issues.

Additional input was sought from local stakeholders during the course of the study, and some representatives from local government attended the study meetings. As the study wound down, however, it became evident that the study findings would need to be shared with a larger cross-section of Ohio's key planning agencies, business and community leaders, elected officials and the general public living within the service areas of the proposed passenger rail corridors. As these stakeholders would be affected by the costs and benefits of such an undertaking -- and would potentially ride and/or promote the service -- it was critical they understood its implications and have a voice in how passenger and freight rail moves forward in Ohio.

The following report summarizes how ORDC reached out to the local stakeholders, what ORDC heard from the various groups attending the meetings and how the public and stakeholder comments have influenced how ORDC moves forward with the development of the Ohio Hub passenger and improved freight rail service.



B. Public & Agency Involvement Objectives

ORDC's public and agency involvement program was to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Increase the public's understanding of the Ohio Hub Study's assessment of introducing passenger rail and improved freight rail service in Ohio.
2. Leverage existing communication channels to seek extensive feedback on the results of the Ohio Hub Study, a major study milestone, and make adjustments accordingly as appropriate.
3. Use the feedback from the public and agency involvement effort to determine the public's willingness to move into developing the Federal Railroad Administration's First Tier Environmental Impact Statement, a requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act when seeking federal funds for major infrastructure projects.

C. Overview of Public Involvement Strategies

To accomplish these objectives, the following strategies were used:

1. Technical and communication input and sponsorships were sought and secured with eight metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and regional planning commissions (RPCs) throughout the state.
2. Eight technical meetings were held with transportation agency and local officials in seven locations throughout the state.
3. Fourteen public and community leader meetings were co-hosted at nine locations throughout Ohio.
4. One-on-one meetings were held and presentations given to about 1,000 individuals and members of community groups and grassroots organizations.
5. Publicity efforts that included: news releases to all area media and resulting print and broadcast news stories, letters of invitation to area leaders and stakeholder groups, Web site meeting listings, e-mail notifications and updates to grassroots leaders and previous meeting attendees, who were asked to notify others.
6. Written comment forms provided to public meeting attendees.
7. Other feedback mechanisms such as phone calls, e-mails, letters and resolutions of support.

