
IV. Conclusions/Next Steps

By pursuing this public and agency involvement program, ORDC gained valuable input and reinforced positive relationships with stakeholders who could advance -- or obstruct -- this initiative and the eventual development of a statewide passenger rail strategy. The program, with its aggressive use of partnerships with local metropolitan planning organizations, the media and existing grassroots organizations, met its goals of: 1) increasing public understanding of the Ohio Hub Study's assessment of introducing passenger rail and improved freight rail service, 2) leveraging existing communication channels to seek extensive feedback, and 3) using the feedback to adjust the plan and gauge the public's willingness to move ahead with more detailed environmental analysis. The response to the last objective was an overwhelming "move ahead!" While it anticipated receiving insights on issues of importance to the public, ORDC did not anticipate the wide breadth of support and sense of urgency among community leaders and members of the general public.

Additionally, the 14 public and community leader meetings provided a "news hook" for local media, giving them a reason to cover this issue -- which in turn increased the opportunity for ORDC to educate the public at large in a cost-effective manner. While only a small percentage of the public actually attended the public meetings, a much larger audience had the opportunity to read and/or hear about the study progress through the news coverage, invitation letters and e-mails from grassroots organizations that closely follow rail and transit issues. Similarly, elected officials and other community leaders had multiple opportunities to learn how rail can play a key role in providing Ohioans a balanced transportation network, which in turn can enhance the overall economic vitality of the state.

