



# Ohio Rail Development Commission

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## Ohio Rail Development Commission Staff & Commission Retreat August 30, 2007 – Highbanks Metro Park

Members present included: Chairman James Betts, Commissioners Tom McOwen, Dan Roberts, Herk Wolfe, Kim Gibson, Barbara Bennett, Jim Hartung, Larry Sowers and Howard Wood. Members absent included: Commissioner Solomon Jackson, Senators Capri Cafaro and Larry Mumper and Representatives Bob Hagan and Larry Flowers.

Chairman Betts called the retreat to order at 8:20 a.m. Chairman Betts asked ORDC staff to give brief introductions of themselves and an overview of their responsibilities within ORDC. All ORDC staff was present with the exception of project managers Tod Darfus and Joe Reinhardt who were needed at project sites.

Gloria Howard presented a brief overview of the personal services contracts ORDC has awarded since 2003 through the present. Ms. Howard indicated she met with Commissioner Jackson prior to the retreat to answer some questions he had regarding these contracts. She distributed a handout which outlined some of the questions to better illustrate the process. A brief discussion took place regarding the process and the need for personal services contracts in the future.

Chairman Betts introduced Terra Goodnight, Governor Strickland's Office, who presented an overview of the Governor's *Turn Around Ohio Plan* and how ORDC fits into the plan. Ms. Goodnight asked that ORDC staff and commissioners help the Governor's office to develop a long-term vision for the future of rail in Ohio and requested ORDC take a leadership role in implementing that vision. Discussion followed on the need for a strategic plan to keep moving forward in promoting rail as a viable option of transportation.

Discussion then took place regarding the trucking industry vs. the rail industry. Commissioner Gibson asked "how do we best promote our mode (rail) of transportation?" Commissioner Gibson reiterated "Ms. Goodnight has challenged us to develop a long term vision" and indicated "we need a strategic plan."

Matt Dietrich led a discussion regarding the potential long term lease of the Panhandle Rail Line to the Ohio Central Rail Road System. A five page outline and overview of discussion points was presented in the retreat packet. Mr. Dietrich indicated staff has developed three categories to consider in their discussions regarding the long term lease: Policy/Procedure; Business Case; and Financial Value of the Asset. Discussion took place with the commissioners requesting that staff add the Panhandle Lease as a formal discussion item to the agenda at the Commission's September meeting.

Don Damron, ORDC's Passenger Rail Planner, reviewed his "Passenger Rail Topics of Discussion" outline that was included in the retreat packet. Mr. Damron discussed the outstanding issues with passenger rail and brought the commissioners up to speed on what ORDC has accomplished on this initiative thus far. Mr. Damron had several questions identified he was hoping to have answered; rather it was decided to review the issues at the commission meeting in September where formal action could be taken, if necessary.

Mr. Art Arnold, President of the Ohio Railroad Association, facilitated a Railroad Roundtable discussion where members of his organization were present to discuss issues such as operating costs, maintenance costs, tax credits, public benefits from the railroads, capacity studies and public/private partnerships. Present for the discussion was Mr. Bill Harris, Norfolk Southern; Mr. Pat McCune representing Wheeling & Lake Erie; Mr. Bill Strawn, Ohio Central Railroad Systems; Mr. Pete Petrie, RJ Corman; and Mr. Neil Zimmers, representing CSX Transportation.

Stu Nicholson, ORDC's Public Information Officer, reported on ORDC's public relations' efforts and indicated media attention is growing. Mr. Nicholson informed commissioners that media inquiries are increasing beyond requests for quotes and announced "we are being viewed more as a resource."

Mr. Nicholson spoke about this year's Ohio State Fair and said the state exhibit was "the best in years." He reported ORDC's profile is more visible and positive. A two-page handout identifying ORDC's strategy and outreach issues was included in the retreat packet.

Chairman Betts adjourned the retreat at 4:00 p.m.