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**Congress of the United States**  
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COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
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(RANKING MEMBER)

September 11, 2025

Mike DeWine  
Governor  
State of Ohio  
77 South High Street, 30th Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Pamela Boratyn  
Director  
Ohio Department of Transportation  
1980 West Broad Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43223

Dear Governor DeWine and Director Boratyn,

I write to express my disappointment with the recently released draft 2025 State of Ohio Rail Plan and the lack of a feasibility study for the expansion of a rail service line for the Akron-Canton region. My community and I have made it incredibly clear through letters, public comment, and Congressional testimony, that a rail service line expansion to the Akron-Canton region is necessary to continue to foster economic development and expand opportunity for the residents of Northeastern Ohio. I respectfully request in full and fair consideration the Ohio Rail Development Commission to reconsider this omission and conduct this feasibility study for the benefit of Northeastern Ohio and its communities.

Ohio's infrastructure plays a vital role in the quality of life for the state's residents and visitors while enabling commerce for local businesses and freight. Ohio is located within a half day's drive of 60% of the population of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Ohio roadways and bridges carry the third highest freight volume in the United States and accommodate the sixth most vehicle miles traveled. There are 27 urban and 34 rural transit systems serving 83 of Ohio's 88 counties,<sup>2</sup> making the state an essential tool in the national economy. Ohio maintains one of the most extensive and heavily traveled roadway systems in the nation, consisting of over 8,000 miles of total road lanes and over 27,000 bridges. This places Ohio's system 2nd in the nation for number of bridges, 5th largest interstate system in the nation, and 6th largest in total vehicle miles traveled.<sup>3</sup> With so many travelers coming to and through the state, rail can serve as a much needed addition to the current transportation system to encourage economic development, job growth, and increasing connectivity throughout the state and country.

<sup>1</sup>Ohio Department of Transportation. "Ohio Department of Transportation." 2023 Annual Report, <https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/about-us/odot-strategic-plan/annual-reports/annual-reports/> Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>2</sup>Ohio Council of Local Sections of the American Society of Civil Engineers. "Ohio Council of Local Sections of the American Society of Civil Engineers." Ohio's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card, [https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ASCE\\_Brochure%E2%80%9494OH2021.pdf](https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ASCE_Brochure%E2%80%9494OH2021.pdf) Accessed 8 May 2024

<sup>3</sup>Ohio Department of Transportation. "Ohio Department of Transportation." 2023 Annual Report, <https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/about-us/odot-strategic-plan/annual-reports/annual-reports/> Accessed 8 May 2024.

The announced 3-C+D and Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit Corridor plans do not adequately serve Eastern Ohio, leaving behind a significant population that could benefit from the inclusion of passenger rail. The Akron-Canton region is the fourth largest region in Ohio and the only large metropolitan area without a proposed rail line. The region offers travel connections through the Akron-Canton Regional Airport, higher education opportunities at five distinct institutions, several healthcare systems, countless manufacturing companies, and various attractions such as the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the Akron Art Museum, the Akron Zoo, and Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Furthermore, the business community, led by the Akron-Canton Advocacy Alliance, has united to advocate for the addition of a passenger rail service stop in the region, recognizing the economic benefits and increased connectivity it would bring to the area.

Eastern Ohio consistently ranks among the most affordable places to live in the nation. The Akron Housing Market Area (HMA) has remained among the most affordable in the nation and the most affordable in the Northeast Ohio region. During the fourth quarter of 2021, the Akron HMA ranked as the 15th most affordable metropolitan area in the nation, with 221, or 90 percent, of the 246 ranked metropolitan areas in the nation being less affordable.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in April 2024, Ohio was named the second<sup>5</sup> most affordable place to own a home, while Akron and Canton ranked in the top eight<sup>6</sup> housing markets nationally. In December 2023, Canton and Youngstown were ranked 2nd and 17th, respectively, as the most affordable places to buy a home in the country.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, Ohio's population in nearly every county in Northeast and Eastern Ohio is expected to decline by 2050<sup>8</sup>; expanding rail services in this area will help maintain and attract residents to the state and ensure the progress of the region.

In fact, a passenger rail line in the Akron-Canton region has been advocated for at the local level for many years now. In the 2019 State of Ohio Rail Plan, the Plan notes that "There is interest from local stakeholders in establishing a rail service between the Akron-Canton Airport and the Football Hall of Fame in Canton."<sup>9</sup> Over 5 years later in the draft 2025 State of Ohio Rail Plan, regional stakeholders were again cited expressing interest in "intercity passenger or commuter rail service to Akron-Canton Regional Airport and requested that service to the region be included in the 3C+D CID effort."<sup>10</sup> The Akron-Canton Advocacy Alliance, a coalition formed from the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce, have twice advocated for this rail line as recently as last year. Once in a letter to then Ohio Department of Transportation Director Jack Marchbanks and again in a public comment to

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. (2022). Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis Akron, Ohio.

<sup>5</sup> Murphy, Chad. "See where Ohio ranks for affordable housing in the US." Akron Beacon Journal, Akron Beacon Journal, 12 April 2024, <https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/news/2024/04/12/ohio-rank-affordable-housing-real-estate-income-home-owner/73204735007/>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Weiker, Jim. "Ohio cities land on Realtor.com's list of strongest housing markets." The Columbus Dispatch, Columbus Dispatch, 30 April 2024, <https://www.dispatch.com/story/business/real-estate/2024/04/30/ohio-cities-land-on-realtor-coms-list-of-strongest-housing-markets/73511077007/>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Mentz, Zach. "5 Ohio towns among top 20 Most Affordable Cities to Buy a House, report says." Cleveland.com, Cleveland.com, 14 December 2023, <https://www.cleveland.com/news/2023/12/5-ohio-towns-among-top-20-most-affordable-cities-to-buy-a-house-report-says.html>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Ohio Department of Development. "Ohio Department of Development." Projected 2050 County Populations, <https://development.ohio.gov/about-us/research/population/population-projections/projected-2050-populations-map>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Ohio Rail Development Commission. (n.d.). 2019 State of Ohio Rail Plan. rail.ohio.gov. <https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/rail.ohio.gov/publications/rail-plan/Rail-Plan.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Ohio Rail Development Commission. (n.d.). 2025 Draft State of Ohio Rail Plan. rail.ohio.gov. <https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/rail.ohio.gov/publications/rail-plan/2025DraftRailPlan.pdf>

the Commission as the draft 2025 plan was being created.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that there is persistent local support for passenger rail service to the Akron-Canton area and a feasibility study should be conducted.

It is imperative that we acknowledge that the Eastern region of our State deserves, and stands to greatly benefit from, improved rail accessibility. Akron and Canton have always been deeply connected in respect to our shared airport, roadways, cultural assets, industry footprint, and commuter interchange rates. The region is a gateway to Ohio from the East Coast of the United States; a rail stop would better connect the workers and families of Eastern Ohio to economic, educational, and healthcare opportunities across the state and the region. Failing to provide such infrastructure would undoubtedly result in adverse consequences for the economic development of the region.

In light of these considerations, I respectfully request your full and fair consideration that the Ohio Rail Development Commission conduct a feasibility study on the addition of a passenger rail corridor that includes a stop at CAK or another location within the Akron-Canton area.

Thank you for your attention and careful consideration of this matter. I look forward to your favorable response and to the opportunity to collaborate on this critical issue in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emilia Sykes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Emilia Sykes  
Member of Congress  
13th Congressional District of Ohio

cc:

Executive Matt Dietrich

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<sup>9</sup> Akron-Canton Advocacy Alliance. (2024, May 10). Letter to Director Marchbanks.  
<https://sykes.house.gov/imo/media/doc/ODOT%20Indication%20of%20Interest%20for%20Amtrak%20Stop%20in%20Akron%20Canton%20Region.pdf>