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Mighty Economic Engine Will Power 3C Train

Diverse stakeholders representing business, regional planners, rail passengers, and environment begin “whistle stop tour” urging Ohioans to get on board 3C “Quick Start” Rail Plan

Developer of \$100 million project next to new train station in old New England mill town predicts Ohio will reap handsome return on investment from 3C train

(Columbus, OH)– Proponents of Ohio’s proposal to restart passenger train service along its 3C corridor kicked off a “whistle stop” tour of cities along the 250-mile route today to push a potent message: Ohio’s 3C “Quick Start” passenger rail plan will deliver much more than passengers; it also will deliver jobs and economic development to the Buckeye State.

The supporters—including local chambers of commerce, regional planning organizations, real estate developers, and rail passenger and environmental groups—are hoping to build support among local business and community leaders for the state’s application for federal stimulus funds to get trains running between Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati. State officials are competing for federal stimulus funds to start train service as early as 2011.

Helping roll out their case at a Statehouse press event this morning was Robert Martin, a real estate developer from New England. Mr. Martin is spearheading a \$100 million redevelopment project to convert an abandoned mill to residential and commercial space next to a new train station along the Downeaster passenger rail line in Saco, Maine.

“Done right, a well-run train and a well-placed train station can be a magnet for growth and development in a town center,” said Martin. “Condos and apartments get built. New shops and restaurants open. Energy and commerce jump as people converge to do business.

“We found that the Amtrak Downeaster is a true economic engine on our steel interstate. After less than \$100 million in public investment, we see over \$7 billion in additional construction investments; 42,000 new housing units; almost 7 million square feet of commercial space and almost 18,000 new jobs. Magnify that by the impact on energy and the \$2.4 billion per year of additional consumer purchasing power, and you have a huge shift in the economy of a state one-eighth the size of Ohio. If we can do this in our little state, think of what Ohio can do.”

Ohio transportation officials plan to apply for \$400 million in federal stimulus funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to initiate 79 MPH service along the 3C corridor. Ohio plans to use federal funds to make capitol and infrastructure improvements, upgrading tracks, signals, and crossings and acquiring train cars and locomotives.

Competition for federal stimulus funds is fierce. Forty states have submitted pre-applications, seeking \$102 billion from a pool of \$8 billion available for passenger rail. The U.S. Department of Transportation is expected to make its funding decisions this fall.

“The 3C passenger train will be a real economic boon to Ohio,” said Chester Jourdan, Executive Director of the Mid Ohio Regional Planning Commission. “We know from the experience of cities across the country and around the world that when a solid passenger rail system is created, it boosts the private sector’s confidence in the long term commitment to the area and triggers private investment and development. These investments will help create jobs, bringing people and activity to Ohio’s downtowns, suburbs, and even smaller towns, creating ripple effects in our economy. This train can’t start to roll soon enough.”

State officials plan the start-up service as a prelude to 115 MPH high-speed train service. The 3C corridor is part of the high-speed Chicago Hub Network, connecting Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati with other Midwest cities. Nearby connections are envisioned to include Buffalo, Detroit, Indianapolis, Louisville, Pittsburg, and Toledo.

This week is expected to be a momentous one for Ohio’s 3C rail plan:

- On Tuesday or Wednesday, the Ohio Department of Transportation and the Ohio Rail Development Commission will announce their recommended route and station alternatives, preliminary ridership, and travel-time estimates. Also this week, Amtrak is expected to release a much-anticipated operations proposal for the 3C, announcing schedules, assumed start-up station locations, and its own ridership projections.
- ODOT and ORDC are hosting a public open-house meeting in each of the 3Cs (Columbus-Tuesday; Cleveland-Wednesday; Cincinnati-Thursday) to give the public an opportunity to ask questions and voice preferences about train fares, routes, etc.
- Rail advocates plan a series of briefings this week for local business and community leaders in Columbus, Springfield, Dayton, and Cincinnati.

“On September 11, 2001, I was half way across the globe, working on the feasibility study of the Dubai metro system,” said Ken Sislak, Associate Vice President, AECOM Transportation and board member of All Aboard Ohio. “Last week, on Sept. 9, the system opened. In just eight years, this former fishing village went from feasibility study to revenue service on a world-class, fully automated light-rail system. In Ohio we’ve had 30 years of study but precious little action on passenger rail. The time for study is over, and the time to act is now. ODOT Director Molitoris is on the right track to get trains rolling again on the 3C corridor.”

Advocates believe Ohio will benefit from investing in the 3C rail plan, pointing out that:

- nearly 6 million people live within 15 miles of the 3C corridor;
- well-planned train station projects attract new construction and development;
- freight rail will benefit from infrastructure improvements at congested choke points;
- trains offer an affordable, safe, convenient, and productive way to travel;
- nearly 1 million residents along the 3-C Corridor do not drive due to age, health, financial disability, the high cost of driving or personal preference;
- existing transportation alternatives to driving from Cincinnati to Cleveland (258 mi.) are inadequate, with airfares ranging from nearly \$400 to more than \$700 round trip and bus services in retreat despite trips being oversold two and three times over;

- driving costs 55 cents per mile, or more than four times higher than taking the train (Midwest rail fares average 8-14 cents per passenger mile);
- business travelers can work on the train, safely and conveniently talking on the phone, working on their laptop, even conducting meetings, making their travel time more productive, even when the train travels slower than a car; and
- a March 2009 statewide poll showed 64% of Ohioans want passenger rail;

Once the 3C train is rolling, Ohio will join 14 other states that contract with Amtrak to operate state-funded passenger trains in their state, including Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Ohio officials estimate \$10 million to \$15 million in state support will be necessary to supplement ticket sales and other revenue to operate the train and pay for engineers, conductors, fuel, maintenance, etc. Some critics have suggested that Ohio should not invest in passenger rail, citing the subsidy and supposed competition for highway project funding from the state motor fuel tax.

An annual \$10 million operating support for the 3C train would amount to only 0.26% of Ohio's annual \$3.8 billion state transportation budget. ODOT, however, has indicated that it will use non-fuel tax revenue to help operate the train, preserving the state fuel tax for the state's historic investment in highways and bridges.

It's been almost 40 years since the last passenger train traveled the 3C corridor. Advocates are wasting little time urging Ohioans to let state officials know that they support the 3C.

"The 3C train stands for more than Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati," said Jack Shaner, Deputy Director of the Ohio Environmental Council. "It also stands for conservation, convenience, and commerce. Fourteen other states have figured that out, including our Big-10 rivals, Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. They're investing in state supported passenger train service. And they're growing jobs, stimulating new investment, and saving travelers millions on travel expenses. Ohio cannot afford to be stuck at the end of the line. It's high time for Ohio to get on board modern passenger rail service. We urge every Ohioan who supports the 3C plan to tell their lawmakers to get on board, today."

Scheduled participants in this week's 3C "whistle stop" tour include:

- All Aboard Ohio
- Clark County-Springfield Transportation Coordinating Committee
- Columbus Chamber of Commerce
- Dayton Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Ohio
- Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission
- Mid Ohio Regional Planning Commission
- Mayor Warren R. Copeland, City of Springfield
- Ohio Environmental Council
- Sierra Club Ohio Chapter
- Springfield Center City Association
- Springfield Chamber of Commerce