

LICKING COUNTY WHITE PAPER

Possible Sale of the State Rights to the Panhandle Railroad

November 13, 2002

1. The State of Ohio acquired the Panhandle line in 1992 to foster and support industrial and commercial growth in Central Ohio. This was a good decision.
2. Freight service is now available to industry in Licking County and elsewhere, and must continue to be available with the best possible service and at the best possible price.
3. The public interest was furthered when the state and counties got involved. Many local communities committed "capital" in the form of tax abatement and, even more substantially, in the prioritization of this issue by forgoing other priorities in order to ask for state assistance.
4. Since 1992, local community projects in Licking County have been completed which may not have been possible without state ownership.
 - Example: Currently, ODOT is proposed to upgrade Beaver Run Road/SR79 with a 0.5 mile relocation of the railroad using state and federal highway funds. This project may have been more costly without state ownership.
 - Example: State ownership, and the state's provision for multiple trackage rights, has given Licking County developers and economic development officials the ability to market competitive rail services. Without state ownership, this is lessened.
 - Example: ten miles of joint use of the Panhandle Line and a safe public recreation trail extending from downtown Newark East past the Longaberger Golf Course.
5. Local community projects are contemplated which may not occur or may be more costly to the public without continued state ownership.
 - Example: The Macro Corridor between Columbus and 1-77 is proposed to finish uncompleted portions of State Routes 161, 37, and 16. Some plans call for completion all the way to Pittsburgh. Portions of this corridor will certainly involve crossing, relocation, or right of way encroachment of the Panhandle line. The exact locations may be years away from determination. This impacts Franklin, Licking, Muskingum, Coshocton, Tuscarawas counties directly and Harrison and Jefferson counties indirectly.
 - Example: The Longaberger Company, among others, has long-advocated

passenger rail service as an alternative for filling their long-term work force needs in Licking and Muskingum counties. These plans are consistent with plans in Franklin County as well. Without state ownership of the Panhandle line, passenger service may be more difficult. This impacts all counties along the line.

- Example: Plans for redevelopment of the former Newark AFB call for alternative road access points which cross existing rail spurs and main line track as well as utility extensions which may involve crossing under the rail line.

6. Thus, privatization should be considered only if the public interest can be guaranteed to be continually protected. The Ohio Rail Development Commission is encouraged to take a role in controlling right of way or facilitating a multi-county role in controlling right of way for future highway, passenger rail, utility, and other local community access issues.

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