

7.0 Recommendations & Implementation

With multiple planning tools at its disposal, OMEGA is distinctively positioned to provide a pathway to enhance community and economic growth in the region. Two of the largest planning efforts undertaken by OMEGA are the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and the Long-Range Transportation Plan. By combining these two documents into a Regional Development Plan, OMEGA seeks to reduce the number of hours spent planning and increase the efficiencies by aligning goals across all program areas within the organization. These efficiencies will allow OMEGA to connect communities to resources and help the region achieve parity with the rest of the nation.

The recommendations in this section, and suggested implementation strategies, will guide OMEGA's program efforts through the upcoming decades. The CEDS and Transportation Plan, now one document, will seek to advance the goals and objectives set forth by the respective funding agencies, while tailoring how implementation will look within the OMEGA region.

CEDS

To properly implement the CEDS, OMEGA must work to establish a diverse economic base, provide adequate infrastructure to its residents and businesses, and procure the necessary funding to meet its goals. Viewing potential projects and developments from a holistic stance will amplify the magnitude of the effects on the region and pave the way for future related developments. Alignment with transportation planning objectives will allow regional planners the ability to develop sensible strategies to tackle complex challenges.

Transportation Plan

A robust, efficient, and safe transportation network is essential to the successful development and continued growth of a regional economy. Free movement of goods, services, residents, and commuters enables the region to respond to the needs of the global marketplace and support neighboring regions to allow for statewide prosperity. Alignment with economic development efforts will result in the most cost-effective, coherent development strategy, saving valuable resources for regional communities.

7.1 Regional Policy Recommendations

Broadband

In September 2019, OMEGA's Executive Board adopted a Broadband Policy to provide a pathway for enhanced broadband deployment throughout the region. Access to broadband is essential for creating economic opportunities and community development. The absence of broadband service places substantial constraints upon the economic growth, social, and cultural aspects of our region. Due to the detrimental impact this has had upon the region, the OMEGA Executive Committee has adopted the following Broadband Policy Priorities:

1. Improve the accuracy and veracity of broadband mapping by drilling down to the actual service locations.
2. Advance the region's economic development through Internet-enabled education, healthcare, transportation, and workforce development.
3. Leave no one behind by extending broadband to all households and businesses, delivering robust communication services.
4. Use fiber to connect local government facilities in Appalachia in order to increase efficiency of management and delivery of municipal services.

This Broadband Policy also outlined implementation strategies to guide future projects. This policy, in its entirety, as well as additional policy recommendations approved by the OMEGA Executive Board in December 2019 are available in **Appendix C**. The additional policy recommendations are meant to support Ohio's development of a funding mechanism to extend broadband to underserved areas and include the following:

1. **Create a state broadband fund that ensures sufficient resources are available** across the state for broadband deployment projects that directly connect 100% of unserved and underserved households and businesses in a designated service area.
 - a. **Use a portion of the state fund to award zero-match planning grants** to enable regional organizations to leverage state resources to develop successful applications for federal broadband funding.
 - b. **Establish a steering committee comprised of at least one regional organization** to review applications for funding under the proposed program to ensure that the projects are meeting qualifications.
2. **Create a diverse statewide task force of experts to develop recommendations on how to close the rural-urban divide on broadband access.** The task force should focus on possible funding solutions for delivering broadband to rural Ohio and review potential legislative actions that could reinforce those solutions.
3. **Seek a streamlined right-of-way approval process for broadband fiber installation** to encourage easier build out.

RTPO Capital Funding

OMEGA assists communities of all sizes in pursuing various funding opportunities to complete needed projects. Located in the Appalachian region of Ohio, many communities are economically distressed or are faced with legacy infrastructure that requires maintenance, even as the population declines and whittles down the local tax base. The lack of local financial capacity for transportation projects often results in projects being postponed or canceled, maintenance deferred, and communities remaining at risk due to obsolete or deteriorating infrastructure. OMEGA recommends a sustainable funding resource for Ohio's RTPOs, that will allow RTPOs to assist communities in utilizing existing funding mechanisms by providing all or part of the local match requirement. The addition of these funds will allow the OMEGA RTPO to have more influence on transportation projects programmed throughout the region and incorporated into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.

Multimodal Inclusivity

When designing, rehabilitating, or reconstructing infrastructure, inclusivity of all modes of transportation should be considered. Incorporation of alternative modes of transportation allow for people to reduce their dependence on privately owned automobiles. It also allows for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, reduced dependence on oil, and reduction of the wear on transportation assets. Projects proposed in the OMEGA RTPO should consider the comfort level of all users. These users may be pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, or horse and buggy operators. Additional consideration should also be given to senior citizens and persons with disabilities or limited mobility.

OMEGA recommends projects within the RTPO follow guidelines set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). OMEGA also recommends transportation projects consider all users during design, construction, or rehabilitation. Adoption of policies or guidelines, such as Complete Streets or Safe Routes to School, will enable communities to provide robust, sustainable transportation networks that work efficiently for all users.

Environmental Risk Mitigation

Environmental risks can pose a unique threat to infrastructure. Excessive rainfall events may produce flooding conditions or landslides along regionally significant routes. Flooding also may occur within developed areas, with high amounts of impervious surfaces. OMEGA recommends assessing alternative drainage improvements to mitigate damage by excessive rainfall. Alternative improvements include, but are not limited to, planter boxes, bioswales, permeable pavements (especially in parking lots), green streets and alleys, green parking, and land conservation.

OMEGA will also advocate for policy changes at the state and federal levels to allow for emergency repair funds to incorporate enhancements to damaged facilities to reduce the risk of repeated incidents.

Designation of Maritime Statistical Port

The designation of the Mid-Ohio River Valley Statistical Port is recommended by OMEGA to enhance the data collection by the US Army Corps of Engineers from the Ohio/Pennsylvania state line in Columbiana County to the border of Gallia and Meigs County in Ohio. This stretch of the river also corresponds to the West Virginia/Pennsylvania state line in Hancock County, West Virginia and extending south to the western border of Jackson County, West Virginia. This new statistical port will allow for detailed data collection of cargo that originates, terminates, and passes through the region between the current Ports of Pittsburgh and Huntington Tri-State. This data will be crucial in advocating for infrastructure improvements along this stretch of the river and can also be used as an economic development tool by businesses and communities in the area.

Business Diversification

A diversified economy is vital for a strong and resilient region. The adage “don’t put all of your eggs in one basket” applies to the economy now more than ever, especially in a rapidly evolving, globalized economy. A diverse economy will create prosperity by creating flexibility and spurring innovation. The health of the regional economy will not rely on a single industry but instead multiple industries, allowing the region to withstand the impact of economic downturns. Collaboration among different industry clusters could also spur additional innovation or allow new partnerships to form, strengthening the region.

OMEGA supports efforts undertaken by local and regional economic development professionals to create a diverse collection of industries ranging from petrochemicals to manufacturing, and from agriculture to retail in order to cultivate a stable, growing, and resilient economy.

7.2 Project Recommendations

OMEGA being a Local Development District, an Economic Development District, and a Regional Transportation Planning Organization is positioned well to solicit projects and assist member communities with funding applications for potential projects. OMEGA supports projects that meet one or more of the goals and objectives of the organization. To assist in the organization of projects, as they are submitted, OMEGA has classified them into four categories:

- Transportation
- Water
- Wastewater
- Other Infrastructure & Initiatives (including broadband, workforce development, and other eligible projects not otherwise specified, but aligned with the goals and strategies of this plan)

Established scoring criteria will be used to prioritize projects when necessary. OMEGA currently accepts pre-applications for Appalachian Regional Commission and the Governor’s Office of Appalachia funding with established criteria. OMEGA is also developing criteria for Human Services Transportation/Rural Public Transit funding in accordance with the Regional Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan. Should capital funding become available for the OMEGA RTPO, then

OMEGA will work with the Transportation Advisory Committee to develop project selection and prioritization criteria. Otherwise, funding source guidance will be used to ensure applications for proposed projects are competitive.

Regional Corridors



OMEGA recommends the completion of the US 30 four-lane highway from East Canton to central Columbiana County. The completion of this corridor will mark the completion of the four-lane highway across the entire state of Ohio and links this corridor to existing four lane highway segments in West Virginia and Indiana. This corridor will enable efficient travel, reducing the burden on Interstates 70 and 76/80/90 (Ohio Turnpike), while connecting mid-size populations centers that are often bypassed or hard to reach using current routes. This route will also connect the ethane cracker plant currently being constructed in Monaca, Pennsylvania to plastics manufacturers in Ohio for final product development, thereby allowing the value addition to remain in the state. This corridor will also establish a more direct link with the public intermodal port in Wellsville, allowing shippers and receivers to take full advantage of the maritime access afforded by the Ohio River.

The proposed improvements would also improve a spur connecting to Carrollton in Carroll County. This may be along SR 43, or another alignment, but would offer the county its first four-lane highway access. As a focal point in the shale oil and gas extraction industry, Carroll County can capitalize on improved connections to more urbanized areas for delivery of their resources and services for their residents.

In 2019, the US 30 RTIP project was awarded \$2 million in Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC) funding for preliminary engineering and detailed design to extend the current four lane highway from Trump Avenue in East Canton to SR 44 southeast of East Canton, allowing most traffic to avoid traveling through the village.

Please see **Figure 7-1**.

Map Disclaimer (Figure 7-1): Please note that any of the alignment decisions ODOT made as a part of the environmental process are no longer valid, because of the time that has passed since the decisions were made (over 15 years). If a project were to move forward, highway design criteria, environmental regulations, and the entire NEPA process would have to be reviewed and updated. All technical information and documents would have to be updated, beginning with the purpose and need statement and logical termini decisions. Any depiction of the route is for representative purposes only and shows the potential connections that may be made on a regional level.

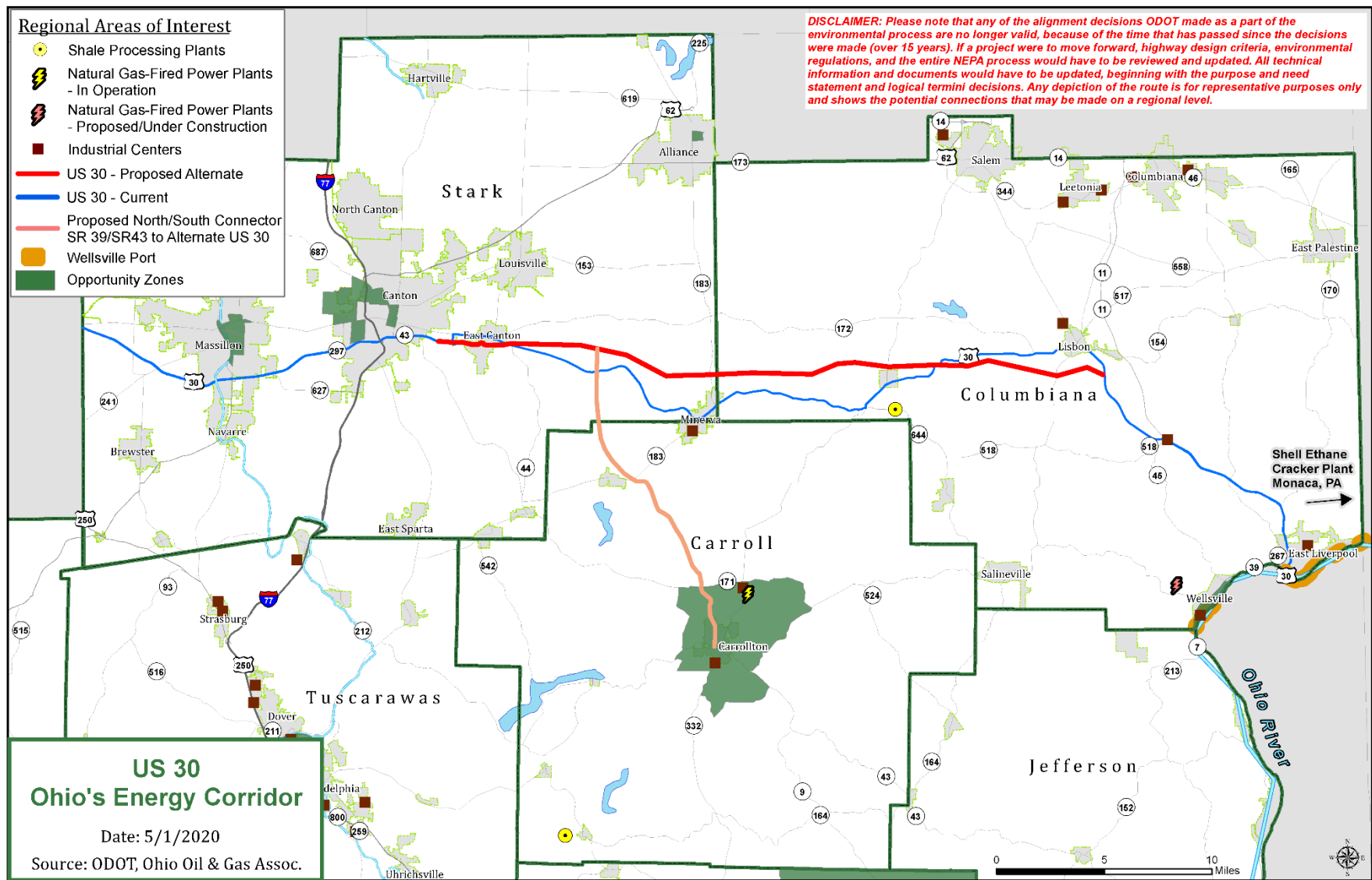


Figure 7-1: Proposed US 30 Corridor (for representational purposes only)

Columbus to Pittsburgh Corridor



OMEGA recommends the completion of a contiguous four-lane corridor through the middle of the RTP, dubbed the Columbus to Pittsburgh Corridor. This corridor consists of several US and state routes, though potential future alignments for sections of the corridor may be considered as needed to complete the corridor.

This corridor would link two large population centers of over 2 million people each with an efficient corridor for freight and people. It would also serve as a relief valve for the I-70 corridor, which is constrained in areas near Wheeling, West Virginia, and southwestern Pennsylvania from expanding further to accommodate more traffic. I-70 is forecast to have a Level of Service of F in many locations, primarily between Zanesville and Cambridge, by 2045. The Columbus to Pittsburgh corridor would also connect the center of the Marcellus and Utica shale formations to potential end users of the extracted resources.

The corridor starts in the west at I-270 in northeastern Columbus. It is currently a four-lane highway through New Albany and Newark (SR 161/SR 16), transitioning to a two-lane highway near Dresden in Muskingum County. It continues as a two-lane highway until the south side of the City of Coshocton. Here, SR 16 ends and US 36 joins the route. The route is four lanes through eastern Coshocton County and southwestern Tuscarawas County, transitioning back to a two-lane highway again immediately east of Interstate 77. Passing through the villages of Port Washington and Gnadenhutten, this corridor returns to a four-lane configuration west of Uhrichsville and turns into US 250 here. North of Dennison, US 250 turns back into a two-lane highway, remaining so until intersecting with US 22 in Cadiz. Following US 22, it is four-lane from here to Pittsburgh, except for a three-mile two-lane portion near Hopedale, east of Cadiz.

Despite the corridor not being complete, the region's economic development professionals have aggressively marketed the corridor and have been successful in securing over \$5 billion in business investments and brought nearly 10,000 jobs to the area between 2012 and 2017. Over half (52%) of the investments and 80% of the job growth occurred along the portion of the corridor that is already complete. Companies seeking to move to eastern Ohio are often left with few options, as many require reliable and quick access to a four-lane highway for movement of goods and inbound shipments of resources or products. Without the completion of the corridor, southern Tuscarawas and Coshocton Counties, as well as northwestern Harrison County will not be able to compete for major job leads.

Completion of a four-lane corridor would open significant opportunities for additional economic development in the region. The first step in completing this corridor would be updating planning/feasibility studies to incorporate the new economic and community developments that have occurred since the previous studies were finalized. Once the study is complete, it is likely that construction of the corridor would occur in phases, with the Dresden to Coshocton segment and three-mile segment near Hopedale (Harrison County) being completed first.

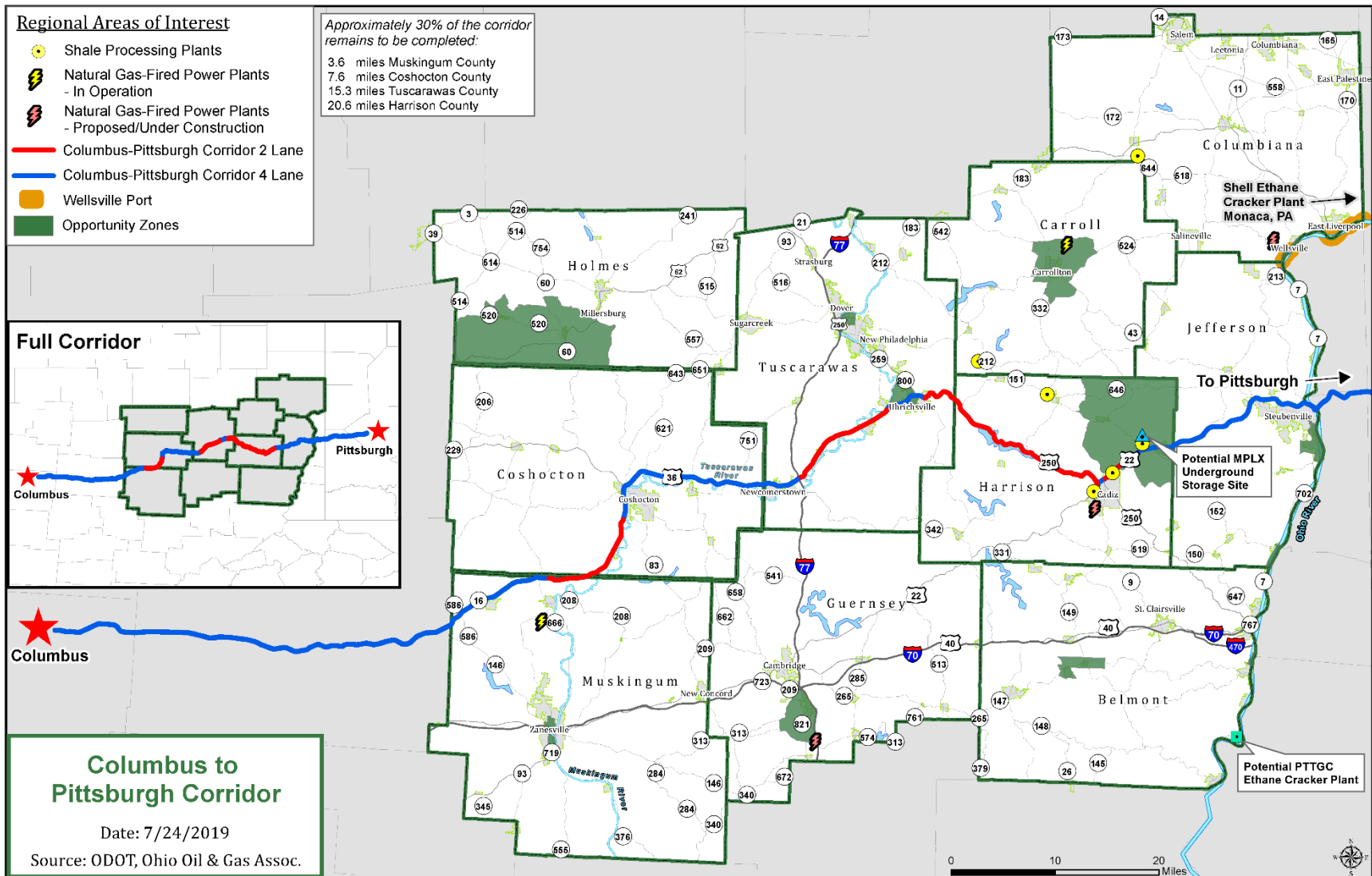


Figure 7-2: Columbus to Pittsburgh Corridor

Proposed Developments

OMEGA supports the construction of the National Road Business Park in Muskingum County, east of Zanesville, as shown in Figure 4-12. This project involves constructing an access road and extending water and wastewater farther into the park. These developments will provide large manufacturing, distribution, and/or warehousing end users with the infrastructure that they need to purchase the available land in the park. OMEGA is assisting the Zanesville-Muskingum County Port Authority in applying for funding from EDA for this project.

The D.O. Hall Industrial Park in Guernsey County has undeveloped available land, waiting for an end user. However, the industrial park is located atop of abandoned mine land, in need of substantial remediation before any sizable development can be done. OMEGA is working with the Cambridge – Guernsey County Community Improvement Corporation to apply for Abandoned Mine Land (AML) funding to remediate the property in order to attract businesses to the park.

The Carroll County Commerce Park is located on two state highways and holds multiple development, industrial, and business opportunities. There is excess capacity of water and sewer for the Carroll County Commerce Park located in a semi-rural setting, north of Carrollton, Ohio. The park currently contains Carroll County Transit and Ohio Department of Transportation will locate their county facility in 2020. All utilities are available on the property which is strategically located to capitalize on the growing energy, petrochemical, plastics and polymer industries.

The Columbiana County Port Authority has also identified the need to develop a 50-acre industrial park and is currently assessing potential locations. Once the site is selected, OMEGA will work with the Port Authority on procuring the resources needed to develop the park.

Overall, our regional partners have identified over **\$303 million** in needed projects. These projects are split into four categories: Transportation, Water, Wastewater, and Other Infrastructure & Initiatives. OMEGA will maintain an updated database with these submitted requests and work with our regional partners to identify and pursue appropriate funding sources.

Project Category	Total Cost
Transportation	\$140,675,122
Water	\$42,725,867
Wastewater	\$86,798,338
Other Infrastructure & Initiatives	\$33,425,463
Total Needed:	\$303,624,790

Table 7-1: Project Needs

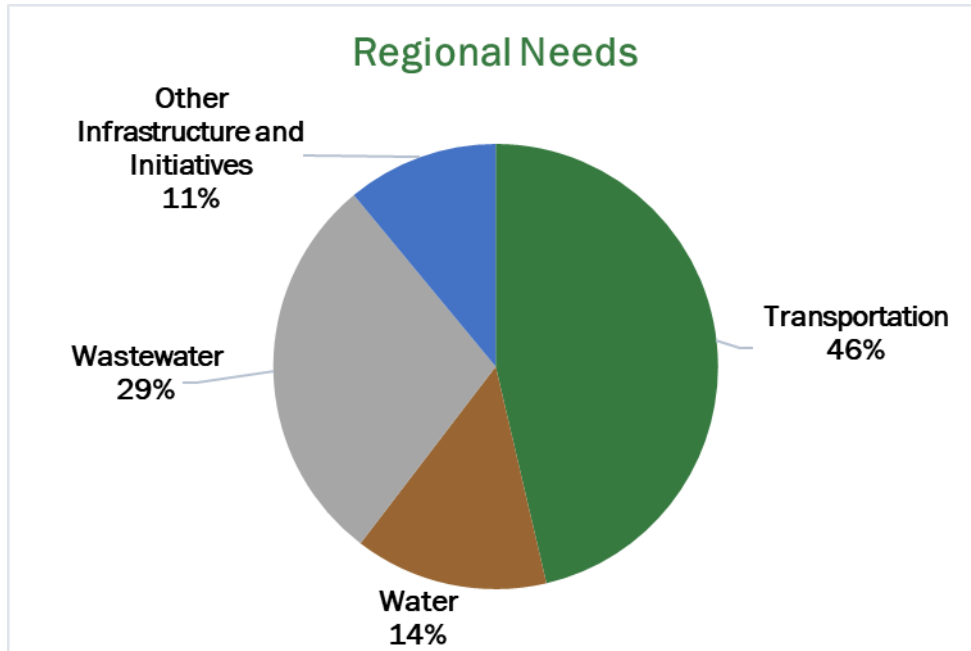


Figure 7-3: Project Needs

OMEGA will provide detailed project lists, by category, in Appendix E. These lists will be reviewed and updated quarterly. A status report of projects added or removed from the plan will be provided to the OMEGA Executive Board during regularly scheduled meetings.

- ✓ Projects will be added as they are submitted by member communities.
- ✓ Projects will be modified upon request of the community.
- ✓ Projects will be removed if the community asks to withdraw the project.
- ✓ Projects will be removed once funding has been obtained and the project is let.

Please note that the total project costs in this section, as well as the projects contained in **Appendix E** are not exhaustive and only contain the projects that have been submitted to OMEGA or that OMEGA staff is aware of due to planning activities.

7.3 Project Evaluation

Statewide and Regional Initiatives

As new state and regional initiatives are developed and implemented in the planning area, OMEGA will adapt existing guidelines and standard practices. A recent example of this was the creation and implementation of a Regional Job Training program by the Governor's Office of Appalachia in 2018. This program was aligned with the mission of OMEGA and is currently being administered successfully by OMEGA. Partners in the program will have until 2021 to complete workforce development activities.

Opportunity Zones

OMEGA views Opportunity Zones as another tool in the toolbox to be used with other development strategies, rather than as a singular tool. While Opportunity Zones are strong incentives for investment in the region, they work best in collaboration with other enticements such as tax abatements, sites being made shovel-ready, and other local incentives. OMEGA recently partnered with Ohio University and Buckeye Hills Regional Council on a grant application to EDA to provide targeted technical assistance to communities for development of the Opportunity Zones.

Additional Evaluation Criteria

Once OMEGA receives capital funding to commit to projects within the RTPPO, OMEGA staff, in conjunction with the Transportation Advisory Committee will develop a simple criteria-based rating system to score and prioritize projects, similar in structure to the criteria used by the Ohio Public Works Commission.

OMEGA also recommends that adequate access management principles be followed to ensure the safety of new developments seeking to gain entry onto the existing transportation system.

OMEGA will scrutinize all projects submitted to the RTPPO for proper analysis of Environmental Justice considerations. During the project review process, a project's location will be mapped to identify if the project would affect an Environmental Justice Focus Area. Projects not located within an Environmental Justice population would be exempt from further analysis and marked as "N/A." Projects that are located within an Environmental Justice population area will then be subject to further qualitative review by the control variables listed below to evaluate the impacts of projects that are in minority or low-income areas:

Consideration will be given to:

- Safety
- Congestion
- Aesthetics
- Natural Environment
- Local Economy
- Residents
- Accessibility

As outlined in Section 1.4 of this plan, OMEGA will annually review the status of each goal, objective, and related strategy. A progress report or “score card” will be presented to the OMEGA Executive Board in mid-September and to ODOT in late September along with the RTPPO Work Plan Completion Report. This progress report will also be added to the larger update provided to the EDA semi-annually each October.

Access Ohio 2045 (AO45) Strategies and Tasks

OMEGA is a member of the Steering Committee for the development of Ohio’s statewide transportation plan. As a regional planning partner, OMEGA will support the state long-range transportation plan’s strategies and initiatives that are applicable to our region and mission, in order to benefit and effect positive change throughout the region. These strategies and tasks are outlined in Table 7-1 This table is an adaptation of the AO45 table, created by the statewide planning staff and their consultants. Initiatives that are in light gray are not applicable to the OMEGA region.






Theme	Strategy	Nickname	Initiatives
 Safe	A Ohio will champion initiatives leading to zero transportation deaths and injuries.	1 - Laws	Strengthen transportation safety laws – distracted driving, seat belts, work zone speed limits, and child passenger safety.
		2 - Partners	Enhance collaboration among state and local safety education, enforcement, engineering, and emergency response agencies to achieve zero deaths and injuries.
		3 - Initiatives	Proactively implement proven transportation safety policies, processes, programs, and initiatives.
	B Ohio will proactively address transportation safety, security, and environmental risks.	4 - Risk	Identify and mitigate transportation facilities at risk from extreme weather events.
		5 - Security	Identify and mitigate transportation security risks, including cybersecurity risks.
 Smart	C Ohio will leverage technology and data to improve transportation safety, efficiency, and reliability.	6 - Asset Management	Maintain transportation networks (including enabling technologies) in a "state of good repair."
		7 - Operations	Employ Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO) strategies to address congestion and improve reliability.
	D Ohio will evolve its transportation system for a connected and autonomous future.	8 - Infrastructure	Enable partners to test and deploy advanced vehicle technologies through supporting infrastructure improvements.
		9 - Alternative Fuels	Accommodate adoption of alternative fuel vehicles.
		10 - Broadband	Make highway right-of-way assets available to assist in closing gaps in broadband and cellular infrastructure.
 Connected	E Ohio will enhance critical elements of its transportation system to optimize safe, efficient, and reliable movement of people and goods.	11 - Multi-modal	Advance ongoing planning and investments to Ohio's multi-modal transportation networks, with emphasis on connectivity among modes.
	F Ohio will develop transportation plans for major statewide and regional transportation corridors.	12 - Corridor Plans	Develop multi-modal corridor plans that consider local land use and economic development decisions.
 Collaborative	G Ohio will strengthen its transportation partnerships.	13 - Steering Committee	Continue to strengthen partnerships with other organizations at the state, regional, and local levels.
	H Ohio will expand the transparent use and sharing of transportation data and information.	14 - Data Sharing	Establish protocols to seamlessly and securely share transportation data among partners.
	I Ohio will advance innovative and sustainable transportation funding options.	15 - Highway Funding	Investigate and pursue long-term sustainable funding strategies to reduce reliance on motor fuel tax, such as vehicle miles traveled (VMT) fees.
		16 - Transit Funding	Investigate and pursue long-term sustainable transit funding strategies.
		17 - P3	Pursue public-private partnerships to jointly finance priority transportation projects.
 Community-Oriented	J Ohio will advance transportation investments that expand the state's economy and workforce.	18 - Access to Jobs	Continue to prioritize transportation system investments that grow the economy and improve access to jobs.
		19 - Economic Development	Identify and promote locations for economic development with good transportation access and compatible land uses.
	K Ohio will advance a transportation system that improves quality of life for all users and moves communities forward.	20 - Values, Health, Equity	Support multi-modal transportation investments that align with community values, public health, and equity.
		21 - Aging/Disabled	Promote accessibility and mobility for an aging population and persons with disabilities.
		22 - Environment	Continue to avoid, minimize, and mitigate environmental impacts from transportation projects and operations.
	L Ohio will increase access to transit and shared mobility services.	23 - Local Transit	Increase opportunities for local investments in transit through ODOT's funding programs.
		24 - Coordinated Services	Coordinate regional public transit and human service transportation.
		25 - Mobility as a Service	Advance Mobility as a Service (MaaS), including first/last mile connections.
		M Ohio will advance safe walking and bicycling as a convenient transportation choice for everyone.	26 - Bike Network
27 - Bike/Ped Plan	Complete the Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, including adoption of a Complete Streets Policy.		

Table 7-1: Access Ohio 2045 Themes

7.4 Fiscal Constraint

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) /Governor's Office of Appalachia (GOA) Projects

OMEGA annually solicits pre-applications for projects seeking ARC or GOA funding. ARC and GOA funding is designed to be “gap” financing, or the last funding needed to complete a project. To qualify, OMEGA verifies the information on the pre-applications to determine that all other funding is or will be committed to the project when the complete application is submitted. The projects are scored against established rating criteria and presented to the OMEGA Executive Board for approval. This rating criteria is adjusted as criteria, goals, or objectives are changed. Once approved, OMEGA assists applicants to complete the full funding application for submission to the appropriate state or federal agency.

Projects with Federal, State, or Local Funding Sources

OMEGA assists with grant writing services for communities to pursue various federal, state, and local/private funding sources. As a part of this service, OMEGA will ensure adequate matching funds are in place for the funding opportunity in order to construct, operate, and maintain the proposed infrastructure, equipment, program, or other improvements.

Transportation Projects

Projects contained in this plan are not fiscally constrained, as many projects are in initial concepts, and have not had a detailed cost estimate completed. Once a project moves forward, costs are detailed, and funding is pursued, OMEGA will ensure that projects are properly balanced between federal, state, and/or local shares. If a project receives funding and is programmed by ODOT for completion, it will be removed from this plan and added to the current Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (RTIP).

Per Federal regulations, for a project to be included in the RTIP and therefore included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) reasonable fiscal constraint must be maintained. Fiscal constraint is maintained by keeping estimated transportation improvements within identified budgets. Since OMEGA does not currently receive sub-allocated funding, the ODOT STIP addresses fiscal constraint for these projects.