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MORPC ANNOUNCES \$2.5 MILLION RAPID-SPEED TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE

First time anywhere in the world: Multiple transportation technologies including Hyperloop studied in same environmental impact study

(COLUMBUS, OH – Feb. 21, 2018) The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) is launching a Rapid-Speed Transportation Initiative (RSTI) to explore intercity routes that could utilize two rapid-speed transportation technology options – traditional passenger rail and/or Hyperloop technology – between Chicago, Columbus, and Pittsburgh. MORPC will conduct two studies as part of this initiative: a feasibility study of Hyperloop technology for the corridor, followed by components of an environmental study of the corridor. For these two studies and later phases, MORPC anticipates the total cost of the RSTI to reach approximately \$2.5 million.

Multiple partners have verbally committed financial resources to the initiative including the city of Columbus (\$250,000), Ohio and Indiana rail partners including MORPC, Union County, and the cities of Marysville and Lima (\$500,000). Additionally, support from other private partners and Virgin Hyperloop One is anticipated but yet to be determined.

“We are excited to partner with leading public and private organizations on the future of rapid-speed transportation here in Central Ohio,” said MORPC Executive Director William Murdock. “Being in one of the fastest growing regions in the Midwest and with the potential to add up to 1 million people by 2050, we are taking the next steps in exploring the best transportation options for both passengers and freight that will better connect Columbus to Chicago and Pittsburgh.”

“As the winner of the U.S. Government’s Smart City Challenge, Columbus and Central Ohio is on the cutting edge of transportation technology,” said Virgin Hyperloop One CEO Rob Lloyd. “We are very excited about the prospect of a Midwest Hyperloop from Pittsburgh all the way to Chicago. These actions by MORPC break new ground because they are integrating Hyperloop technology into a larger Environmental Impact Study – the first time that has happened anywhere in the world.”

Midwest Connect, spearheaded by MORPC and other regional partners, was one of 10 global winners of the Virgin Hyperloop One Global Challenge. The advanced route analysis, paramount in winning the challenge, included the only route selected in the United States to cross four states; Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. It is also the first in the U.S. to focus on leveraging major freight assets in the Midwest, the epicenter of freight movement in North America. Virgin Hyperloop One, sponsors of the global challenge, is the only company in the world to have a fully operational Hyperloop system.

“The Midwest Hyperloop connecting Columbus to Chicago and Pittsburgh is an exciting possibility that would further bolster Ohio’s transportation and logistical strength,” said JobsOhio Senior Managing Director Kristi Tanner. “We look forward to learning more from these studies, which we expect will provide valuable information on how this project could move forward.”

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“Columbus is recognized as a leader in forward-thinking alternative methods for mobility,” said Columbus Chief Innovation Officer Michael Stevens. “Exploring Hyperloop technology makes sense because we have the thought leadership, a history of successful public-private partnerships and residents who embrace cutting-edge ideas.”

“This is another step forward for our community, as we work together to become the model for connected cities of the future,” states Alex Fischer, The Columbus Partnership President and CEO. “We’re pursuing the most comprehensive study for any corridor – and the only interstate corridor at that – and we’re doing it the Columbus Way, bringing together the private, public and non-profit sectors to transform our community and its prosperity.”

Phase 1: Hyperloop Feasibility Study

In the first phase of this initiative, MORPC is issuing a RFP for a Feasibility Study for potential routes supporting the Midwest Connect Hyperloop project connecting Columbus to Pittsburgh and Chicago. The Feasibility Study, estimated to take nine months, will include two potential route alignments for evaluation. One option follows the rail corridor featured in the Hyperloop One Global Challenge Midwest Connect corridor proposal; the other is an alternative to be defined as part of the study work. At minimum, the potential routes will include the following cities: Chicago, Fort Wayne, Lima, Marysville, Columbus and Pittsburgh.

The Midwest Connect Hyperloop One Corridor Feasibility Study will enhance work already completed by MORPC that submitted the winning proposal to Virgin Hyperloop One as part of its “Global Challenge” competition last year. The Feasibility Study will further define and identify the optimal range of initial implementation and alignment and initial stations and end-points. It also will provide estimates of transportation demand and economic benefits, develop a business case, implementation strategy and stakeholder and public engagement strategy.

Phase 2: Environmental Impact Study (EIS) of the Corridor

For the second phase of the initiative, MORPC, along with the Ohio corridor partners for the Columbus-to-Chicago Passenger Rail project (including Union County and the cities of Columbus, Marysville, and Lima), is issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to conduct initial components of a Tier I EIS study to advance intercity, rapid-speed transportation service between Chicago, Columbus and Pittsburgh.

The study complements and incorporates work for the corridor portion between Chicago, Fort Wayne and Lima currently underway by the Indiana corridor partners that includes the city of Fort Wayne in collaboration with the Northeast Indiana Passenger Rail Association. The Columbus to Chicago Passenger Rail project began as an effort to study passenger rail and identify investment needs to improve freight flows and freight rail congestion between Chicago and Columbus. The project has since evolved to include Pittsburgh in the corridor and expand the scope of study to include other high-speed transportation options that are available, such as Hyperloop.

These initial components of the Tier I EIS study are estimated to take 12 months, and the study will collect data, document existing conditions, prepare a purpose and need statement, provide route alternatives and service alternatives for proposed routes, and evaluate infrastructure investments. This study will inform the approach for completing the remaining portions of a Tier 1 EIS.

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The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) is a voluntary association of local governments and regional organizations that envisions and embraces innovative directions in economic prosperity, energy, the environment, housing, land use, and transportation. Our transformative programming, services and innovative public policy are designed to promote and support the vitality and growth in the region. For more information, please visit www.morpc.org.

Virgin Hyperloop One is the only company in the world that has built a fully operational Hyperloop system – complete with a levitation system, propulsion, power and electronics systems, controls, vacuum structures, and an autonomous pod. Our team has the world's leading experts in engineering, technology, and transport project delivery, working in tandem with global partners and investors to make Hyperloop a reality, now. For more information, visit www.hyperloop-one.com.