

## CHAPTER 8: RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes recommendations based on the goals and objectives presented in **Chapter 1** and other issues and concerns identified within this document. In addition, recommendations incorporate input received during the public outreach and stakeholder engagement process that took place during the development of the Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan, as discussed in **Chapter 7**.

The following four goals were reaffirmed as part of the 2015 Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan update:

### *Preservation*

Encourage the preservation of the largely privately owned and operated rail system within Kentucky.

### *Economic Development*

Support economic development by working to provide roadway connectivity to the state and national rail system and intermodal facilities.

### *Customer Relationships/Transportation Planning Process*

Strengthen customer relationships with the rail industry through communication, cooperation, and information exchange in the KYTC planning process.

### *Safety and Security*

Enhance highway-railroad at-grade crossing safety and reliability to ensure mobility and access.

The above goals are similar to the goals established for the 2002 Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan. The KYTC and partner agencies evaluated the goals to identify progress since 2002, as well as specify action items and recommended improvements for each goal.

Overall, the KYTC is making strides in each goal area to work within its organization and with other public and private sector partners to improve rail transportation in Kentucky. A status update of each of the Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan goals, progress in meeting the goals, and recommendations for future actions are included in the following sections.

## 8.1 PRESERVATION

### *Status*

The KYTC partners with other agencies to provide technical guidance, planning, and coordination of efforts to help preserve the railroad system in Kentucky. The state has funded nearly \$10 million in rail infrastructure improvements over the last several years. Additionally, few rail abandonments have occurred in Kentucky during the past decade, an indication that the rail industry in Kentucky is sustainable. The KYTC continues to maintain information and records about abandoned railroads.

**Recommendations**

It is suggested that the KYTC provide information regarding abandoned rail lines to partner agencies and the public. Additional rail line abandonment records are available and can be requested by contacting the Surface Transportation Board and/or the Kentucky Rail Trail Office. It is further suggested that partner agencies identify opportunities to provide technical guidance and assistance during abandonments, particularly for owners interested in rail banking, as described in **Chapter 6**.

**8.2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT****Status**

The KYTC is tasked with maintaining and improving the state's transportation network. Transportation is the key to a healthy economy and an integral part of the transportation network is a robust rail system. The KYTC has worked with the Governor's Office and other agencies to make funding available for rail projects through short line assistance grants and has partnered with railroads to support TIGER grant applications. Kentucky funding for rail projects consists primarily of federal government grants and competitive general sources. The state highway fund can only be spent on highway projects. Although nearby states, such as Pennsylvania and Ohio, have developed dedicated funds for rail development projects, there is no dedicated source of state funding for rail projects in Kentucky. Private groups and companies in Kentucky have led rail investment advocacy efforts in the pursuit of a dedicated funding source for rail improvements.

Similarly, no dedicated state funds exist for passenger rail development projects to advance passenger rail infrastructure investment, conduct in-depth studies and marketing, and perform facility upgrades, or other improvements. During the stakeholder engagement process, numerous comments mentioned the need for Amtrak station upgrades in Fulton, the most heavily used Amtrak station in the state.

**Recommendations**

The KYTC has limited abilities to influence private investment and behaviors, but can encourage partnerships for investment and provide technical analysis related to the feasibility of public investment in rail. The KYTC can also partner with other agencies and the private sector to continue to study the potential expansion of rail within its borders and strengthen the transportation planning process.

Interested parties and rail owners and operators have identified needs that include seeking methods to establish a permanent source of funding for rail improvements, for both passenger and freight. This effort must be initiated by the private sector. A dedicated source of rail funding for improvements and investments is the best tool to achieve economic development successes.

### 8.3 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS AND TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

#### ***Status***

The KYTC is engaged in periodic discussions with the rail industry as it relates to transportation planning. The KYTC also collects yearly reports from railroad companies regarding their operations in Kentucky. The Kentucky LRSTP is multimodal in scope and includes a rail element. The KYTC Division of Planning partners with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Area Development Districts (ADDs), local governments, and other planning agencies across Kentucky to coordinate rail planning activities within the statewide transportation network. The KYTC is moving towards a performance based project selection process for developing future highway plans. Efforts are underway to determine criteria for this performance based selection process. However, Kentucky's Highway Plan will continue to be subject to legislative review during each biennial adoption.

#### ***Recommendations***

It would be helpful for the KYTC to consider amending the annual report it collects from the railroads to include information about the full rail transportation system. This information would include details such as yard information and location, track types (mainline, sidings), and major structures such as railroad bridges. More complete knowledge of the rail transportation system and needs may improve the KYTC's ability to support upgrades to highways serving important rail infrastructure.

During the stakeholder engagement process, it was recommended that the KYTC, federal, state, and local representatives, private organizations, railroad companies, and economic development groups participate in research to develop a project benefits calculator for examining multimodal investments. As the KYTC performance based project selection process is in the development stage, industry support and guidance would be helpful in originating policy language and procedures in project value estimations.

It is recommended that the KYTC continue to engage interested stakeholders in related planning efforts and continue to strengthen relationships with the industry. Periodic rail industry meetings allowing an exchange of information between the KYTC, rail companies, and other stakeholders is also recommended.

Finally, the Rails to Trails Program and its processes are shared by the KYTC, the Department of Parks, and the DLG. Continued coordination between these agencies will further advance the program, its mission and effectiveness.

### 8.4 SAFETY AND SECURITY

#### ***Status***

The KYTC monitors rail safety and security issues by collecting data required by the FRA,

including types of warning devices and accidents, on all public highway-rail at-grade crossings within the state. The KYTC provides vehicle visor cards for detailing highway-rail at-grade crossing safety issues as well as railroad contact numbers and information. The KYTC is a supporter of Kentucky's Operation Lifesaver and its educational message.

***Recommendations***

It would be helpful for the KYTC to continue monitoring these activities and consider expanding the programs. In addition, the development of a Rail Safety and Security Plan would be helpful to identify risks and threats to the rail system and detail countermeasures that the state and other private partners could implement to reduce those risks. This document could detail contingency and action plans in the case of disasters, both manmade and natural, and include coordination with nearby states.