

Trains linking Downtown and Franklin County's outer reaches may not be needed by 2000, but the option should be kept open, members of a task force studying transit needs said last night.

The task force, composed of community members, conducted its final meeting at the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, 285 E. Main St. For a year, members have been considering public transit needs.

Researchers recommended scrapping a long-suggested idea of using existing railroad tracks for a local transit system. Instead, they said, the Central Ohio Transit Authority should add 117 buses during rush hours.

MID-OHIO decided the price of **rail** transit would be too high. Researchers estimated a train system would cost \$103.5 million and more buses would cost \$7.7 million.

Two of about 20 task force members present objected to the plan.

"It is a wimpy report, and I feel COTA is not presenting any vision of the future," Cleve Ricksecker, of the University Area Commission, said. He said **rail** transit would attract riders, influence developers to build along tracks and help ease urban sprawl.

Another commission member said Ricksecker did not speak for the group.

MOST TASK force members agreed the price would be too high for now but said **rail** transit may be needed in the future, especially if Downtown parking becomes scarce and gasoline prices soar.

Mid-Ohio Executive Director William Habig said COTA would be better able to attract passengers if shuttles traveled on elevated guideways along streets and highways rather than on railroad tracks. Roads are closer than railroad tracks to where people live and work, he said.

Alf Hansen, of the Northland Community Council, said he was disappointed the report did not contain a recommendation for developing public transit from Downtown to the North Side along railroad tracks parallel to Cleveland Ave. Such action would ease congestion, and "we have a problem in the Northland area, and we need some relief," Hansen said.

COTA trustees' planning committee will discuss the report in a meeting Feb. 17 at bus company headquarters, 1600 McKinley Ave.