

Inside RTA

FEBRUARY
09

This RTA newsletter is published bi-monthly for Greater Cleveland public officials and community leaders. Its goal is to keep you informed of important transit issues and developments, both in the news and behind the scenes.

Governor's Task Force urges more funds for public transit

■ **RESULTS RELEASED:** After more than six months of study, a statewide task force on transportation has presented its findings to Gov. Strickland. The bottom line: Ohio transit is vital to the economy, and more State funding is needed to preserve key services.

■ **MISSION:** The mission of the Task Force was to envision a future transit system, conceive new and innovative concepts for financing, identify legislative and administrative changes needed to achieve the vision, offer recommendations and prioritize them.

■ **INVESTMENT:** A key recommendation is for a significant increase in investment for public transit, to stabilize the 60 public systems in Ohio, and to allow them to expand needed services.

■ **GOOD FINDINGS:** "We're pleased with these findings," says Joe Calabrese, RTA General Manager. As Immediate Past President of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA), he was a member of the task force. "The majority of people who turned out at public hearings last summer told us that transit is important to maintain their quality of life, and service cutbacks are hurting them."

■ **WHY IT'S KEY:** OPTA believes the State should play a stronger role in funding public transportation, to ensure that a transit network meets the needs of the population. In Ohio, transit systems serve more than 500,000 customers daily, and remove more than 100,000 cars from the highways. This reduces congestion and pollution for everyone, and greatly improves the quality of life for all Ohioans

■ **ON THE WEB:** The complete report can be found at www.dot.state.oh.us.

■ **WHAT'S NEXT:** Task force findings were made public in early January. The report is now being reviewed by Gov. Strickland, officials at the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), and state legislators. OPTA officials hope the report will help guide legislators in budget hearings, which began earlier this month. The new two-year State budget begins July 1.

■ **TIMING CRUCIAL:** Nationally, State funding levels average 23 percent. In recent years, State funding to public transit in Ohio has been reduced by 63 percent, and is now about 3 percent of an agency's budget. This low level of State funding is straining local resources, and most systems in Ohio have either increased fares, reduced service, or both. Without additional funding, service cuts will continue.

■ **THANKS:** "I thank everyone who took the time to attend these meetings, or to comment in writing," Calabrese says. "I think the final report accurately reflects the many challenges that Ohioans face. Public transit is in crisis. At a time when demand for transit is growing, transit systems are being forced to cut service to balance their budgets. This task force was a wonderful opportunity for us to impact funding for public transit in Ohio, and our citizens helped us take full advantage of it."

■ **POSITIVE CHANGES:** "Because of this task force report, public transit now has the full attention of the State government, and we need to make the most of it," Calabrese says. "Working together, we can help bring about policy changes that will positively impact Ohioans for generations. OPTA urges all community leaders to read the task force report, and urges state legislators to turn its findings into reality."

Mayor Jane Campbell leaves RTA Board of Trustees

■ **BOUND FOR DC:** Jane Campbell has announced she is leaving the RTA Board of Trustees to accept a position as Chief of Staff to Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana. Campbell has served on the RTA Board since 2006. She was appointed by the County Commissioners. A former State Legislator, she was Mayor of Cleveland from 2002-2006.

■ **RE-ELECTED:** Westlake Mayor Dennis M. Clough has been re-elected to another three-year term on the RTA Board by the Mayors and City Managers Association. Clough has been on the Board since 1999, and chairs the important Finance Committee. He has been the Mayor of Westlake since 1986.

2008 ends on a strong note; ridership climbs again

■ **RIDERSHIP UP:** For a record sixth consecutive year, RTA saw a jump in its ridership numbers. RTA has only achieved five consecutive years of ridership growth two other times in its 32-year history. The 2008 total: 57.9 million, up 1.1 percent from 2007.

■ **UNEXPECTED:** RTA officials had not expected a ridership increase this year. Because of budget restraints, there were two rounds of service cuts, a fare increase, and a fuel surcharge. Officials believe many new riders switched to transit when fuel costs were high, and stayed when costs dropped again.

■ **RACK-N-ROLL:** More than 1,900 bike rides were taken on transit in December, boosting the year-end total to 50,300.

■ **HEALTHY NUMBERS:** The new HealthLine began service on Oct. 24. In December, more than 560,000 persons rode the HealthLine, up 46 percent over a year ago, when it was known as the #6 line. This kind of ridership increase is in line with what has been seen when Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service was introduced in other cities.

■ **BRIGHT SPOTS:** Besides the HealthLine, RTA saw strong ridership increases in three key areas. Trolley ridership topped one million in 2008, and was up 31 percent in December. RTA is bringing back three-car trains during rush-hour service on the Red Line to handle the increased demand. In December, car counts at some Park-n-Ride lots in western suburbs showed increases of 33 percent to 110 percent.

RTA staff keeps busy with a variety of projects

■ **TRANSIT POLICE:** RTA loaned six Transit Police officers to the Washington, DC, transit system to help with crowd control and security for the Jan. 20 inauguration. Other transit systems also loaned officers to help with the record crowds that attended. All expenses were paid by the Washington system.

■ **ROCK HALL:** The eyes of the nation will be on Cleveland March 28-April 4, for Induction Week at the Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame. RTA is working with officials to promote that week and provide high-quality transit services to the many visitors who will be here.

■ **TOP VOLUNTEER:** If there is someone in your community who acts as a role model for volunteers, let us know by April 1. RTA's Citizens Advisory Board will salute a top area volunteer with the Wiesenberger Community Volunteer Award. For details, call 216-566-5251.

■ **RTV AT IX:** A Rapid Transit Vehicle (RTV) from the HealthLine will be on display at the Cleveland Auto Show, Feb. 28-March 1, at the IX Center. At 63 feet, it is one of the longest public transit vehicles in Ohio. The hybrid-electric vehicle offers state-of-the-art technology. Staff will be there to answer questions.

RTA's 2009 operating budget presents many challenges

■ **A REFLECTION:** "The budget, as approved by our Board, does not represent where RTA wants to be, but it does reflect the current state of affairs in the public transit industry and today's economy," says Joe Calabrese, RTA CEO and General Manager.

■ **TIGHT BUDGET:** The \$275 million operating budget calls for greater efficiencies, wage freezes for management and non-bargaining staff, and the elimination of 116 positions, from 2,693 to 2,577. Despite these cost-cutting efforts, Calabrese cautions that if additional operating dollars are not secured, more service cuts and an additional fare increase are "very likely" in September 2009. Federal funds from a stimulus package cannot be used for day-to-day expenses.

■ **DEVASTATING:** "These service cuts could be devastating to the many employees and employers who rely on public transportation," Calabrese says. "They were deferred in September by a one-year funding plan initiated by Gov. Strickland to buy some time, until a more permanent funding plan for public transportation can be developed."

■ **NATIONAL ISSUE:** The budget situation is not unique to RTA. In spite of record ridership levels, increased costs and a sluggish economy are significantly impacting the budgets of transit systems from coast to coast. Transit systems in Ohio have been especially impacted. Under a previous governor, State funding to transit was cut 63 percent.

■ **THE NUMBERS:** The budget includes \$65 million in Capital Improvement Funds and \$18 million in Bond Retirement Funds. It calls for \$246.5 million in expenditures -- a 1.9 percent increase over 2008 estimated expenses -- and estimated income of \$274.6 million -- a difference of \$3.4 million.

■ **CAPITAL IDEAS:** At this writing, details on a federal stimulus package are not clear, but RTA has submitted a number of "shovel-ready" projects that qualify. This year, RTA plans to spend money on new buses, rail projects and stations, and smaller projects. RTA wants to construct the Stephanie Tubbs Jones East Side Transit Center at CSU. Plans also call for construction to begin on new rail stations at Puritas, Woodhill and East 55th Street.

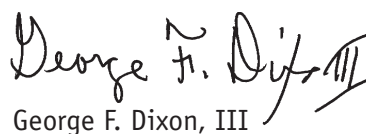
■ **OTHER WORK:** RTA will continue to design three ADA rail station projects -- University-Cedar, Mayfield-East 120 and Lee-Van Aken -- and build improvements to the rail tunnel at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, and expand the Westlake Park-n-Ride lot.

IN CLOSING: For information about RTA, visit the automated trip planner at rideRTA.com, or call the RTAnswerline, 216-621-9500. If you would like more information on RTA, or if you have changes to the mailing list, send e-mail to jmasek@gcrta.org or call 216-566-5211.

Sincerely,



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CEO/General Manager
Secretary-Treasurer



George F. Dixon, III
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Insider NEWS from RTA

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