

Inside RTA

OCTOBER

06

The RTA Letter 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.

In September, RTA Trustees passed a resolution expressing “grave concern” over the level of state funding for transit. Since 2001, state funding for transit has been cut by 63 percent.

State of Ohio funding for transit at crisis levels

■ **SOURCE:** The Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA) collected the information used on this page. OPTA’s President this year is Joe Calabrese, RTA’s CEO & General Manager.

■ **THE PROBLEM:** In the last six years, State funding for public transit has declined from \$43.35 million to \$16 million annually. The cumulative sum of these cuts to transit is \$93 million. The state has disinvested in public transportation over the last six years, reducing funding by 63 percent, to 1980 levels. While the typical state provides more money to public transit than the federal government (\$9.3 billion vs. \$7 billion), Ohio provides only 10 percent of the federal amount.

■ **RANKINGS:** Ohio is the seventh largest state in the nation in population. It ranks 12th in transit ridership, but 28th in state per capita funding, at \$1.58. Of the border states, Pennsylvania spends \$63.29, Illinois \$61.25 and Michigan \$20.73. To find states with a lower per capita ranking than Ohio, you have to travel to South Dakota at \$1.29, and West Virginia or New Mexico, both at \$1.26.

■ **WHO USES PUBLIC TRANSIT?:** There are 60 public transit systems in Ohio -- 24 urban and 36 rural. They serve 400,000 customers on a typical weekday and more than 126 million annually. Approximately 60 percent of all transit trips are work-related. Seniors and people with disabilities, who represent 60 percent of transit riders in rural areas, depend on public transportation to participate in basic life activities, such as access to health-care facilities, school and work.

■ **HOW SYSTEMS COPE:** Transit agencies across Ohio have worked hard to balance service levels and expenses, but budget shortfalls are reaching a critical point. Most systems have had to cut overhead -- Cleveland has eliminated 454 positions. At least 12 systems -- including Cleveland -- have raised fares. At least six systems -- including Cleveland -- have had to cut service. Many systems have delayed capital project. In 2005, it was estimated that more than 574 buses -- or 16 percent of the total fleet in Ohio -- were beyond their useful life.

■ **DEDICATED FUNDING:** Today, almost all state funding for transit originates as General Revenue Funds. Public transit has been unable to compete with other social services to maintain a reasonable funding level. Because of a long-standing interpretation of the Ohio Constitution, Ohio gas tax dollars do not go to public transit. However, that is not the case at the federal level. Public transit receives a formula-based portion of Highway Trust Fund tax dollars. OPTA believes that Ohio should use the same formula with federal gas tax dollars that are returned to Ohio.

■ **BI-PARTISAN STUDY:** OPTA suggests the establishment of a bi-partisan state committee to consider the gas-tax formula and other options to establish a dedicated funding source.

■ **SHORT-TERM:** In the interim, OPTA suggests that additional funding from the Federal Highway Bill (\$1.1 billion annually) be dedicated to support transit in metropolitan areas, and existing General Fund revenue be increased, or at a minimum be guaranteed, to address the needs of the smaller rural systems.

Action by the Board of Trustees keeps RTA on track

■ **RAPID:** The Board hired Richard Fleischman Partners Architects Inc. of Cleveland for \$325,954 to do architectural/engineering services for ADA modifications at the Buckeye-Woodhill Rapid Station, on Cleveland's East Side. The project includes the installation of an elevator, lifts, ramps, and ADA-compliant signage, lights and tactile warning strips. Four Disadvantaged Business Enterprises will share 20 percent of the work. 80 percent of the work is being paid with federal funds.

■ **SMILE:** The Board spent \$1.3 million to add audio and camera systems to 40 light-rail cars and 16 light-rail stations. This will increase safety and efficiency, and allow RTA to operate trains of up to three cars each, thus significantly increasing capacity for carrying crowds for special events. In another move to enhance safety, the Board voted to upgrade the St. Clair Avenue rail crossing on the light-rail Waterfront Line, at a cost of \$200,000.

■ **ADVERTISING:** The Board selected Brokaw Inc. of Cleveland to provide advertising services at a cost not to exceed \$2.5 million for 3 years. Brokaw has been RTA's advertising agency since 2001, and has won numerous awards for its work.

■ **RIDERSHIP:** The Board learned that, despite a fare increase that took effect July 1, ridership continues to increase. Year-to-date, ridership is up 1.1 percent, or 416,000 rides. This is the highest total system ridership since 2001. Also in August, 41,230 people rode on trolleys. More than 5,200 persons carried their bikes on RTA, a 38 percent increase over last August.

■ **TERRORISTS:** The Board agreed to spend \$40,000 for rapid deployment kits for Transit Police, as part of the Terrorist Security Prevention Project. The portable kits help detect gas and hazardous materials. A Homeland Security grant will cover 100 percent of the cost.

What's happening – news from around RTA

■ **SCENIC RAILROAD:** RTA and 15 other agencies have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to extend service on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad from Cuyahoga Valley National Park eight miles to downtown Cleveland. Because of the strong rail heritage of the Cleveland Union Terminal building, Tower City is the proposed location for trains to arrive and depart downtown Cleveland. The agreement is a show of support from federal, state, regional, and local agencies.

■ **CANINE CORPS:** Thanks to a Homeland Security grant, RTA has added three bomb-sniffing German Shepherds to their Transit Police Department. They represent "the most effective and economical way to detect explosives," says Transit Police Chief John P. Joyce. The dogs, and the officers assigned to them, received special training.

■ **WIRELESS:** RTA is one of the founding partners of OneCommunity (formerly OneCleveland), a non-profit provider of technology services to the public and non-profit sectors. On Sept. 13, RTA participated in a demonstration of innovative wireless applications that will eventually improve access to health-care services and educational opportunities for neighborhood residents and students. The event was held at the campus of Case Western Reserve University. OneCommunity and other partners are working to deploy a wireless mesh network that will serve the neighborhoods surrounding University Circle. RTA CEO and General Manager Joe Calabrese displayed a wireless-enabled trolley that would allow riders to access the Internet during their daily commute and provide the RTA with remote monitoring of transit operations. RTA hopes to eventually have wireless Internet services on all rail lines, including the new Silver Line.

Ridership triples on two downtown trolley routes

■ **RIDERSHIP:** RTA's new trolleys are the transit success story of the year. Since replacing the old downtown loop buses in April, ridership has more than tripled, from about 700 riders a day to more than 2,200 riders a day.

■ **AT YOUR SERVICE:** The "B-Line" serves downtown offices on Superior Avenue, Lakeside Avenue, East 12th Street and the Warehouse District. It operates from 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Friday. The "E-Line" connects the Warehouse District to Tower City and Cleveland State University. It operates from 7 a.m.-11 p.m., Monday-Friday. The E-Line added extended hours in late August, to better serve theater patrons, and students attending evening classes at CSU.

■ **FREE WITH A SMILE:** Last April, officials of the Convention & Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland offered to underwrite the trolley service through Labor Day. Since then, they have extended that offer through Dec. 31, while RTA seeks a more permanent full-time sponsor in exchange for naming rights.

■ **TRANSIT FUN:** RTA CEO and General Manager Joe Calabrese says that combining fun with functionality was the impetus for the downtown trolley lines. He thanks the Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Downtown Cleveland Alliance for their help in making the trolley vision a reality.

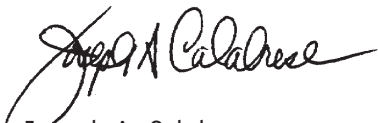
Shaker Square shines, station & median upgraded

■ **STATION WORK:** Each day, more than 5,000 persons use the Shaker Square Station. RTA spent \$750,000 to make the light-rail station ADA accessible. Federal funds paid for 80 percent of the work, which includes the installation of a powered wheelchair lift, wide wheelchair ramp, sidewalk ramps, signage and tactile tiles. The work is part of an ongoing effort by RTA to make more of its key passenger facilities ADA accessible. All RTA vehicles are ADA-compliant.

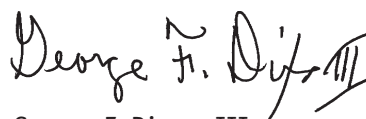
■ **BEAUTIFICATION:** The Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) provided RTA with a \$360,000 grant from transit enhancement funds to upgrade and enhance landscaping on the light-rail median strip between the Shaker Square Station and the Coventry Station. Although Shaker Square is in the City of Cleveland, part of the median work extends into Shaker Heights. The work includes new curbing, grass and landscaping, wrought-iron fences and pedestrian benches

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,



Joseph A. Calabrese
CEO/General Manager
Secretary-Treasurer



George F. Dixon, III
President
Board of Trustees

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from
RTA

NEWS

Insider

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