

Inside RTA

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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.

RTA seeks more funding from state, federal legislators

■ **OVERVIEW:** RTA General Manager Joe Calabrese also serves as President of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA). In that capacity, he has been meeting with state officials on a bold new funding initiative, explained below. In March, Calabrese and other RTA officials will travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with federal legislators as part of an annual Legislative Conference, sponsored by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

■ **CLEAN AND GREEN:** OPTA's proposal: to use a combination of state, federal and local dollars to purchase more than 500 environmentally friendly buses over the next five years for transit systems throughout Ohio. The buses would use electric, hybrid or bio-fuel propulsion. "If the state accepts this idea, Ohio will have the most environmentally friendly transit fleet in the nation," Calabrese says. An OPTA survey of transit systems in Ohio found that at least 500 buses now in use have outlived their useful life. They are unreliable, expensive to maintain and not environmentally friendly. RTA passengers account for about one-half of all transit use in Ohio.

■ **BENEFITS:** OPTA says its proposal would improve air quality, as mandated by the federal government in some non-attainment areas. It would also improve fleet reliability, increase ridership and support Ohio's bio-fuel industry. The proposal would reduce commuting cost for Ohioans, reduce capital and operating costs for transit systems, and cut down on noise levels.

■ **FUNDING:** The new buses would cost \$50 million a year for five years. From the state, OPTA is seeking \$20 million a year for the next five years. Ohio now receives some \$80 million each year in federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) money, and funding could come from there. RTA is seeking Congressional support for the proposal, with an earmark of \$20 million per year, for the next five years, from the Bus Discretionary funding category. The rest of the cost would come from local transit systems.

Four Board members reappointed to 3-year terms

■ **NICK "SONNY" NARDI:** A County appointee, Nardi is President of Local 416 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. He is a member of the Democratic National Committee, and the Executive Committee of the Ohio Democratic Party.

■ **JESSE O. ANDERSON:** An appointee of the City of Cleveland, Anderson is the Board's senior member. He has served since 1990, and is active in national transit issues for the disabled.

■ **GEORGE F. DIXON III:** A city appointee, Dixon joined the Board in 1992, and became President in 1994. A former national chair of the American Public Transportation Association, he won APTA's Outstanding Public Transportation Board Member award in 2006.

■ **EDWARD J. KELLEY:** Kelley, as Mayor of Cleveland Heights, is an appointee of the County Mayors and City Managers Association. He has served on the RTA Board since 2000, and is now Board Vice President.

A summary of RTA's federal legislative priorities

■ **TRUST FUND:** A federal gas tax of 18.4 cents per gallon goes into the Highway Trust Fund. From there, 16 percent goes to fund transit projects. The other 84 percent is the principal mechanism for funding federal highway programs. However, the recent spike in fuel prices has sharply reduced consumer demand, and some estimate the Trust Fund will operate at a deficit within three years. RTA officials are asking federal legislators to address the projected deficit, and preserve the transit dollars that remain in the Trust Fund.

■ **MORE BUSES:** From the Bus Discretionary funding category, RTA officials want to reprogram a \$1.9 million earmark from the conversion of the former Brooklyn bus garage to the purchase of four additional articulated buses, for use on high ridership routes. Because the buses are longer (60 feet vs. 40 feet), productivity is increased, and operating costs are reduced.

■ **TRANSIT CENTER:** From the Bus Discretionary funding category, RTA officials request a \$5 million earmark for construction of the East Side Transit Center – also called an intermodal facility – at East 21st Street and Prospect Avenue. A cooperative venture with Cleveland State University, it is tied to the Euclid Corridor Transportation Project, and would improve bus service to the downtown area. The 1.8-acre facility would include 16 bus bays, a climate-controlled passenger waiting area, and improved landscaping and streetscaping along Prospect Avenue.

■ **SAFETEA-LU:** In 2005, President Bush signed the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). This act authorizes the federal surface transportation programs for highways, highway safety, and transit for 2005-2009. RTA officials are asking federal legislators to appropriate maximum transit funding levels, consistent with the provisions of the act. RTA officials are also asking federal legislators to begin the often-lengthy reauthorization process, and to address Ohio's "donor state" status. Ohio's transit programs now receive only 58 cents per transit tax dollar generated.

■ **RAIL REHAB:** If additional economic stimulus funds become available, RTA officials request an earmark of \$10 million to help make three key Red Line stations compliant with the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). At the Brookpark Station, a two-year design should begin later in 2008. At the University Circle Station, a \$10 million-\$12 million construction project should begin in mid-2009. Design work was completed with \$250,000 from the Cleveland Foundation, Case Western Reserve University, and University Hospital Health Systems. The project will include a new bus station and private development. At the Euclid-East 120th Street Station, a transit-oriented development (TOD) plan is now being put together with help from the Cleveland Foundation, the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) and the Little Italy Redevelopment Corp. Construction will begin in 2010, and the station will be moved to Mayfield Road.

More RTA rail stations facing ADA upgrades

■ **LEE/VAN AKEN:** Later this year, work will be completed on a station-area plan, and transit-oriented development (TOD), at the Lee/Van Aken Blue Line Station. Work was done in collaboration with the City of Shaker Heights, NOACA and RTA. A design contract is expected to be awarded by the RTA Board on March

18. Construction should be completed by 2010.

■ **WARRENSVILLE/VAN AKEN:** RTA is working with the City of Shaker Heights on a TOD plan for the Warrensville/Van Aken Station on the Blue Line. This plan should be completed this summer.

GM Joe Calabrese writes: 'It's all about the money'

■ **BACKGROUND:** In December, RTA implemented service changes that reduced its annual expenses by some \$5 million. In most cases, the frequency of service was reduced, and some routes with low ridership were modified for a better connect with the Rapid. Our focus was to assure that all customers could still get to their destination, although for some, less conveniently than before. I heard from 15-20 customers who were unhappy with the changes. They believed that these changes were not about service, but they were "all about the money."

■ **REDUCED FUNDING:** These customers are right -- it is absolutely all about the money. RTA's revenue from the local sales tax is down significantly from previous levels, averaging only a 1 percent annual increase from 2001 to 2006. Funding for public transit from the State of Ohio has been reduced by 63 percent since 2001, and our expenses for diesel fuel have increased from \$4 million in 2004 to more than \$15 million in 2008. It is all about the money.

■ **GOOD NEWS:** RTA has been able to do more with less by consolidating services and instituting major efficiencies. RTA is still providing 30 percent more service per capita than Cincinnati, and more than twice as much as Columbus. Akron has cut more than 33 percent of its service in recent years, and Youngstown has cut 25 percent this year alone.


■ **NO LOGIC:** With five straight years of ridership growth, growing concerns about air quality non-attainment, increasing evidence of global warming, concerns about the economy and unemployment and with gasoline at \$3 per gallon, it makes no logical sense for RTA to be forced to cut service and lay off 63 employees.

■ **NEIGHBORING STATES:** The State of Ohio contributes, on average, less than 5 percent of the funding to public transit than does our neighboring states of like population, such as Pennsylvania, Illinois and Michigan. Gov. Strickland, knowing that Ohioans can't work if they can't get to job sites, put additional funds for transit in the most recent budget cycle, but it was overturned by the General Assembly.

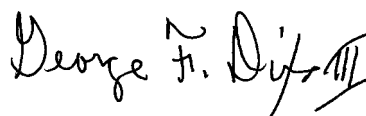
■ **THE FUTURE:** If the issue of transit funding is not addressed, cuts in transit service will be an annual occurrence. RTA's mission is simply to provide the greatest amount of high-quality service possible to our customers, with the revenue that we have. We simply can't spend what we don't have, because it is all about the money.

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Sincerely,



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CEO/General Manager, Secretary-Treasurer



George F. Dixon, III
President, Board of Trustees

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INSIDER NEWS from RTA

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