

Inside RTA

JUNE
08

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.

State Task Force hears testimony here June 17

■ **HOLD THIS DATE:** From 4-8 p.m. on Tuesday, June 17, a new statewide task force on transportation planning will hold an important public meeting in the Joseph E. Cole Center at CSU, 3100 Chester Ave. RTA CEO Joe Calabrese urges all community leaders to attend and tell the panel how important public transit is to the quality of life for Clevelanders.

■ **WHO'S COMING:** "We expect attendance to be high," says Calabrese, who is President of the Ohio Public Transit Association and a member of the Task Force. "We want to provide Task Force members with quality testimony, so they can hear from those dependent on transit to those those who choose public transit because it saves them money, is safe, reliable and good for the environment."

■ **WHAT IT IS:** The goal of the Ohio 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force is to bring all Ohioans to the table to explore a broad spectrum of transportation issues. The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) created the Task Force to help prioritize how Ohio balances the movement of people and freight, promotes safety and reduces congestion, creates jobs and encourages responsible growth, helps to building sustainable communities and links all modes – connecting highways to rail, aviation, water ports and transit. Chairman Ty D. Marsh of Columbus says the Task Force "is an opportunity for visionary thought and to look from a global perspective on how Ohio can create the optimum multi-modal transportation system for all Ohioans."

■ **THE MISSION:** The mission of the Task Force is 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. The Task Force is slated to make recommendations to Gov. Strickland by Sept. 18. Eventually, those recommendations will be taken the State Legislature for action. Legislators are invited to all regional meetings.

■ **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.

■ **RECENT CUTS:** In recent years, State funding to public transit has been reduced by 63 percent, and is now about 3 percent of an agency's budget. Nationally, State funding levels average 23 percent. 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. "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."

■ **MEMBERS:** Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson is a Vice Chair of the Task Force. Other local members are: Rose Ann DeLeon, Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority; Ken Sislak, All Aboard Ohio; Brian Newbacher, Ohio Motorists Association; Albert Ratner, Forest City Enterprises; Parma Mayor Dean DiPiero; Bob Brown, CWRU; David Beach, the Center for Regional Sustainability; and George Palko, Great Lakes Construction.

You see progress daily on Euclid Corridor Project

■ **NEW SECTION OPENS:** Another section of the Euclid Corridor Transportation Project opened in April, ahead of schedule. In November, RTA opened the section of Euclid Avenue from East 17th Street to East 55th Street. In April, RTA opened the section from East 55th Street to East 86th Street. That means all orange barrels are now gone from East 17th Street to East 86th Street.

■ **A NEW LOOK:** In those areas, residents now see new pavement, transit-only lanes, special cross-walks, landscaping and boarding from stations in the center median strip. Standard RTA buses modified with state-of-the-art precision docking will provide service on the #6 route along the stretch.

■ **CLINIC WORK:** Work continues daily on the portion of the project near the Cleveland Clinic, from East 86th to East 105th streets. Initially, work was delayed because the Clinic sought some changes to the original plan. Under the agreement, Clinic officials will pay for any added cost to reconfigure the roadway to fit their new master plan. The center median strip will be wider and arranged differently. There will be more pedestrian lights, more plantings and more landscaping. The Clinic section will still have transit-only lanes, bike lanes and general use vehicle lanes.

■ **EAST CLEVELAND:** On May 12, RTA officially opened the portion of the Project in East Cleveland. The Project extends from Public Square in Cleveland to the Windermere Rapid Station, 14223 Euclid Ave., in East Cleveland. Mayor Eric Brewer and other East Cleveland officials used the celebration to emphasize economic development opportunities in that suburb.

■ **KUDOS TO CITY HALL:** The City of Cleveland has earmarked \$208,000 in Urban Development Action Grants to pay overtime for city crews doing work from Playhouse Square to Public Square. Crews must finish their utility-related work before RTA can begin to repave Euclid Avenue. Work should be completed later this summer.

■ **ON BUDGET:** The \$200+ million project remains on time and on budget, with RTA officials closely monitoring spending. An Oct. 25 grand opening is planned. Funding partners include the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), the City of Cleveland, and the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA).

Zeller leaves long-term CAB leadership position

■ **CHANGES:** In May, there was a changing of the guard at RTA's Citizens Advisory Board. After many years as president of the 20-member volunteer group, George Zeller turned the gavel over to Brad Chase. Zeller was a fixture at RTA Board meetings for many years, and RTA staff joined Board members in thanking Zeller for his service. He remains on the Citizens Advisory Board.

■ **RE-APPOINTED:** Two active members of the Citizens Advisory Board – Andre White and Arlene Cohen – have been reappointed to three-year terms by RTA Trustees. The 20-member volunteer group of transit advocates meets monthly to discuss issues and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees. A special subcommittee of the group focuses on disability matters.

RTA buys 20 articulated buses to meet demand

■ **MORE BUSES:** On May 20, RTA Trustees approved the purchase of 20 articulated low-floor buses from New Flyer of America for \$13.1 million. The buses, to arrive here in 2009, are 60 feet long, and have a greater capacity than the standard 40-foot vehicles that make up the bulk of the RTA fleet. Three of the vehicles will have five doors each and resemble the Rapid Transit Vehicle (RTV) that will be used on the Euclid Corridor. Those vehicles can operate on the HealthLine, as ridership demand increases. The other 17 vehicles, with three doors each, will operate as needed on heavily-travelled RTA routes. About 76 percent of the purchase came from federal funds. The rest came from state and local funds. The buses will replace current vehicles that have exceeded their useful life. RTA has an option to buy 30 more such vehicles.

■ **RIDERSHIP UP:** Rising gas prices are driving more riders to public transit. In April, RTA ridership rose 4 percent, mostly in the bus area. Officials report more instances of crowded buses and fuller lots at Park-N-Ride facilities. In addition, downtown trolley ridership is up 3.5 percent. Trolley ridership approached 4,000 customers on some days, as the trolleys began their third year of free service. Bike rack usage is up 23 percent in April. In 2007, more than 50,000 persons took their bikes on buses and trains.


■ **FUEL COSTS UP:** RTA paid \$12.1 million for fuel costs last year. This year's total will be closer to \$20 million. The budget projection for 2008 showed a 1.3 percent increase in sales tax revenue, but so far this year, revenue is flat.

■ **BUSES ON SHOULDERS:** On June 2, RTA and Lakeland will begin operating buses on the highway shoulders of Rt. 2 (the Shoreway) to bypass slow-moving traffic. The concept is already being used by transit systems in Minneapolis, Columbus and Cincinnati to keep their buses on schedule. When the traffic speed is less than 35 mph, buses can move to the right shoulder, and operate at 35 mph or less.

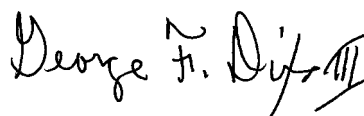
■ **GOOGLE TRANSIT:** On May 19, RTA became the first transit system in Ohio to hook up with Google Transit, a national trip planning service offered by the popular Internet search engine. To use it, just go to google.com/transit and click on "Cleveland OH". RTA has provided Google with all bus and rail schedules and routes, and will continue to work with Google to keep the service up-to-date. RTA also maintains a trip planner on its Web site, rideRTA.com. This is the latest RTA effort to use cyberspace. RTA's Web site also includes links to many print publications, including the 2007 annual report.

IN CLOSING: For personalized schedule information, visit rideRTA.com, or call the RTA Answerline, 216-621-9500. If you would like more information on RTA, or if you have changes to the mailing list, please send e-mail to jmasek@gcrta.org, or call 216-566-5173. Copies of *Inside RTA* are available on rideRTA.com as Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) files. This newsletter is now available as an e-mail attachment. If you would like to receive this newsletter as e-mail and help reduce our costs, write to jmasek@gcrta.org.

Sincerely,



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NEWS from RTA

Insider

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