

Groundbreaking nears for Puritas- W. 150 Rail Station

A groundbreaking ceremony will be held this month for a new \$9.6 million Red Line rail station at Puritas Avenue and West 150th Street.

The station is one of the first significant projects in Ohio to benefit from federal stimulus money. The new station should open in fall 2010 – about 44 years after the original station was built.

Puritas is a key West Side location with direct access to I-71. It will remain open during construction. Three bus routes stop there -- #70, #78 and the #809 Kamm's - Puritas Community Circulator.

The site includes 558 parking spaces. About 900 people board there daily, making it one of RTA's top five for Red Line ridership. Ridership is expected to increase when Inner Belt construction begins.

The new station was designed by the Dewolff Partnersip Architects, with strong community input from development corporations at Bellaire-Puritas and Kamm's Corners. Features include:

- A 2,500-square foot main entrance building with a brick grand foyer and a rounded portico outlined in sandstone.
- A 30-foot tower and two elevators for ADA access.
- A 130-foot bridge that brings passengers over the Rapid tracks to the boarding platform.
- A smaller, secondary entrance on the residential West 154th Street.
- Several pieces of public art.

By law, federal stimulus money cannot be used for operating expenses.

Weak local economy hurts RTA operating budget

The weak local economy is affecting RTA's operating budget.

If RTA does not receive additional funding from an outside source, it will not be able to meet its payroll after Thanksgiving, General Manager Joe Calabrese says.

"Last year's problem was the high price of fuel. This year's problem is weak revenue from sales tax collections in a poor economy. If no action is taken, we are projecting a year-end budget gap of more than \$9.1 million," Calabrese says.

Much of RTA is funded by receipts from a one-percent countywide sales tax. RTA will receive more than \$45 million in federal stimulus money, but it cannot be used for daily operating expenses.

"We have already cut 17 percent of our service since 2000," he says. "This year, the longer we wait to act, the larger the problem will be. It is projected that receipts from sales tax will be down \$12 million from 2008 levels. I believe we should not cut any more service. We need help, and we need it quickly."

Calabrese says the State budget, now being crafted for the two years starting July 1, has even less money for transit than previous budgets.

Calabrese says RTA has already taken a number of steps to close the budget gap.

- A hiring freeze and wage freeze have been in place since last year.
- A number of support staff was laid off in November.
- Management efficiencies helped save more than \$2 million in overtime in 2008.

Thanks, Cavs!

RTA thanks the Cavaliers for all the excitement they brought us during the regular season.

The regular home season ends with the game at 8 p.m. April 15 at Quicken Loans Arena.

As the post-season schedule is announced, remember that playoff games may be scheduled on nights when Indians play at Progressive Field. This will create a huge traffic jam downtown.

With thousands of free parking places along the rail lines, and direct access from Tower City, RTA remains the best ticket to watch sports action.

Tribes opens on April 10

The Indians open their home season at 4:05 p.m. Friday, April 10, when they host Toronto.

The home opener is a sellout, so more than 43,500 fans will converge on the ballpark.

RTA begins extra rail service two hours before the first pitch of every home game. The Walkway from Tower City opens two hours before every game. RTA guarantees service for at least 90 minutes after the game ends – even when those extra-inning battles continue well after midnight.

Because this is a normal workday for many people, parking lots at Rapid Stations are expected to fill up quickly.

Please obey all posted signs. Cars that are parked illegally will be towed.



RTA bus operators use new safety methods

For the past several months, RTA has been working, both internally and externally through safety consultants, on a multi-faceted approach to reduce bus/pedestrian accidents.

Several months ago, all bus operators received special training with a keen focus on safety during left-hand turns. Bus operators had previously been instructed to make a second stop to scan for pedestrians, and to sound their horns, as they turn into an intersection.

For several weeks, RTA staff has been working on a method to alert pedestrians that a bus is turning. To date, 283 RTA buses are equipped with devices that activate a beeping sound as the left or right turn signal is activated. This pilot project covers approximately 50 percent of RTA's big-bus fleet.

In response to complaints, RTA is looking at ways to turn down the volume of the beeping. RTA has also heard from customers who believe the said they thought the beeping is a good idea.

In the coming weeks, RTA will review this pilot project, as well as other preventive steps that use new technology. Two ideas are being considered:

- Install pole-mounted monitors at various high-incident intersections, which would limit the audio warnings to only those intersections.
- An external strobe-light system.

Back-up alarms are now common on many trucks, and are even finding their way into some automobiles in this model year. If RTA's pilot program is successful, other transit systems may adopt this technology.

"Our goal is to develop a notification process to reduce bus and pedestrian accidents," says Joe Calabrese. "RTA takes the safety of its employees, customers and of the general public seriously."

Track work schedules set for Blue and Green lines

RTA needs to complete \$1.6 million of needed heavy maintenance work on its Blue and Green lines during weekend shutdowns. Care is being taken to schedule these shutdowns when they will impact the fewest number of customers.

Each shutdown on the Blue and Green lines will last from 8 p.m. Friday until 4 a.m. Monday.

The Blue and Green line trains WILL operate on the weekend of April 10-12, to serve customers at Indians Opening Day.

Shuttle buses will replace Blue and Green line trains on:

- April 17-19
- April 24-26
- May 1-3
- May 8-10
- May 15-17.

Shuttle buses — MCI commuter coaches -- will operate the entire length of the Blue and Green Rapid lines, between Tower City and Green Road and Warrensville-Van Aken. The buses will stop at all Rapid stations, and operate on a schedule approximately the same as light rail. Because shuttle buses operate on streets with signals and additional traffic, RTA officials urge riders to allow extra time to reach their destinations.

At Public Square, shuttle buses will use the existing trolley stop in front of Tower City, at Euclid Avenue and Ontario Street.

Waterfront Line trains will continue to provide service from Tower City to the South Harbor Station.

Other Blue and Green line weekend shutdowns will be announced later.

RTA regrets any inconvenience to its customers during this time.

Ride RTA to Earthfest at Zoo on Sunday, April 19

On Sunday, April 19, RTA will provide free service from Public Square to EarthFest at the Metroparks Zoo. It marks the 39th anniversary of Earth Day.

RTA is a sponsor of EarthFest, Ohio's largest educational environmental event.

The Metroparks Zoo is open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. You can ride RTA buses or trains to Public Square, where RTA clean diesel buses will take you from West Roadway, north of Superior Avenue, to the Metroparks Zoo Administration parking lot off Fulton Road.

The buses are equipped with bike racks. 100 percent of RTA's fleet is powered by environmentally friendly fuels – electric, CNG and clean diesel.

Be sure to obtain a proof of your ride, which allows free admission to the Metroparks Zoo. Without this proof, you must pay regular zoo admission.

Shuttles run every 15-30 minutes. The first bus leaves Public Square at 9 a.m. and the last bus leaves the Metroparks Zoo at 5:30 p.m.

RTA will have the educational community bus on display at the Metroparks Zoo, and RTA employees will hand out transit information.

For more information on RTA, visit rideRTA.com, or call the RTAanswerline at 216-621-9500. Those who are hearing impaired can call 216-781-4271

EarthFest is organized by the Earth Day Coalition, a Cleveland-based non-profit environment organization. For info, call 216-281-6468, or visit earthdaycoalition.org.

Ridership update

In February, ridership on the HealthLine rose 66 percent, or about 136,000 rides. Ridership has increased 47 percent since the service began on Oct. 25.

Average daily trolley ridership is 4,860, a 12 percent increase over last year.

More than 1,000 people brought their bikes on RTA in February.