

## Cut the Cost of Your Commute

You have your daily to-do-list, your vacation brochures, and The Plain Dealer, ready for another commute to work. What's missing? How about \$4,700 in savings by choosing to commute on public transportation?

The program is called **COMMUTER ADVANTAGE**. Here's how it works. Employees elect to set aside a portion of their pretax income for public transportation transit fare passes which are **delivered to them at work**. Because the passes are purchased with pretax dollars, the **employee is able to save**, on average, 34 percent, or **around \$200 annually** on the cost of the fare passes. In addition, employers payroll taxes are reduced.

When you throw in the \$4,000\* gained by simply getting on a bus or train and leaving the car behind, and rising parking fees in the Cleveland area, public transportation becomes increasingly more attractive. (\*AAA estimated savings using public transit.)

"The program is much like flexible spending accounts (FSAs) for health and child care," explains Jim Frick, RTA's Sales Director. "The amount of the pretax deduction is no longer reported as taxable salary, nor is it subject to federal, FICA and state income tax. As a result, the employee gains increased spendable income."

Those participating in the program also receive a **guaranteed ride home**. Because the unexpected happens, RTA provides a ride home from work for family emergencies, personal illness, or when the employee must stay late to get work done. On these occasions, the employee can call a cab, and RTA will reimburse the employee up to \$35 for the cab fare. The safety-net service can be used up to four times a year, and is exclusively for riders enrolled in the Commuter Advantage program.

More than 200 companies (a 100% increase from last year) are already offering this benefit to their employees. Shouldn't your company join them? This benefit can be initiated or terminated at anytime, and there are no limitations or restrictions on enrollment. For more information, contact Jim Frick at (216) 781-4764. Or, e-mail him at [njfrick@gcra.org](mailto:njfrick@gcra.org).

## November Ridership Increases 11.4 Percent

Total system ridership for November was up 11.4 percent, or approximately 490,000 rides.

Year-to-date ridership increased as well, 3.9 percent or more than 1,894,000 rides.

Bus rides increased 10.3 percent in November, or about 379,599 rides. Bus ridership in the first 11 months was up 3.3 percent, or more than 1,377,000 rides.

Total rapid transit rides grew 16.6 percent in November, or about 97,900 rides. Year-to-date rapid transit ridership was up 7.3 percent, or more than 482,600 rides.

And for the sixth consecutive month, Community Circulator ridership showed an increase. Ridership was up 14.9 percent in November, or more than 27,700 riders. Community Circulator ridership for the first 11 months was up 6.4 percent, or about 129,400 riders.

## Meeting on Proposed Re-route of Slavic Village Circulator is Scheduled for Jan. 26

RTA has scheduled a meeting to discuss the proposed re-routing of the #805 Slavic Village Community Circulator Wednesday, Jan. 26.

The meeting will take place at the Lourexis Apartments, 5111 Hector Ave., and will start at 6 p.m.

The proposal calls for the #805 to travel entirely on Doloff Ave. to Pershing Ave. instead of the current route that includes Doloff, Hamm, E. 49th and Pershing.

Main advantage of the re-route is a shorter travel time and potentially a shorter walking distance to board the #805, depending on where the customers live.



Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority  
[www.rideRTA.com](http://www.rideRTA.com)

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# Rider's Digest



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## No Fare Increases Due in RTA's 2005 Budget

RTA's 2005 operating and capital budgets contain lots of good news for the 200,000 daily commuters who use public transit here.

The good news:

**No fare increases.** RTA's last major fare increase was in 1993.

**No major service reductions.** The purchase of 47 new buses from North America Bus Industries



(NABI) to replace older buses. Newer buses mean better reliability and increased on-time performance.

Construction begins on the nearly \$200 million Euclid Corridor Transportation Project, the largest capital effort in Cleveland transit history.

Renovation begins at the W. 117th Street Rapid Station, on the Cleveland-Lakewood border.

A new transit center will be built near the Parmatown Mall.

A new \$25 million Triskett Garage opens next summer on the Cleveland-Lakewood border.

Funds are allocated to improve the facilities and public information at RTA's 8,000 bus stops, as

*continued on back*

## Budget *continued from front*

part of a new program to upgrade the Transit Waiting Environment (TWE).

Projections include a 2.4 percent increase in ridership, and a \$3.7 million increase in sales tax collection.

“Our overriding goal is to continue to improve the quality of RTA service without increasing costs,” says Joe Calabrese, RTA CEO & General Manager.

“As transit systems across the nation are raising fares, laying off hundreds of employees, and drastically cutting service to balance their budget, RTA is doing more with less. This budget preserves general transit services and continues an 11-year trend of stable fares for our customers,” says Calabrese.

Calabrese notes that RTA’s largest single revenue source, a one percent countywide sales tax, continues to be unstable.

“This budget was difficult to develop, but we continue to manage resources effectively to help us through this recession. In 2000, we began significant efforts to reduce costs. Those on-going efforts are allowing us to avoid deficit spending in 2005.”

### Operating budget highlights:

- ◆ \$221.5 million, a 0.7 percent increase, or \$1.4 million, over this year.
- ◆ Service reductions/efficiencies of \$6.0 million - a 4.2 percent decrease in service hours and a 3.9 percent decrease in service miles from 2004. However, when 2005 is compared to 1993, RTA still operates 9 percent more service hours and 12 percent more service miles.
- ◆ Paratransit will see a 6.8 percent increase (15,000) in service hours, and a 4.7 percent increase in service miles.

A complete copy of the transmittal letter is available on [www.rideRTA.com](http://www.rideRTA.com).

## RTA Offers Riders Inspirational Thoughts for Daily Commute

Thanks to a local arts program that began last September, commuters riding public transportation have been challenged to view life from a whole new angle — inside RTA buses and trains.

The program, entitled Moving Minds: the Verse and Vision Project, uses interior bus and train cards to display artwork and poetry developed to inspire others and demonstrate the value of creativity in our everyday lives.

Nearly a year in the making, Moving Minds is the result of a collaboration between the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) and the Poets’ and Writers’ League of Greater Cleveland (PWLGC).

The groups worked together with RTA and the its Citizens Advisory Board to create a program that would impact transit riders on their commutes to work and school and on trips around town.

With interior vehicle cards serving as the medium, local artists, designers and poets have created 12 pieces. The plan is to introduce three pieces each quarter.

The series began with the following poems: “From Grandma” by Gina M. Tabasco; “Why Superman was Born in Cleveland” by Brad Ricca; and “The Apple Admits” by Bonnie Jacobson. Starting the New Year and being displayed inside RTA buses and trains through March are these following poems: “Going Home” by Betty Gabrielli; “Butterfly” by David B. McCoy; and “The Reason” by Peter R. Selover.

Poetry and transit systems have an interesting connection. In 1992, the Poetry Society of America developed pieces for New York subways and buses as part of the Poetry in Motion program. The program, whose

mission is to promote literacy, has since been adopted by a number of transit systems across the country. In Cleveland, while poetry has been utilized at RTA passenger facilities, it has never been a regular feature in transit vehicles.

RTA’s Citizens Advisory Board, made up of volunteers from the community who advise RTA trustees on service issues, was the driving force behind the initiative to bring poetry to Cleveland’s buses and trains. Vince Reddy from the Board believes the artistic pieces will have a positive impact the rider’s commute.

“One of the benefits of taking public transportation is that you have time to do other things, like reading or preparing for the day ahead,” he explained. “This program offers riders a welcome escape from newspaper headlines and advertising clutter that fills our lives.”

In addition to enriching the rider’s experience, Moving Minds offers a canvas for local artists and poets to show off their work. And Northeast Ohio has no shortage of artistic talent, as Darlene Montonaro from PWLGC can attest.

“Once all the pieces came together to make this project a reality, we were overwhelmed by the number of poets from all parts of the region who were interested in participating,” explained Montonaro.

“A panel of judges had the unenviable task of whittling down the entries to just 12. Our hope is to make this an annual project with RTA and continue to tap new artists and poets.”