

Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority

***TRANSIT 2025* Long Range Plan**

**Engineering & Project Management Division
Programming & Planning Department**

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TRANSIT 2025

THE LONG RANGE PLAN OF THE GREATER CLEVELAND REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

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Executive Summary

Background

Since the late 1980s, the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) has conducted long-range planning to help guide the future development of public transit in Cuyahoga County. After nearly 3 years of extensive community outreach and research, the RTA Board of Trustees adopted in 1993 the Authority's first-ever long-range plan, **Transit 2010**. **Transit 2010** recognized that Cleveland's transit route network had changed very little in over 30 years. As a result, it proposed a coordinated network of community circulators, park & ride lots, transit centers and rail extensions to reach out to the population and jobs that had moved to outlying areas of the region over that period. Later, the Euclid Corridor and waterfront areas became the region's highest priorities for rapid transit investments, and a program to implement a network of community circulators, park & ride lots, and transit centers was undertaken by RTA. Many of the rapid transit extensions and commuter rail lines that had been studied by Northeast Ohio as far back as the early 1970s were also part of that first plan.

By 1996, RTA and the region realized that a proposed new rail line connecting the region's two busiest development areas, downtown Cleveland and University Circle, and other elements of its long-range plan were not practical. The Euclid Corridor was to be better served by a future Bus Rapid Transit line, while a 2.5 mile RTA rail extension serving the Cleveland Flats and Lakefront areas would become operational as one of the 1996 Cleveland Bicentennial Legacy Projects. To reflect these changes and new community preferences regarding public transit, RTA undertook an update of its long-range plan, using internal and external surveys and an analysis of regional travel trends. The RTA Board then adopted its **1998 Long Range Plan**, which proposed a major restructuring of the bus network based on a comprehensive operational analysis. A public survey on the relative importance of key elements of the 1993 plan led RTA to retain rapid transit extensions, commuter rail, community circulators, park & ride lots, and transit centers in its long-range plan.

By the time RTA entered the present century, Greater Cleveland's economic conditions had continued to worsen, with jobs and population continuing to locate in areas of the region that were difficult to serve by transit. Development patterns in many parts of RTA's service area were such that access by transit was often cost-prohibitive, pedestrian unfriendly, or both. In addition, many of the major changes to RTA's bus network proposed in the **1998 Long Range Plan** were deemed politically impossible, and the envisioned cost savings by those changes could never be realized. By year 2000, RTA's "Back to Basics" strategy, with its heightened focus on service quality, cost-effectiveness and financial prudence, dictated that RTA's long-range plan be updated.

Transit 2025 - RTA's Current Long Range Plan

The current RTA long-range plan, **Transit 2025**, differs substantially from earlier plans. It more closely reflects RTA's, the region's and the state's financial capacity for major transportation investments. **Transit 2025** continues RTA's commitment to the more than 80% of its riders using the bus network with improved services, including new community circulators, transit centers and park & ride lots. It also begins the implementation of the region's premier transit project, the Euclid Corridor Transportation Project, consisting of

the following service elements: Bus Rapid Transit, improved downtown bus flows and routings, East Side Transit Center, and downtown transit zone improvements.

Transit 2025 also focuses on bringing RTA's transit infrastructure up to higher standards and encouraging transit-oriented design, or TOD. Related to nationwide efforts towards Smart Growth, TOD encourages locating transit and development in close proximity in order to reduce auto dependency and improve transit access. The plan also addresses a variety of customer amenity enhancements, such as improved passenger waiting areas and bicycle racks on buses. It also promotes speeding the flow of RTA buses and trains along various major travel corridors using lower cost traffic signal technology advancements and enforcement of peak hour parking restrictions.

Transit 2025 has also incorporated input from RTA's key stakeholders including NOACA, the Ohio Department of Transportation, Cuyahoga County, and the City of Cleveland, as well as other partners like EcoCity Cleveland and the Cleveland Neighborhood Development Corporation. Given the economic realities facing the U.S., the State of Ohio and RTA's region, these entities encouraged RTA to take a realistic look at cash flow projections and to prioritize its major projects. In addition, there are major, yet undetermined land use changes anticipated for Cleveland's downtown lakefront and Innerbelt Freeway, and Chagrin Highlands areas. Therefore, RTA is renewing its focus on maintaining and upgrading the current RTA system, and placing less emphasis on rail extensions and commuter rail. Until more is known about future land uses, RTA will delay pursuing certain rail projects.

RTA believes that **Transit 2025** will help coordinate and maximize its future investments relative to the long-term plans of its stakeholders and partners. Once a better federal funding picture emerges after adoption of the next Federal transportation funding bill and as more detailed Census 2000 journey to work data become available, RTA will continue charting the future course of Cuyahoga County's public transit system.

Transit 2025 Chapters

Following is a brief synopsis of chapters in the long-range plan.

Chapter 1 - **Transit 2025** Vision, Purpose and Strategic Initiatives provides more detailed background on long-range planning at RTA. This includes the vision, purpose and need for this plan relative to RTA's policy underpinnings, and key trends affecting RTA's service and service area. Chapter 1 also includes a set of shorter-term RTA Strategic Initiatives developed to help implement this Long Range Plan.

Chapter 2 - Demographic & Market Analysis presents key national and local data on factors shaping the RTA transit network. Northeast Ohio continues to experience flat growth in population and jobs. Automobile travel continues to increase, but congestion is not yet a major problem. However, providing mobility for the economically challenged and those who prefer not to, or cannot, drive remains important to the region and RTA.

Chapter 3 - Service Analysis and Future Service Concepts initially describes RTA's system performance and selected characteristics, and discusses the kinds of trips typically taken on RTA. Later, it details the various services RTA is pursuing or considering pursuing in both the short- and long-term. This includes new corridor-level approaches to service enhancements, as well as passenger amenities. Intercounty service coordination, transit vehicle types, and intercity and commuter rail options are discussed here as well.

Chapter 4 - Capital Projects and Funding lists the projects comprising RTA's 2005-2009 Capital Improvement Plan, including system maintenance and expansion projects. This chapter briefly summarizes the funding for key RTA development projects and describes the three future rail extension projects that remain under consideration by the region.

Chapter 5 - Transit Oriented Design and Joint Development presents RTA's current and recommended future efforts in this area. Transit-oriented development supports Smart Growth and related initiatives in helping make cities better places to live, work and visit. Encouraging new development near major bus and rail transit hubs, especially in urban redevelopment areas, improves access and mobility by transit and reduces auto dependency. This also helps create a more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environment that can ultimately build transit ridership.

Chapter 6 - Transit 2025 Sketch Plan presents in tabular and graphic form the projects comprising the possible future RTA transit system. This chapter includes key existing bus facilities, as well as expansion projects that are capital- or service-oriented. Regionally-significant projects by others, such as major highway improvements and intercity and commuter rail, are also shown here.

Chapter 7 - Summary and Next Steps gives brief concluding remarks about ***Transit 2025***.

Transit 2025 Appendices

As with ***Transit 2010*** in 1993, the current RTA long range plan includes a separate volume of appendices. These seven appendices present a portion of the research done by RTA and national transportation experts on important trends and issues influencing the region's land use and transportation future. Some of these same issues were raised in RTA's 1993 plan, such as livable communities and transit-focused development. But more is known today, and it is important that this plan help keep the community informed on the latest developments in these and related areas. The appendices also contain background on new initiatives being implemented or considered by RTA, such as Location Efficient Mortgages. And, since millions of dollars (mostly from earmarked Federal funds) have been spent studying commuter and intercity rail in Northeast Ohio, with future study still being considered by others, it is appropriate to share some results of those efforts.

Conclusion

Transit 2025 represents RTA's best possible realistic look at its future. It incorporates many ongoing major planning efforts by others, extensive trend research, and the latest thinking by RTA. As Census data and additional funding become available, RTA will begin its next long-range plan update, most likely in conjunction with the next update of the region's transportation plan by the area's metropolitan planning organization, NOACA. By that time, important downtown land development decisions will likely have been made and an even clearer picture of the future transit system can be drawn.