



## RTA Board of Trustees Meeting

March 18, 2025

### MEETING MINUTES

**Board Members:** Mayor Koomar (Chair), Ms. Welch (Vice Chair), Ms. Elder, Mayor Gallo, Mr. Love, Rev. Lucas, Ms. McPherson, Ms. Pacetti, Mr. Sleasman, Mayor Weiss

**Staff/Other:** Nick Biggar, India Birdsong Terry, Janet Burney, Floun'say Caver, Melinda Dangelo, Nick Davidson, Shashelia Degraffinried, Maribeth Feke, Michael Fesler, George Fields, Bob Fleig, Ida Ford-Marshall, Joel Freilich, Anthony Garofoli, Rajan Gautam, Chief Deirdre Jones, Lawrence Jupina, Carl Kirkland, Sheila Miller, Joshua Miranda, Charles Morgan, Holly Mothes, Mike Schipper, Kay Sutula, John Togher, Natoya Walker-Minor, Carolyn Young

**Public:** E. Bingaman, Brian Gibbons, Kevin Hinkle, Stephen Katanovic, Loh, J. Sopko, MD, B. Sosk

- I. Call to Order
  - a. Mayor Koomar called the meeting to order at 10:01 am.
- II. Roll Call
  - a. There were ten (10) Board members present, representing a quorum.
- III. Certification regarding Notice of Meeting
  - a. It was advised that the notice of this meeting had been posted more than twenty-four hours in advance of the meeting, that the usual notification had been given to the news media and other interested persons, and that all requirements of the Ohio Revised Code and Rules and Bylaws of this Board regarding notice of meeting had been complied with.
- IV. Approval of Board Meeting Minutes from February 25, 2025
  - a. The minutes from February 25, 2025, Board Meeting had been previously distributed and reviewed, and the Board Chair asked whether there were any additions and/or corrections. Rev. Lucas asked that the font be corrected to the appropriate size on all documents. It was moved by Ms. Welch and seconded by Mr. Sleasman with the necessary edits. The minutes were approved.
- V. Public Comments – Agenda and Non-Agenda Items

The public comment section has been consolidated to include agenda and non-agenda items.

1. In-person – Cleveland, OH - a longtime RTA rider came forward to share their perspective, expressing a nostalgic appreciation for paying fares with cash and using all-day passes rather than digital methods. They noted their discomfort with the prevalence of computer advertisements on buses—particularly on the HealthLine and the 51 Pearl Road line and described how they often shield their view from the ads while riding. The speaker voiced concerns about the agency's technology spending, suggesting that funds might be better allocated toward improving service. Specifically, they highlighted the limited afternoon service

on certain routes like 251 and 53A (North Royalton), which currently only operate one-way during the afternoon. They advocated for restoring full two-way service on these lines and emphasized that not everything in transit needs to revolve around technology. The comments were acknowledged and appreciated by the General Manager, Ms. Terry, who thanked the speaker for their input and demonstration.

2. Kevin Hinkle – Cleveland, OH (in person) - a regular RTA rider from Cleveland, Ohio, inquired about the possibility of adding a bus stop at the corner of Bridge Avenue and West 25th Street to improve accessibility to Dave's grocery store, particularly for seniors. Management acknowledged his suggestion and stated it would be taken into consideration.
3. Airric Stewart – Cleveland, OH (caller) - voiced concerns about public access to the board meetings via phone. He noted that this was the first time in over four months he had been able to stay connected through the designated call-in number for the duration of the meeting. Mr. Stewart emphasized that the phone line should remain open for the entirety of the Board of Trustees meetings, as it has been in the past, and called for extended time for public comments to allow for feedback throughout the meeting. He reiterated his ongoing proposals regarding the 48A, 15A, and the rerouting of the 50 line to improve transit access to hospitals, retail areas, and underserved neighborhoods. Mr. Stewart highlighted the potential benefits for workers in Cleveland, particularly those in retail jobs. He also referenced past comments made by Mayor Koomar and General Manager Ms. Terry, expressing frustration that his suggestions have not been directly addressed. He concluded by underscoring the important role of public transit in supporting socioeconomic well-being. His comments ended when his allotted time expired.
4. Airric Stewart – Cleveland, OH (webform) - submitted a written message on Friday, April 14th, which mirrored the verbal comments he had just made during the call-in segment. The board acknowledged that a full reading was unnecessary due to the repetition.
5. Isaac Shimsky-Agosto – Cleveland, OH (webform) - expressed enthusiasm about the progress being made toward fare capping and shared his excitement about the upcoming availability of RTA smart cards, stating that the change would make riding RTA more convenient and improve his overall experience.

VI. Board Governance Committee Report

- a. No committee report

VII. Operational Planning & Infrastructure Committee Report

- a. No committee report

VIII. Audit, Safety Compliance and Real Estate Committee Report

- a. No committee report

IX. External and Stakeholder Relations and Advocacy Committee Report

- a. No committee report

X. Civilian Oversight Committee (COC) Report

- a. No committee report

XI. Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

- a. No committee report

XII. Ad Hoc Committee Reports

- a. No committee reports.

Mayor Koomar stated the Compensation Committee would have a brief report following the relevant resolution discussion.

XIII. Introduction of New Employees/Promotions

- a. Ms. Marshall, Senior Manager, Talent Acquisition announced the new employees and promotions including new operators, administrative staff and engineering personnel. The board welcomed and applauded these individuals for joining or advancing with GCRTA.

XIV. Introduction of Resolutions

- A. 2025-38 - Authorizing Contract No. 2024-225 with J. Ross Express Inc. for motor vehicle towing and flat tire replacement services, as specified and as required, in an amount not to exceed \$596,805.00 for a three-year period, and in an amount not to exceed \$198,935.00 for each of two option years, for a total five-year contract amount not to exceed \$994,675.00 General Fund, Fleet Management Department Budget) the adoption of which was moved by Ms. Pacetti, seconded by Ms. Welch and approved by unanimous vote.
- B. 2025-39 - Authorizing Contract No. 2024-213 with Mike Coates Construction Co., Inc. for Project No. 24W – Warrensville Van Aken Station Reconstruction in an amount not to exceed \$6,702,676.00 (RTA Development Fund, Engineering & Project Development Department Budget) the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Sleasman, seconded by Mr. Love and approved by unanimous vote.
- C. 2025-40 – Intentionally Omitted
- D. 2025-41 - Permanent Easement for The Construction, Use, Operation and Maintenance of a Connector Track, Delivery Switch and Related Facilities for Delivery of Replacement Railcars the adoption of which was moved by Ms. McPhearson, seconded by Mr. Sleasman and approved by unanimous vote.
- E. 2025-42 - Amending Chapter 840 Commissions and Fare Structure of the Codified Rules and Regulations of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority to Implement Fare Capping and Open Payments, the adoption of which was moved by Ms. Pacetti, seconded by Ms. Elder and approved by unanimous vote. Mayor Weiss abstained from the vote.
- F. 2025-43 - Permanent Easement granted to the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company ("CEI") for the Installation and Maintenance of Underground Electric and Communications Cables the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Sleasman, seconded by Ms. McPhearson and approved by unanimous vote.
- G. 2025-44 - Authorizing the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority to Enter into a Purchase and Sale Agreement for the Purchase of Real Property Necessary for the Installation, Operation and Maintenance of a New Modular Traction Power Station in an Amount not to Exceed \$392,000.00 (RTA Development Fund, Engineering & Project Development Department Budget) the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Sleasman, seconded by Ms. McPhearson and approved by unanimous vote.

Mayor Weiss provided background, explaining that the compensation committee—formed when he joined the board and currently consisting of himself, Ms. Welch, Ms. Elder, and Ms. Pacetti—conducted a thorough review. This included a self-evaluation by Mr. Garofoli, board evaluations, input from Ms. Terry, and consideration of market benchmarks and internal equity, and following three committee meetings, a recommendation was made.

- H. 2025-45 - Authorizing a Salary Adjustment for Anthony A. Garofoli, Executive Director of Internal Audit, the adoption of which was moved by Mayor Koomar, seconded by Mayor Weiss and approved by unanimous vote.

#### Secretary-Treasurer's Report

Rajan D. Gautam, Deputy General Manager of Finance and Secretary-Treasurer, addressed the board, first providing clarification on a significant variance from the Q4 Quarterly Management Report. He explained that reimbursed expenses were 163.9% over budget primarily due to the use of preventive maintenance (PM) funds to close out several older grants, increasing the PM amount from the budgeted \$1 million to \$7 million.

He then delivered his regular financial update, noting key economic indicators: the annual inflation rate stood at 2.9%, and interest rates remained at 4.5% pending a Federal Reserve decision. Year-to-date ridership through February 2025 was up 0.2% from 2024 but remained 24% below pre-COVID 2019 levels. Passenger fare revenue was 14.1% below February 2024 due to delayed UPASS receipts and 15.2% under budget. Sales tax revenue, which reflects economic activity from three months prior, was down 2% year-over-year for February, and year-to-date collections were 0.9% lower than in 2024. He also noted recent changes by the Ohio Department of Taxation, which consolidated tax categories.

Financial highlights included \$22.3 million in outstanding debt as of December 31, an average investment yield of 4.07% year-to-date, and total cash and investments of \$361.1 million—\$27.5 million of which is in the general fund, meeting the board's reserve policy. In response to Mayor Weiss's question about investment income projections, Mr. Gautam confirmed the 2025 general fund investment income was budgeted at \$1 million and agreed to follow up with additional details.

#### General Manager, CEO Report

India L. Birdsong Terry, General Manager, CEO provided the final formal report of the annual meeting, beginning with gratitude and setting the tone for a celebratory close, including two upcoming appreciation videos. She first acknowledged the board transition, thanking outgoing Mayor Anthony Biasiotta of Seven Hills for his service. She welcomed Mayor Marie Gallo of Parma Heights as the newest board member.

Ms. Terry highlighted a significant recognition for the finance team: under the leadership of Deputy General Manager of Finance, Mr. Rajan Gautam and Director of Accounting, Mr. John Togher, the team was awarded the Government Finance Officers Association's (GFOA) highest honor for governmental accounting and financial reporting for fiscal year 2023. John humbly thanked his team, and Ms. Terry playfully acknowledged his unofficial title as the "King of the St. Patrick's Day Parade," a historically high ridership day for RTA. She praised the operations and Transit Police divisions for their excellent service during the event, emphasizing the collective effort involved in ensuring a successful and safe day for Clevelanders.

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, Ms. Terry participated in Case Western Reserve University's "Protecting Your Crown" conference, aimed at empowering Black women leaders. She moderated a panel featuring influential voices discussing work-life balance, authenticity in leadership, and navigating professional spaces as women of color. She described the experience as both powerful and uplifting.

Also spotlighted was Dr. Floun'say Caver's testimony to the Ohio Senate Transportation Committee, advocating for \$80 million in general funds and \$15 million for workforce development to support transit across the state. Dr. Caver emphasized that "mobility is freedom" and "transportation is economic development," messages that resonated with bipartisan legislators. Ms. Terry praised Dr. Caver's preparation and delivery, reinforcing the agency's flat management approach that empowers multiple team members to serve as capable spokespeople.

On March 6<sup>th</sup>, Ms. Terry participated in iHeartMedia's "CEOs You Should Know" podcast, which showcases leaders from diverse industries across the region. She shared insights on RTA's operations and leadership style. While the podcast hasn't been released yet, it is expected to be published in the coming weeks, and we will share this information once it becomes available.

The swearing-in ceremony for 14 new Transit Police Officers, joined by their families was held in the boardroom on March 7<sup>th</sup>. Chief Jones and Deputy Chief Mike Gettings administered the oaths. Ms. Terry thanked board members Mayor Kumar and Lauren Welch for attending and commended the emotional and proud moment for the new recruits. Chief Jones noted with pride that, unlike many police departments facing shortages, RTA's department is growing and nearing full staffing, with 50 additional candidates in the pipeline. Ms. Terry credited this to the recruitment and marketing teams and praised the department's continued commitment to safety and diversity.

Additionally, Ms. Terry expressed appreciation to Teresa Burrage for her work behind the scenes in organizing board meetings, wishing her well in her new role with the county.

The meeting concluded with a note about Transit Employee Appreciation Day, encouraging everyone to thank RTA staff—from operators to administrators—for their dedication. Two videos were shown: a teaser of the upcoming digital annual report and a heartfelt appreciation video. Special thanks were extended to Natoya Walker-Minor and her marketing team, along with the board-approved contractor who supported production of the report.

#### President's Report

Mayor Koomar reminded everyone that Mr. Gautam will continue to provide his financial overview, which began during the board retreat, at a meeting scheduled for Tuesday, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 8:30 am. A meeting invitation was recently sent out and members were encouraged to mark their calendars. The President also mentioned an upcoming vacation and noted that the Board Governance Committee would be convened soon to discuss ongoing collaboration with management in the coming year.

In new business, Mr. Gautam provided clarification in response to a question from Mayor Weiss regarding interest rates used in budget planning. He explained that during the budgeting process in August–September, rates were around 4.5%, but projections suggested a decline due to anticipated FOMC actions. As a result, an average interest rate of 2.5%, based on the past three years, was used for budgeting purposes.

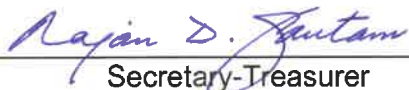
Upcoming Meetings

The next regular Board meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, April 15, 2025** in the Board Room of the Authority, Root-McBride Building, 1240 West Sixth Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44113. This meeting will be live streamed on RTA's Board page ([www.RideRTA.com/board](http://www.RideRTA.com/board)) by selecting the meeting date. The public is welcome to attend in person.

There being no further business to bring before this Board, a motion to adjourn the meeting by Mayor Koomar and seconded by Mayor Weiss was approved by unanimous vote. The meeting was adjourned at 10:57 am.



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President

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary-Treasurer