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Committee Meetings

Documenter name: Lori Ingram

Agency: [Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority](#)

Date: Feb. 6, 2024

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Summary

- RTA is focused on making sure railways and buses, including paratransit, coordinate with the needs of the public for transportation to doctors, schools, work, sporting events, retail and grocery shopping.
- Railway safety seems to be of utmost importance to RTA, based on discussion in this meeting.
- The agency needs to hire more drivers, engineers and inspectors for the new vehicles that will be on the road soon.

Follow-Up Questions

- How do you get hired at RTA?
- If there is a discrepancy in infant mortality rates among Black and brown and white babies, what factors cause this other than a lack of transportation?

Notes

[Editor's note: Multiple RTA Board of Trustees committees held meetings successively. Check out the [board packet](#) and [livestream](#) for more.]

The first committee received an Ohio advocacy update and [presentation](#). Terrence O'Donnell from [Dickinson Wright](#), the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority's (RTA) state advocacy partner, spoke about advocacy around transportation laws within the Ohio House of Representatives and Senate. "Public transit in Cuyahoga County isn't a bi-partisan issue. It's a non-partisan issue," he said.

The state budget related to transportation is made every two years, O'Donnell said, adding that there has been record funding for public transit of \$70 million statewide in the last two budgets. Also added: \$30 million went to the Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership in the last budget. This aims to ensure that riders will have access to

transportation for school and work inside employment hubs.

Also paramount for Dickinson Wright and RTA is funding for railcar replacement and rail track reconstruction, O'Donnell said.

The next committee heard a [presentation](#) about RTA's On-Call Bridge Engineering Services III program. This includes bridge engineering, inspection, load rating, and repair. RTA collaborates with the bridge owners on service, according to employee Kirk Dimmick.

RTA staff recommended awarding a contract for this work to Michael Baker International Inc. worth up to \$300,000 over two years. The committee voted to send the proposal to the full board for final consideration in the future.

Next, the same committee [received an update](#) on RTA's Baby on Board initiative run in conjunction with the Cuyahoga County Board of Health (CCBOH). A main concern is that there is a huge discrepancy between the infant mortality rate for white and Black infants in Cuyahoga County, said RTA employee Maribeth Feke.

This program is for families who are pregnant or are caring for babies under the age of one, said Michele Benko from CCBOH. The goal is for those families to be able to use public transportation to go to the doctor or grocery store in order to preserve the child's health.

RTA was awarded \$500,000 by the Ohio Department of Transportation a few years ago. The program began in 2021, according to the presentation.

One-week bus/Rapid passes are given to participants by community partner agencies. So far, 2,230 passes have been given out, according to Benko. They hope to find more agency partners and to increase eligibility by raising the maximum age of children beyond one year old. Benko noted that science shows there's critical brain development up to three years old.

In addition, RTA increased marketing and bus wrap ads to boost awareness of the program throughout the community.

A different RTA committee then received [an update on paratransit operations](#) from Director of Paratransit Nick Davidson.

The demand for paratransit has increased, but on-time performance has decreased. This is because of a shortage of cut-away vehicles and available drivers, Davidson said. In

order to fix this, RTA is looking at adding 20 vehicles and hiring more drivers. Officials are also looking at user-friendly apps so that seniors can schedule their rides.

The last committee was the Committee of the Whole. It received a [railcar replacement update](#).

Bryan Moore, with the RTA, presented on 30 new railcars previously purchased by RTA. The newly designed vehicles with bike racks and new seating arrangement will be replacing old cars. The front of the railcar is heated in order to cut through ice on the track. There will be new training for employees and tracks that are expanded from the East Side to the airport. "To call it a game-changer is an understatement," a board member said.

RTA will also work to ensure the safety of such cars, as stated by Joe Shaffer, RTA staff. There will be a checklist to define that criteria.

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