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Committee Meetings

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Date: Feb. 6, 2024

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Summary

- There is plenty of support at the state level for public transportation.
- Paratransit demand will continue to increase over the next 10 years.
- The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) seems to have dedicated leadership in tune with riders' needs, based on discussion and presentations in this meeting.

Follow-up questions

- Will paratransit improve its on-time metrics ahead of the projected increase in demand?
- Will more mothers and families use the Baby on Board program, and will RTA change eligibility requirements by increasing the age of babies that families have to care for beyond one year old?
- How vital is public transportation to economic development?

Notes

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

Began with roll call of the External and Stakeholder Relations & Advocacy Committee. Il present.

Terrence O'Donnell from Dickinson Wright, RTA's state advocacy partner, presented on government relations and attitudes about transportation at the state level. Through [slides](#), he demonstrated that public transportation in Cuyahoga County is a "non-partisan issue."

- Highlighted the \$70 million in state funding for public transit in the last two

budgets

- \$30 million in 2023 for Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership

O'Donnell spoke about the need for railcar replacement. He told the story of State Sen. Matt Huffman (president of the Ohio Senate) and his wife coming to visit RTA's rail facilities about a year ago.

Dickinson Wright and RTA worked to change state law to make rail track reconstruction eligible for Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC) funding, O'Donnell said.

What's next? Feb. 13 is Ohio Loves Transit Day at the Statehouse. Dickinson Wright and RTA will be advocating for additional funding, and there are meetings set up with state leaders.

RTA Board Member Calley Mersmann asked what message resonates at the Statehouse. There's a real focus from the governor on upskilling, education and economic development, O'Donnell said.

"Transit benefits everyone," is another message officials hear, added Natoya Walker Minor, an RTA executive.

This committee meeting adjourned at 9:24 a.m.

Next up was the Operational Planning & Infrastructure Committee. All members present.

Kirk Dimmick, RTA engineer project manager for bridges, [presented](#) and discussed a contract for on-call bridge engineering services.

- Not to exceed \$300,000 over 24 months
- Work would include:
 - Annual bridge inspections
 - Load rating for Red Line East bridges
 - Inspection and repair of bridge over Brookpark Road
 - Projects with ODOT

Lou Catalusci, RTA contract administrator, spoke on the [request for proposal \(RFP\)](#). Staff recommended that the board award the contract to Michael Baker International Inc.

Mersmann asked about ownership of bridges and where responsibilities lie.

Dimmick answered that outside agencies own the bridges but RTA enters agreements

that guide the relationships. RTA does own some bridges, he added.

The committee motioned to move the proposal to the full board for future consideration. It was approved.

Officials gave a Baby on Board [presentation](#) next.

RTA was previously awarded \$500,000 to address social determinants of health. It partnered with the Cuyahoga County Board of Health to launch the [Baby on Board program](#) in 2021. The aim is to reduce transportation barriers for families who are pregnant or caring for children under 1 year old by giving transit passes and improving bus shelters.

Presenters noted that infant mortality rates are higher in Black and brown communities than in white communities. Other details:

- 44127 ZIP code has the highest infant mortality rate in the service area but a lower number of bus passes distributed, as pointed out by a board member
- Started with seven community partners in 2021 and now has 14 partners *[Editor's note: Families must be actively involved with one of the program's community partners to be eligible].*
- Just over 2,230 7-day bus/rail passes handed out to date
- Community partners aim to provide wraparound services for families

Presenters went over eligibility requirements and partner agency requirements and gave examples of success stories.

RTA has updated 23 bus shelters as part of the program. Updates include: some shelters were made larger, solar lights were added, family seating was added, trash cans were added, and some stops were moved to safer places

Facts about bus pass users in the program surveyed by RTA:

- 28% used passes for medical appointments
- 43% used buses daily
- 24% walk more than 11 minutes to their most commonly used bus or train stop

Chiqueita Yarbrough, director of Northeast Ohio Neighborhood Health Services Inc. (NEON, an RTA community partner), said through its Moms and Babies First program NEON has passed out 750 weekly passes to over 200 families..

It has been “a very, very successful partnership,” Yarbrough said.

Board members asked about costs, why so few bus passes have been distributed, and lessons learned.

Some officials discussed raising the required age of children that families care for. “I expect great things out of this program and 2,000-plus is a great number, but it’s not big enough,” RTA CEO India Birdsong Terry.

That meeting ended around 10:13 a.m.

Next was the Organizational, Services & Performance Monitoring Committee. All members present.

Nick Davidson, RTA staff, provided [updates on paratransit](#).

Over about the last two years:

- Increase in ridership
- Decrease in on-time performance

Davidson noted that Cuyahoga County has an aging population and said demand for paratransit service will continue to grow in the next 10 years.

He talked about what RTA has done to future-proof paratransit:

- Leveraged scheduling technology
- Purchased transportation
- Introduced 20 new 2023 paratransit vehicles

RTA can further improve paratransit with a scheduling app, Davidson said.

Cost has doubled for vehicles, he added.

Last was the Committee of the Whole.

Bryan Moore, RTA railcar project lead manager, spoke first. He gave an [update on railcar replacement](#).

The board approved the purchase of 30 new rail cars in 2023. The contract for those purchases is \$194 million.

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