$58m in station projects in Toledo, Sandusky, Elyria and Cleveland

Plans and projects are emerging with partial or full funding for improving, expanding or relocating stations in Toledo, Sandusky, Elyria and Cleveland. In total, they involve $58 million worth of improvements. Each station also will become regional transportation hubs with the inclusion of local transit and intercity bus services.

These station projects are the result of team efforts instigated by All Aboard Ohio, some dating back 20 years ago such as with the Elyria station. Full funding is in place for the Toledo station and nearly all of the funding is available for the Sandusky and Elyria stations. Cleveland's station plan, the largest of the four, was recently finalized.

Construction has begun for relocating Greyhound to Toledo's MLK Plaza, site of the Amtrak train station. Soon the rail facilities will see $1 million worth of improved platforms, accessways and more.

Sandusky's historic depot will gain a longer platform for about $250,000 and structural repairs to the depot. Elyria's Lorain County Transportation Center (the historic NYC depot) that hosts Greyhound and Lorain County Transit buses could also gain Amtrak trains if another $500,000 in local/state funds are found to add to the $10 million project.

Cleveland's Lakefront Multi-Modal Transportation Center will improve local, regional & intercity linkages (City of Cleveland graphic).

Cincinnati Streetcar opens on Sept. 9th

The City of Cincinnati recently announced its 3.6-mile modern streetcar will hold its grand opening on Friday, Sept. 9th, 2016 – one week before the city's big Oktoberfest.

This follows the May 6th opening of Kansas City's streetcar, which is using similar CAF-built vehicles as Cincinnati's. In its first week, KC's 2.2-mile streetcar route carried 57,000 riders, triple the average daily projected use. Riding KC's streetcars is free for one year thanks to the city and local sponsors.

Many new real estate developments are being drawn to the Cincinnati streetcar route. The streetcar is opening on time and under its $147 million budget. But Mayor John Cranley is redirecting the excess to non-transit projects rather than plan the expansion of the streetcar to Uptown to serve the University of Cincinnati and nearby hospitals, among the region's largest employers.

All Aboard Ohio looks forward to hearing Mayor Cranley's plans for the streetcar's grand opening.
At its April meeting, All Aboard Ohio’s Board of Directors approved a policy statement to encourage modest investments that could allow passenger trains to travel at 90 mph in mixed traffic with freight trains.

The policy statement follows a federal mandate on the railroads to install costly Positive Train Control signaling on all railroad corridors hosting more than 5 million gross tons of traffic annually, or regular passenger service, or shipments of materials considered a Toxic by Inhalation Hazard (TIH). PTC also allows passenger trains to exceed the federal 79 mph limit on rail corridors where track conditions and road-rail grade crossing safety devices permit.

Ohio and Indiana passenger routes have long sections of straight track, or at least gradual curves, and where tracks are in excellent condition. But grade crossings are protected by safety devices whose train-activated triggers aren’t far enough from the crossings to provide sufficient warning time for motorists. Lengthening these triggers (aka circuits) can cost about $50,000 per crossing. There is an average of about one crossing for every route-mile of railroad.

Significant funding is available for road-rail crossing improvements, including $25 million from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) or $230+ million/year from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Increasing speeds to 90 mph could save significant travel time, especially between Cincinnati and Chicago where maximum passenger train speeds are now only 60 mph. Increasing speeds from 60 to 90 mph on more than half of this corridor could cost about $7 million and allow a travel time reduction of perhaps 30-60 minutes.

If the straight sections of track and gradual curves on the Capitol/Lake Shore route from Cleveland west to the Illinois state line were increased from 79 to 90 mph, it could also offer a travel time reduction over 300 route-miles and cost about $15 million. But that could be pursued in sections, starting with the 68-mile “air line” between Toledo, OH and Butler, IN where there are no curves. Also, there are 24 route miles between Bedford-Ravenna, OH southeast of Cleveland where there are only three grade crossings and lots of straight track and gradual curves. This could be a cost-effective place to raise speeds and reduce travel times, too.

All Aboard Ohio will urge the FRA to consider where train speeds can be cost-effectively increased to 90 mph as part of its upcoming Midwest Regional Passenger Rail Plan. That planning is due to start this summer and will include Ohio & Indiana.
Please contact your Congressperson today!

All Aboard Ohio urges you to contact your Congressperson now! Why? We have a great opportunity to get the funding tools necessary to improve and expand passenger rail service in Ohio – such as a daily Cardinal or an extended Pennsylvanian to Chicago.

Please contact your Congressperson CLICK HERE and politely ask him/her to support S.2844, the 2017 transportation funding bill, with the maximum funding possible for these passenger rail programs:

- $25 million for Federal State Partnership for State of Good Repair (House offers $25 million vs Senate’s $20 million);
- $50 million for Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements (House offers $25 million vs Senate’s $50 million);
- $15 million for Restoration & Enhancements Grants (House offers $0 vs Senate’s $15 million).

The House and Senate bills provide equal funding amounts for public transportation ($12.5 billion), railroad capital programs ($1.7 billion), and Amtrak ($1.42 billion).

Please ask your Congressperson to support railroads and public transportation at their authorized funding amounts to create jobs and improve access to jobs.

The bill now goes to the full House Appropriations Committee and then to the House floor for a vote in June. For more detailed descriptions of both the Senate and House appropriations bills, please CLICK HERE.

Thank you in advance for prompt action!

Ohio transit funds rise for first time this century

With a supplemental appropriation to the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) approved in May, the Ohio General Assembly increased funding for public transportation for the first time in the 21st century. Granted, the amount was small – only $8.2 million – but it turned the momentum in the positive direction after 15 years of annual transit funding declining from $42 million to $7 million.

The new funding includes $6.8 million from a federal TIGER grant and $1.4 million in other federal funding. Most of it will go to the Transit Tech Ohio project to help rural transit agencies purchase hardware and software that allows them to schedule and dispatch transit vehicles more efficiently and therefore save money. The remaining funding will reduce transit fares for elderly passengers on several systems around the state.

During legislative deliberations, some lawmakers sought significant additional funding for transit. All Aboard Ohio thanks Stephanie Howse (D-Cleveland) and Alicia Reece (D-Cincinnati) for amendments to boost transit funding by as much as $97 million per year that could make a real difference in expanding transit to reach more than one out of four jobs in Ohio’s metro areas, currently. Alas those amendments were tabled.

Get smart! Ohio transit finally adopting smart cards

Many large transit agencies throughout the nation have implemented equipment and technologies so that passengers can utilize smart cards and smart phone apps to pay fares. Now Ohio’s largest transit agencies are adopting them, too.

This is an important development because it speeds the loading of passengers, reduces service-hours without reducing service and thus saves money. All Aboard Ohio conducted a study of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority’s (GCRTA) 10-most popular bus routes in 2012. We found that buses spent twice as much time stopped waiting for boarding passengers to pay their fares than they did stopped at red traffic lights.

GCRTA announced in May that a six-month “flash pass” mobile farecard pilot program will be rolled out in June or July through Passport. Also, work is continuing with Xerox on a smartcard but GCRTA still has a number of kinks that need to be worked out.

In Columbus, the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) is developing a request for proposals for a new payment system to replace outdated fareboxes that require cash or COTA passes and accept digital payments. The new communications system also will allow COTA to provide Wi-Fi to passengers on its buses.

The Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority announced in May that it finalized an agreement with mobile payment provider Passport to develop a mobile ticketing app that Metro bus and streetcar riders can use to pay fares on a smartphone or tablet, as an alternative to pass cards or cash.

Just as exciting is the possibility that, if multiple neighboring transit agencies offer compatible fare-paying technologies and fare media, customers can more easily transfer between buses and trains offered by those systems.
At its Annual Meeting held on May 21st in Columbus, All Aboard Ohio’s general membership elected qualified and dedicated persons to the nonprofit association’s 15-member board of directors. This included three new membership-elected board members Tom Horsman of Cleveland, Sue Mancino of Wickliffe and Robert Winn of Cleveland.

A fourth new board member, Laurie Housemeyer of Cincinnati, who expressed interest in serving after the filing deadline was appointed to the board by the newly elected directors, as per the association’s bylaws. Also according to the bylaws, the directors chose the association’s officers from among their ranks. Re-elected officers were Chairman Jack Shaner of Columbus, Secretary Charles Horn of Kenton, and Treasurer Ken Clifford of Medway. Newly elected as vice-chairman was Derek Bauman of Cincinnati.

All Aboard Ohio thanks outgoing board members Timothy Porter of Toledo, Ronald Scheck of Sylvania, Akshai Singh of Cleveland Heights, and Ken Sislak of Shaker Heights for their volunteerism and professionalism in service to the association. All expressed a desire to remain supportive of All Aboard Ohio albeit in less active capacities.

Please see the ABOUT page on our Web site for a current list of the entire All Aboard Ohio Board of Directors and its officers. Their individual contact information appears on Page 7 of each print issue of the Ohio Passenger Rail News that is mailed to all dues-paying All Aboard Ohio members up to four times each year.

To join, CLICK HERE.