Ohio transit systems were already facing service cuts, fare hikes and a big backlog of state-of-good-report needs when they got more bad news. Eight of Ohio's largest transit agencies will see their countywide sales tax revenues cut deeply starting in 2017.

Ohio counties that levy sales taxes for transit are Cuyahoga, Franklin, Lake, Mahoning, Montgomery, Portage, Stark and Summit. All will lose up to 10 percent of their funding unless state lawmakers act to make them whole.

At issue is that sales taxes were applied twice to purchases from Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCO). That will end next year. Large agencies like the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority that depend on sales taxes for a majority of their total revenues will be hurt the most.

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The state of Ohio also will lose $550 million per year in sales taxes. Counties will lose too. In fact, rural counties will be hurt the most as they depend on sales taxes. Thus urban transit systems and rural counties have something in common in the Ohio legislature's agenda this year. All Aboard Ohio urges lawmakers to make whole all the entities hurt by the loss of MCO sales tax revenues.

Ohio stations to proceed without TIGER

Two Ohio intermodal station projects will move forward with their intercity passenger rail components, despite not winning federal grants to add bus facilities.

Cleveland and Oxford will proceed with their Plan B's of improvements in the absence of federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants. Cleveland's Lakefront Multimodal Transportation Center plans to unite Amtrak, Greyhound and Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority buses and trains under one roof west of East 9th Street downtown.

The $46.7 million project depended on a $37.4 million TIGER grant. But the Amtrak station improvements, estimated at $44 million, are to be funded by Amtrak. The improvements will include modernization of the 1976-built station facility, ADA compliance, platform resurfacing/widening, and parking lot and walkway improvements.

The City of Cleveland's planned Mall-to-Harbor walkway is a separate project and fully funded.
Ohio stations to proceed without TIGER grants

Modernizing the Amtrak station facility in Cleveland’s Lakefront Multimodal Transportation Center will move forward although the overall project didn’t win federal funds. For more, see the Illustration of the Month on Page 4.

A similar opportunity may exist for Oxford where the city, Miami University and Butler County Regional Transit Authority (BCRTA) are turning to their Plan B for development of an Amtrak station on the Chicago-Cincinnati-New York City Cardinal route. They sought $20 million in TIGER funds for a $26 million bus-rail intermodal station called Butler County Connection.

Instead, the city will work with the Talawanda School District for easements to the station site (a former high school) on Chestnut Street, just east of Main Street. The city also has purchased a house it will demolish at Main and Chestnut so Collins Run Road can be realigned to intersect with Chestnut directly across from where Main intersects with Chestnut. This re-alignment will greatly increase the access and aesthetics of the proposed Amtrak station.

The Amtrak station platform, shelter and parking will cost about $600,000 and the road realignment will cost approximately $420,000. The city, university and BCRTA will continue to seek grants and other funding to further improve the site and add a BCRTA bus transit hub to the Amtrak station.

Rail passengers continue to get priority over freight

For 180 years, rail passengers have had priority over rail freight. For the foreseeable future, the movement of people on America's rails will continue to have priority over the movement of cargo, be it waste bound for landfills or consumer goods from Asia.

A federal regulatory body, the Surface Transportation Board (STB), in July enforced a law passed by Congress in 1972 that gave passenger trains priority over freight trains.

Amtrak said if the STB ignored this law, long-distance and commuter trains would have seen a substantial increase in delays, since nearly 97 percent of the passenger railroad’s route miles operate on railroad tracks that aren’t owned by Amtrak.

Freight rail companies, however, said the effort would have allowed railways to determine the priority of trains on a case-by-case basis.

The STB also decided to tweak a proposal that would have defined “on-time performance” by when a train reaches its end destination. Instead, performance will be measured by punctuality at intermediate Amtrak stations.

The definition is important because a 2008 law mandated that if on-time performance averages less than 80 percent for any two consecutive calendar quarters, Amtrak can petition the STB for an investigation and remedies for delays and congestion issues.

Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), who is the ranking member on the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, urged the STB to reconsider the proposals and pointed out that measuring performance at route endpoints only takes into account 10 percent of all Amtrak stations.

America is rare in that no railroad companies provide both freight and passenger services, that rail rights of way are considered a private good and not open to public access, and that America spends little capital on passenger rail. These create conditions in which passenger and freight trains conflict with each other. Thus the only option to resolve many operating disputes is through regulation.
**Want trains/transit? Tell your Congressperson!**

With the election season delaying critical votes on transportation spending bills until the end of the year, it's not too late to contact your Congressperson. Together we can win 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. For more detailed descriptions of both the Senate and House appropriations bills, please **CLICK HERE**.

Thank you in advance for prompt action!

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**Cleveland transit funding backlog nears $2B**

As jobs sprawl away from aging industrial sites along existing transit lines and poverty worsens, the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) can't afford to expand outward to chase jobs to the urban fringe. In fact it can't afford to maintain the transit system it has now.

On Aug. 2, GCRTA staff reported a **$580 million backlog** of unfunded state-of-good-repair needs by 2025:

- $280 million – replace aging rail cars
- $88.3 million – bridges, garages & misc station repairs/improvements
- $74.3 million – rail division track reconstruction projects
- $47 million – bus improvement program
- $35.9 million – replacement buses
- $18.3 million – replace light-rail line signals
- $17.3 million – Radio-CAD/AVL system replacement
- $13 million – East 79th station ADA reconstruction
- $5.9 million – EB road demo/replace

**Only one in four Greater Cleveland jobs** can be reached in 90 minutes or less by transit. Recently planned expansions would address that at a cost of nearly $1.4 billion, including:

- Extend Red Line rail to Euclid – $917 million
- Lorain-Solon commuter rail – $320 million
- Lakefront Multimodal Transportation Center – $66 million
- University Circle Express buses to southeast park-n-rides – $36 million
- Cuyahoga Valley shuttle trains Rockside to Tower City – $25 million

Expansion isn't on GCRTA’s agenda as it cut bus and rail services 3 percent and raised fares 22 percent to cover a $7 million shortfall. By 2018, GCRTA expects to **lose nearly $20 million per year** in countywide sales tax funding due to changes in Medicaid taxing policies.

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**Cincinnati faces deep transit service cuts after 2017**

The Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) which operates Metro buses and streetcars faces $20 million annual deficits starting in 2018. The reason is due to job-sprawl beyond the city of Cincinnati.

Yet SORTA’s board said it **won't ask voters for a funding increase** this year and it may not seek one next year either. Meanwhile, half of the transit system’s aging bus fleet must be replaced at a cost of $76 million.

Metro is funded primarily by an earnings tax that generates about $50 million per year from persons working in the City of Cincinnati.

But with more people working in outer Hamilton County and beyond, the earnings tax has become obsolete and must be augmented or replaced by a countywide funding source.

A 0.5-percent countywide sales tax would generate about $70 million per year and allow Metro to expand to get more job seekers to reach more jobs. One in five Cincinnati residents do not own a car.

The new streetcar is not contributing to nor is it affected by Metro’s financial woes. The streetcar has its own dedicated operating and capital funding sources provided through the City of Cincinnati, including parking fees, private sponsorships, advertising and fares.
Cleveland isn't alone

More trains on less rail infrastructure means train delays like those shown at right – not only at Cleveland but at all stations west to Toledo including Elyria and Sandusky. Toledo offers the best station where two passenger trains at the same time can leave Norfolk Southern's busy two-track mainline and process passengers from two station tracks.

Elyria may soon have the capability of processing more than one passenger train simultaneously. All but $500,000 is available to add $10 million worth of elevators, stairwells and two station platforms at the Lorain County Transportation Center.

City-led upgrades are funded at Sandusky station and Amtrak plans a new station platform with extenders to reach the second main track. While not ideal, Amtrak’s plan would reduce train delays.

That leaves Cleveland where Amtrak plans to resurface and widen the existing platform to Track 44. But new crossover tracks just east of the station are critical needs.