WASHINGTON — Ho hum, it’s just another record year for Amtrak ridership. For the ninth time in 10 years, the National Railroad Passenger Corp., known more commonly as Amtrak, has broken its latest ridership record. But this is more than just another boring ridership statistic. There is much to celebrate. For starters, Amtrak has overtaken Greyhound in ridership and is larger than all but five airlines — four if US Airways and American Airlines are allowed to merge.

Amtrak carried 31.2 million passengers in Fiscal Year 2012 ending Sept. 30, marking the highest annual ridership since the passenger rail company started in 1971. That’s 49 percent more riders than Amtrak carried in 2000, and almost double the 15.8 million riders carried in Amtrak’s first full year, ending Sept. 30, 1972.

Ticket revenue jumped 6.8 percent to a best-ever $2.02 billion. In addition, Amtrak system-wide on-time performance increased to 83 percent, up from 78.1 percent and its highest level in 12 years, according to a written statement from Amtrak.

In Amtrak’s first full year, it required $140 million in federal operating subsidies — $800 million in 2012 dollars. Those federal subsidies grew to $750 million by 1981 ($1.9 billion adjusted for inflation). In FY2013, Amtrak is seeking only $450 million in operating funding from Congress, or $16 million less than what it received in 2012.

For Ohio’s trains, it was a good year:

— See “Ridership” on page three.
When the planes leave town
Flights vanish from rail-competitive markets, leaving fewer options

If you need more proof that we are living in a new age, head down to your local airport. If you live in a city between Chicago and the East Coast, chances are your nearest airport has a few vacancies. Vacancies include an unusually large number of empty ticketing counters, boarding areas, gates, tarmacs, concourses and even runways.

Your airport may have been hurting ever since the Great Recession and never recovered. Or maybe it started at your airport when crude oil prices first went above $50 a barrel in 2005, causing fuel costs to rise from 10 percent of an airline’s budget in 2000 to 35 percent today. Or, for small airports, it probably started right after the attacks of Sept. 11th, 2001 when heightened security meant the end of many puddle-jumping commercial flights.

The last decade has been brutal to the airline industry and to many communities and businesses that have depended on access to commercial aviation. Only vast government subsidies have kept the airlines aloft. Still, communities and businesses throughout America, but especially in our Midwest-Northeast region, have lost thousands of flights and at least as many high-paying corporate headquarters jobs.

Ironically, one of those is locomotive-maker GE Transportation which moved its headquarters (but not its factory) from Erie, PA to Chicago to have better access to global markets. Another is Chaquita’s headquarters which flew to Charlotte’s US Airways hub

— See “Planes” on page four
Each New Year seems to bring new and stronger reasons for expanding passenger rail service. This past year was no different. Actually, the New Year didn't bring new reasons for expanding passenger rail service. The airlines did.

Recently, I was talking with other rail advocates from around the country who, like All Aboard Ohio, also consider Chicago-East Coast Amtrak expansion a priority. They view this travel market as a potential national showcase for long-distance passenger rail service. After it is expanded and improved, it can provide a “Connected Corridors” model to train routes longer than 500 miles.

Connected Corridors simply refers to a long-distance train that serves more than one significant intermediate travel market. For example, Amtrak’s Lake Shore Limited serves numerous and significant short-distance travel markets between cities whose metro areas rank among the 100 most populous in this country.

There is, of course, New York City and Chicago — the first and third largest markets in the U.S. But would you be surprised that only 11 percent of the Lake Shore’s riders are traveling between those large, internationally relevant centers of business? Then consider all the other city-pair combinations involving top-100 markets (measured by metropolitan population).

There’s Chicago-Toledo, Chicago-Cleveland, Chicago-Buffalo, Chicago-Rochester, Chicago-Syracuse, Chicago-Albany and Chicago-Boston. Or replace Chicago with New York City to come up with more city-pairs. Or Boston. Then there are middle-of-the-route city-pairs like Toledo-Cleveland, Toledo-Buffalo, Cleveland-Buffalo, Cleveland-Rochester, and so on.

You get the point. Airlines don’t.

Most of those cities had direct flights between them, although some involved forking over big money to squeeze into some tiny planes. Then came three hits to the airlines — the attacks of Sept. 11, high oil prices and the Great Recession.

That’s where the past year has brought a new reason for expanded passenger rail. Admittedly, the decline of airline traffic in medium hub cities is a story that’s a decade in the making. But that story was finally told in shocking detail in September 2012 by the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Office of Inspector General (see “When the planes leave town” on Page One and on the Centerspread). That report showed how steep that decline has been for many cities, and not just the medium hubs like Cincinnati, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and St. Louis.

The report’s synopsis is that flights shorter than 500 miles, and especially less than 250 miles, are an endangered species in America. Airlines want to concentrate as many travelers on as few planes as possible. So if you want to fly from Cleveland to Cincinnati, chances are you will see the inside of Atlanta Hartsfield or Chicago’s O'Hare.
The Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers (dba All Aboard Ohio) is incorporated in Ohio as a non-profit association and exempt from federal income tax under the IRS Code, Section 501(c)(3) as a publicly supported educational organization. Dues and donations may be tax-deductible in accordance with the IRS Code.

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The report’s synopsis is that flights shorter than 500 miles, and especially less than 250 miles, are an endangered species in America. Airlines want to concentrate as many travelers on as few planes as possible. So if you want to fly from Cleveland to Cincinnati, chances are you will see the inside of Atlanta Hartsfield or Chicago’s O’Hare along the way. It’s worse for smaller cities. If you want to fly from Toledo to Syracuse, chances are you’ll see the inside of a hotel en route.

And that’s why Amtrak routes like the Lake Shore Limited with just one daily train in each direction manage to carry the same number of passengers as ten 146-seat Boeing 737 jets — each day. Consider also that, when each run of the Lake Shore eases up to the bumper posts at Chicago, New York City or Boston, it has carried 550 people in the course of its latest dash. How can that be when each train doesn’t have a total of 550 seats and beds?

The answer is ridership turnover. Each seat may be occupied by more than one traveler throughout the course of its trip. And that’s what a Connected Corridors train like the Lake Shore does. Furthermore, it’s serving lots of places that aren’t connected by direct flights anymore. And where they remain, there aren’t as many flights or the fares have jumped.

Consider Cleveland-Chicago, which had one of the most competitive air travel markets in the nation as recently as the late-1990s. You could choose from up to 40 round-trip flights per day and get a fare for under $100 round trip, less than the Amtrak fare. Today there are only 18 round-trip flights per day and cheapest round-trip air fare is about $184. Most flights cost over $300. Amtrak charges $106.

Amtrak wants to provide more and faster trains in the Chicago-East Coast travel market — one of the most populous in the world. It needs expanded stations (see “Elyria train station? A flawed situation” on Page Seven). Amtrak needs more trains. And it needs more track capacity so its trains and busy freight traffic can peacefully co-exist. Those are reasonable requests considering the growing demand for passenger rail, just as it was for publicly funded airport improvements over the past century.

Fortunately, this new and compelling reason for passenger rail is one of the strongest yet for our region. Let’s see what the New Year brings.
Amtrak ridership up 49% since 2000!

“Ridership” from page one

Lake Shore Limited (daily Chicago-New York City/Boston via the Ohio stations of Bryan, Toledo, Sandusky, Elyria and Cleveland): Its FY2012 record ridership of 403,700 is up 4.3 percent over 2011 and breaks the Lake Shore's previous all-time best of 387,986 rides set in 1986. As recently as FY2000, ridership was 303,087 due to reliability and service quality issues. Use of the Lake Shore Limited has since grown by 33 percent! This train has been in continuous operation for 37 years after Ohio’s Congressional delegation urged that it be Amtrak’s “Experimental Route for 1975.”

U.S. Senator Robert Taft (R-OH), supported by the Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers (now All Aboard Ohio) — namely Al Mladineo and others — worked closely with the Ohio Congressional delegation and Amtrak back in 1975 to urge startup of the Lake Shore. We applaud Amtrak and members of Congress from both parties that are from along this route. They continued to support this train that produced steady ridership for years before it enjoyed tremendous growth in popularity in the 21st century. If service was expanded to serve Ohio cities at convenient times, this Chicago-New York route would certainly break more ridership records.

Cardinal (three-weekly Chicago-New York City via Cincinnati and the cross-river towns of Maysville KY, South Portsmouth KY, Ashland KY and Huntington WV): FY2012 ridership was up 4.9 percent over 2011 to 116,373. Ridership grew strongly even though it provides only three trains per week per direction. Amtrak predicts ridership would nearly double on this route if it were able to offer daily service. However, more frequent service is hampered by freight train congestion in Virginia, between Clifton Forge and Charlottesville. The provision of one or more long passing sidings along this hilly stretch of railroad may be sufficient to relieve rail traffic congestion and provide daily passenger service on this route.

Faster trains are attracting Americans in record numbers in the Amtrak era. Illinois was the latest to join the 100+ mph club after an Oct. 19 test run between Chicago and St. Louis. Aboard that test train that hit 111 mph was, from left, Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Federal Railroad Administrator Joe Szabo. Amtrak trains now routinely cruise at 110 mph in Illinois and Michigan.

U.S. Department of Transportation photo

Mr. Boardman noted ridership numbers for FY 2013 will be helped by the New Jersy extension that is expected to open in July 2013.

federal and state partners to improve on-time performance, reliability, capacity and train speeds.”

During FY 2012, ridership on the Northeast Corridor is up 4.8 percent to a record 11.4 million, state-supported and other short distance routes is up 2.1 percent to a record 15.1 million and long-distance services is up 4.7 percent to their best showing in 19 years at 4.7 million.

Mr. Boardman noted ridership numbers for FY 2013 will be helped by the New Jersy extension that is expected to open in July 2013.
the Chicago-St. Louis corridor grew 11 percent to set a new record of more than 675,000 passengers. But Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac Wolverine Service slipped 3.9 percent to 484,000 riders due to Norfolk Southern (NS) imposing train speed restrictions during state negotiations to acquire the Kalamazoo-Dearborn segment from NS. Wolverine ridership grew 40 percent 2004-2011. It will likely grow again as the speed restrictions were lifted and work continues to allow 110 mph on more of the route.

Other Midwest routes setting ridership records include: Hiawatha Service (Chicago – Milwaukee) up 2.3 percent to more than 838,000; Missouri River Runner (St. Louis – Kansas City) up 5.3 percent to nearly 196,000; and Blue Water (Chicago – Port Huron) up 1.1 percent to more than 189,000.

All 15 Amtrak long-distance routes experienced an increase in passengers. In addition to the Lake Shore, routes setting new ridership records include: Texas Eagle (Chicago - San Antonio) up 12.8 percent to nearly 338,000; and City of New Orleans (Chicago - New Orleans) up 8.5 percent to more than 253,000. Routes with significant percentage growth in ridership include: the Empire Builder (Chicago - Seattle/Portland) up 15.8 percent to more than 543,000; and Coast Starlight (Los Angeles – Seattle) up 6.5 percent to more than 454,000.
When the planes leave

**An abandoned traffic control tower** at Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (CVG) once guided aircraft ground operations at one of the airport’s trio of shuttered concourses. Terminals 1 and 2, plus Concourse C closed 2007-12 after Delta Airlines eliminated most of its operations at CVG in a series of cost-cutting consolidations. Today, half of CVG’s six concourses are empty after taxpayers funded a $250 million expansion in 2005.

**Troubled Tarmacs**

While domestic enplanements on regularly scheduled commercial flights rose 3 percent overall at U.S. airports 2000-2011, enplanements fell sharply 2000-2011 at many medium and large hub airports in between Chicago and the East Coast despite serving stable populations:

- Akron-Canton, OH: +107 percent
- Huntington, WV: +96 percent
- Elmira-Corning, NY: +35 percent
- Johnstown, PA: +29 percent
- Rochester, NY: +26 percent
- Erie, PA: -28 percent
- South Bend, IN: -29 percent
- Cleveland, OH: -31 percent

“Planes” from page one

after Delta Airlines left Cincinnati’s once-booming airport for dead.

Not all local economies are in dire straits. Some of the nation’s international business centers like Chicago and New York haven’t lost flights. Instead air traffic has grown. Meanwhile some states are developing 100+ mph passenger rail corridors to America’s global business centers from lesser cities like St. Louis, Bloomington-Normal, Harrisburg, Albany, Raleigh, Springfield IL, Springfield MA, Hartford, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and Detroit.

Cities with fast trains have positioned themselves to weather this hard shift in the nation’s travel winds and build more enduring economies for an increasingly resource-constrained future. Many of Ohio’s leaders have yet to recognize this change or that high-performance, low-cost trains can be powerful economic engines by linking Ohio’s cities to the likes of Chicago and New York. This newsletter provides some alternative ideas to the hopes that the planes will someday return.

No region of the nation has taken the brunt of this shift harder than the medium-sized airline hubs in the Midwest-Northeast, according to a report issued in the fall of 2012 by the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Office of Inspector General.

The report noted that airlines have sought to become profitable in two ways. One is through mergers that have eliminated competition and driven up fares. In 2000, 10 airlines handled 90 percent of America’s flying public. Today, only five airlines control 85 percent of domestic air passenger traffic. That could drop to just four airlines if US Airways is allowed to merge with American Airlines. Fewer airlines means less competition and that means higher fares at cities with fewer options. Cincinnati has the highest fares in the nation while Cleveland ranked 11th, according to the USDOT’s Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

The other path airlines have taken allow rail which is a powerful competitor.

The Ohio hubs were in St. Louis, Cincinnati and this popular airport faces an uncertain future.

Only when Miami International developed terminal three in 1981 did Miami become the third major airport in the United States.

The long-term future of the new Cincinnati $250 million cvg terminal flights face an uncertain future.

National Air Travel Statistics show 3 percent of domestic flights going up in 2012 while air travel in the Midwest-Northeast (see “The New Airports”) is down 3 percent in 2012.

A few new terminals and those that have been expanded in Cincinnati and Dayton still allow rail which is a powerful competitor.

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Aviation Subsidies Fly High

Commercial aviation receives significant taxpayer benefits in many forms:

- $1 trillion worth of airports, air traffic control and other foundations of commercial aviation were established before 1971 when the first federal aviation user fee was instituted;
- Subsidies continue with tax-free municipal bonds to finance airport improvements, the amounts for which are almost impossible to measure but are likely in the billions – if not hundreds of billions – of dollars;
- The federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. (PBGC) absorbed tens of billions of unfunded pension liabilities as airlines declared bankruptcy in the past decade. American Airlines alone has $17 billion in pension obligations it wants PBGC to bail out. Congress in 2007 passed a law to allow airlines to underfund pensions, making it likely more airlines will seek pension bailouts in the future.
- The Transportation Security Administration spent $5.2 billion more in 2011 on aviation security than it took from passenger and airline user fees (versus a $5.3 billion subsidy in 2010);
- The nation’s air traffic control system receives more than $3 billion per year from the federal treasury;
- The Essential Air Services subsidy is about $200 million per year;
- Airlines received $15 billion in bailouts after the attacks of 9/11.

Bill Hutchison photo
Trucks are stored where planes arrived at St. Louis Lambert Airport in December 2012. This former TWA hub saw flights cut 30 percent and enplanements decline 60 percent even as construction continued on a $1 billion taxpayer-funded expansion that leveled 2,000 homes and businesses.
low rail service providers to fill those voids. And high airports lost the most flights in those rail-

competitive markets?
The OIG found that the nation’s hardest-hit airports were in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and St. Louis. Combined, those four airports lost 57 percent of their scheduled passenger flights since 2005 when oil prices first went above $50 per barrel. For each dollar increase in the average annual oil price, airlines see an additional $1.6 billion in costs, according to the International Air Transport Association.

Only years before, most of those airports had completed huge expansions of runways, airport

cranials and air traffic control systems valued in the billions of taxpayers’ money. Now, several concourses each at Cincinnati, St. Louis and Pittsburgh sit empty and some may be demolished.

Shortly before American Airlines gobbled up TWA and eliminated its hub at St. Louis, the city opened a third runway in 2006 that required demolishing 2,000 homes and businesses at a $1 billion cost to taxpayers. Then two-thirds of all “seat-miles” (an industry term to describe flight capacity) at St. Louis were cut. The new runway was no longer needed. Ditto in Cincinnati, where a third runway was completed for $250 million in December 2005, the same month Delta began downsizing. Cincinnati saw its daily flights drop from 670 to less than 100.

Nationally, domestic airline passenger traffic is up percent since 2000, compared to U.S. population growth up 12 percent in the same period. By contrast, air travel is down at most airports in the Midwest-northwest region. In some cases, it is down sharply (see “Troubled Terminals” chart at left).

A few small airports are up, however. Akron-Canton and Dayton have grown thanks to lower airport fees, lower airfares and proximity to secondary airport hubs like Cincinnati, Cleveland and Pittsburgh.

Other small airports were not so fortunate. Those on the edges of major cities — like 2000 at two

FAA: domestic aviation market is saturated

Did you hear about a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) report that shows the domestic aviation market is nearing saturation? Don’t feel bad if you hadn’t. Apparently quite a few airport administrators and planners in America don’t know about it either. That’s a shame because they are planning to spend billions of your tax dollars to accommodate air travel demand that may never materialize.

FAA air traffic researchers Dan Murphy and Michael Wells made a presentation “Could the Domestic Air Travel Market Be Nearing Saturation?” Jan. 13, 2010 at the 89th Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board. For all we know, the authors’ efforts may have been rewarded by their reassignment to an air traffic control tower in Barrow, Alaska until they retire or freeze, whichever comes first.

In 2000, the aviation world continued to make sense to the FAA. Domestic passenger enplanements had been rising exponentially from a trace in 1950 to more than 600 million by the end of the century. And as governments do, they use past trends to predict future trends. The FAA was certain exponential growth would continue unabated.

A year later came the abatement in the first of several paradigm shifts — the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. Suddenly, short-hop flights vanished as did commercial flights to many small airports which could not support the time or expense of the added security. More than a decade later, most of those short flights and small airports have yet to return.

No matter. The FAA simply delayed its projection of exponential growth. They simply re-issued old charts with a new trend line shifted later by a couple of years to account for they were sure just a hiccup caused by 9/11.

Then came the second shift — oil prices began soaring in 2005 for the first time in years. This

The city could not have guessed that its own enplanements would soon drop below 50,000.

This Estimate is 10% Below FAA’s Latest 2025 Forecast

Domestic Enplanements per Capita
other small airports were not so fortunate. Passenger traffic has fallen since 2000 at two (40 percent, Johnstown-Cambria. -63 percent) of three small airports near the Altoona, PA area of Congresswoman Bill Shuster (the new chairman of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee). Yet he argues against federal funding for passenger rail outside the Northeast Corridor. State government University Park Airport saw a 15 percent rise. Meanwhile Toledo Express Airport lost 71 percent of its passenger traffic since 2000, but if it went to Toledo Metro Airport, it wasn't enough to save it from a 9 percent decline in passenger traffic since the start of the century. Yet Toledo wasn't alone in among and nearby airports. The biggest decline of all in passenger traffic was marked at Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International Airport. It saw its enplanements drop from 11.2 million in 2000 to 3.4 million in 2011 — crashing from the 22nd busiest airport in the United States to 51st.

Airline finances crash despite subsidies

The last decade, 2001-2010, was a horrible one for airlines. As a group, U.S. airlines lost $16 billion and made money in only three of those years (2006, 2007 and 2010).

The Air Transport Association has numbers going back to 1947. In the 64 years from 1947 to 2010, the industry has been profitable in 35 of those years. However, the profits in those 35 years, $63 billion, are more than offset by the losses in the other 29 years, $97 billion. That means the industry since 1947 has cumulatively lost about $34 billion.

Why Warren Buffett, who put some money into US Airways back in the 1990s, wrote his 2015 letter to Berkshire Hathaway shareholders: "The worst sort of business is one that increases in size rapidly, requires significant capital to engender the growth, and then earns little or no profit on that capital. A durable competitive advantage has proven elusive ever since the Wright Brothers. Indeed, if a farsighted capitalist had been present at Kitty Hawk he would have done his successors a huge favor by shooting Orville down."

Terry Maxon
Aviation Blog, Dallas Morning News,
Nov. 16, 2011

Airlines cut 3,000 daily flights since 2007 mostly in travel markets shorter than 500 miles — where rail is most competitive with flying and driving. Like other Midwest/Northeast airports (ie: Cleveland, Memphis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis etc.), Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky beat hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on a airline hub and lost. Instead CVG’s Terminal 1 (above) and 2 are due to be demolished.
The Chairman’s Corner
Board looks to organization’s future

By Ron Sheck
Chairman, All Aboard Ohio Board of Directors

In what I hope will be a regular gathering before the start of the New Year, the Board of Directors held a retreat on Nov. 17 in Kenton. There, the board members established their goals for the coming year with the assistance of trained facilitator Marie Keister of Engage Public Affairs and her colleague Stu Nicholson. This meeting followed a members-only workshop Oct. 27 in Delaware, OH where members provided ideas and suggestions for consideration at the board retreat.

The board retreat was a very focused and productive meeting where board members, regional coordinators, Executive Director Ken Prendergast and Intern Marvin Ranaldson helped determine All Aboard Ohio’s organizational strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. Then we suggested issues/projects we could work on in the coming year. Given All Aboard Ohio’s small size, it was suggested we put most of our limited resources into four or fewer priorities.

The top vote-getting priority was expansion of Chicago-Toledo-Cleveland-New York City service. The second one was Cleveland-Youngstown-Pittsburgh and third was Cincinnati-Indianapolis-Chicago. The reason was that those routes already had some service and, if improved and expanded to gain more ridership, they could build a political constituency for expansion beyond those routes.

All Aboard Ohio will support efforts by the Northeast Indiana Passenger Rail Association to advocate for Columbus-Lima-Fort Wayne-Chicago service. Likewise, we will support efforts by Michigan to improve rail service between Detroit, Toledo and the east. And we will assist local and statewide efforts to improve public transportation.

Fundraising, membership development and communications will be enhanced as these are supportive activities necessary for any organization to succeed. So the board will also be developing a new fundraising plan as well as membership development, targeting young people, minorities and women to increase membership diversity. Plus we need to communicate our presence more consistently and effectively statewide.

To achieve many of these goals simultaneously, Mr. Prendergast and I will be coordinating research into a proposed Amtrak charter train operating between Cleveland and Toledo, and preferably all the way to Chicago. Excursion trains were operated along this route successfully in the 1990s. Given the growing ridership and interest in Amtrak expansion along the Lake Shore Limited route, there’s every reason to believe these charter trains will be successful again. I look for any suggestions, ideas or offers on how to make the trips succeed and show what the future offers.

All Aboard Ohio will also be conducting a survey of members and the public about dues, the newsletter, website, and member benefits. We also want to get opinions from people who are not members so we can learn how to reach them and get them to join. From that input we will design our newsletter (print and digital), website, social media and other aspects of our communications plan.

We will continue to research and report the “purpose and need” for Chicago-New York City with each newsletter. The last issue was a round-up on all the capital projects occurring along the route. This issue is about the freefall of air travel at airports along the Lake Shore’s route, and most other airports generally between Chicago and the East Coast.

In addition, All Aboard Ohio will work with Northeast Ohio metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) to organize a Rail Summit in Spring 2013 to discuss the Cleveland – Pittsburgh Corridor travel market, needs and possible service expansion.

If Ohio wants to remain economically relevant, then more rail passenger access to global business centers like Chicago and New York is needed as aviation continues to restructure its service offerings and routes. Let’s work together on these goals in the coming year.

AAO to ODOT: become more multimodal

COLUMBUS — At its Dec. 10 meeting, that’s more than 1 million Ohioans
COLUMBUS — At its Dec. 10 meeting, the All Aboard Ohio Board of Directors voted unanimously to urge the creation of a multi-modal transportation fund at the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). As early as February, the Ohio General Assembly will begin hearings on ODOT’s two-year budget which must be passed by April 1.

All Aboard Ohio supported a framework for a multi-modal transportation fund at ODOT. That framework was recently proposed by a coalition of transit, rail, environmental, civil rights and disability rights advocates. The proposed framework includes directing up to $60 million per year in federal Surface Transportation Program and Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality Program dollars from Ohio’s multi-billion dollar transportation budget to a designated fund to expand Ohio’s transportation choices.

Funding would improve rail, public transit, biking, walking, electric vehicle infrastructure and operations, as well as transition public and private fleets to use homegrown fuels. Doing so will reduce Ohio’s economic vulnerability to volatile oil markets, promote jobs, protect public health and provide affordable transportation options. It would also help tackle rising and unsustainable infrastructure costs by promoting sustainable economic development goals, All Aboard Ohio’s board said.

By 2020, All Aboard Ohio and others want ODOT to direct 10 percent of its roughly $3 billion annual budget to improve and operate non-highway transportation modes. An increasing number of Ohio households are without cars — now at 9 percent, according to the 2010 U.S. Census count. With an average of more than two persons per Ohio household, that’s more than 1 million Ohioans without cars. The Census doesn’t measure the number of households where more than one wage earner must share a single car, nor does it evaluate the operable condition of those cars.

“Seeking 10 percent of ODOT’s funds for non-highway transportation is a very conservative request,” said All Aboard Ohio Executive Director Ken Prendergast. “And we’re starting out even more conservatively by asking for only $50 million in each of the next two years to support trains, transit, bikes, pedestrians and homegrown fuels that help businesses expand their available labor pool, reduce business costs and make Ohio a more attractive place to start or expand a business.”

As part of a national poll in 2012, the Natural Resource Defense Council discovered that Cuyahoga County (Cleveland area) residents thought that ODOT was already spending more than 10 percent of its annual budget on public transportation. In reality, ODOT spends only 1 percent per year on trains and transit.

Today, more than half of all ODOT funding comes from non-user revenues such as general taxes and bonds. User revenues include gas taxes and license fees. Indeed, much of ODOT’s funding comes from U.S. treasury bailouts of the federal Highway Trust Fund. Declining driving from car-aphetic young people and retiring Baby Boomers combined with more fuel-efficient cars is causing significant declines in gas tax revenues.

It’s why road construction contractors are pleading with Gov. John Kasich to privatize the Ohio Turnpike to provide a brief shot in the arm to add more lane-miles to an already overbuilt and under-maintained highway system. Their hope is that more lane-miles will induce more people to drive and produce more gasoline taxes, as they once did. But Indiana’s experience in privatizing the Indiana Toll Road produced no long-term benefits. Instead, Indiana faces a 25 percent decline in highway funding after the turnpike windfall was spent, according to a Nov. 28 article in the Evansville Courier & Press.

Ohio road contractors are looking under other rocks for money, too. For example, they alleged the Ohio Tax Commissioner was unconstitutionally using $140 million a year from the state’s Commercial Activity Tax for non-highway purposes — namely local law enforcement, schools and other community needs. The road builders took their case all the way to the Ohio Supreme Court which agreed with the contractors in a Dec. 6, 2012 ruling.

Yes, $140 million sounds like a lot of money, and for community needs like transit it would be. But it failed to stop ODOT’s financial bleeding even before the contractors won their case. The reason is Ohio would need to cumulatively raise the state’s gas tax by two cents per year every year ad infinitum to keep up with declining gas tax revenues and rising highway costs, according to Greater Ohio.

Ohio’s current state gas tax rate is 28 cents per gallon, with each cent generating $64 million per year. So the contractors’ court victory of $140 million per year is equal to about 2.2 cents of gas tax per gallon. Their case was originally filed with the Franklin County Common Pleas Court in June 2010. So the contractors spent two and a half years in the courts to get a little more than one year of net fiscal benefit of new gas tax revenue.
ELYRIA — Somewhere within the corporate hierarchy of railroad giant Norfolk Southern Corp. (NS) is a midlevel attorney who has mired the idea of Amtrak locating ranean facilities to be used at Amtrak stations in Greensburg, PA and Johnstown, PA, both on the NS mainline between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. That was followed by letters to NS and Amtrak from U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, fresh off
Amtrak must consider a similar facility for Elyria station inside the newly restored Lorain County Transportation Center. All Aboard Ohio is hoping that a gentle nudge by a U.S. Senator and others will get NS to reconsider its position.

At the Oct. 20-21 Fall Council of Representatives Meeting of the National Association of Railroad Passengers in Milwaukee, council member Phil Copeland (also All Aboard Ohio’s Elyria Regional Coordinator) reported that Amtrak was preparing to spend $1 million to replace Elyria’s “Amshack” depot. However, that investment would not be made at the historic New York Central (NYC) depot on East Avenue in downtown that Lorain County had renovated into a transportation center with a mix of local and federal funds totaling $7 million.

The Lorain County Transportation Center opened in 2010 after 10 years of planning and construction. It hosts Lorain County Transit buses and Greyhound, but the building is not open to passengers because the county cannot afford to provide a caretaker for the building to lock and unlock it. Instead, it is used only for special events, such as conferences and weddings. Bus passengers must wait outside in the weather.

At issue is access to a pedestrian tunnel below the tracks at the former NYC depot. Although the tunnel was refurbubshed by Lorain County, NS will not allow it to be used for rail travelers. Yet NS permits similar subterranean facilities to be used at Amtrak stations in Greensburg, PA and Johnstown, PA, both on NS lines. For Amtrak to relocate to the Lorain County Transportation Center, at least one sealed stairwell and elevator must be rebuilt. NS cites liability and cost issues associated with reopening those tunnels for rail travelers.

All Aboard Ohio confirmed that Amtrak would instead invest $1 million at its existing station site on East Bridge Street east of downtown. There, Amtrak plans a new, substantial station building, like what it recently built at Alliance, OH, to replace a “temporary” structure that had stood in Elyria since 1978. That structure previously served as Cleveland’s Amtrak station from 1975-78.

The existing Elyria Amshack is long past its useful life. It is frequently vandalized and fails to meet federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Amtrak is overdue in bringing all of its stations into compliance with ADA by July 26, 2010. Amtrak invested $161,446 in 2011 to upgrade Elyria’s trackside platform, walkways and parking lot the station, located less than a mile east of the Lorain County Transportation Center.

In October and November, All Aboard Ohio reached out to local, county, metro-area and federal leaders to raise awareness that Amtrak was being forced to make a duplicate investment in a separate transportation facility, when the region could barely afford to have one. Furthermore, having all transportation services focused at one location would greatly improve traveler convenience and connectivity, as well as preserve downtown Elyria’s status as an economic hub for Lorain County.

Elyria Mayor Holly Brinda wrote letters to NS and Amtrak officials, urging their cooperation on getting Amtrak into the Lorain County Transportation Center. That was followed by letters to NS and Amtrak from U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, fresh off his re-election victory.

“Moving Amtrak service to the Lorain County Transit Center would be a tremendous step forward in our efforts to revitalize downtown Elyria and provide a common sense solution to the problems posed by the current station which has no amenities and very little space,” Sen. Brown wrote in his Dec. 6 letter.

Furthermore, the Lorain County Transportation Center would meet All Aboard Ohio’s goal of having every Amtrak station along the Chicago-Cleveland rail corridor provide safe access for travelers to trains on both main tracks. Nearly all stations on this route require half of the Amtrak trains to cross over between tracks and run against the flow of rail traffic to serve at-grade stations located on only one side of the railroad. The reason is because trains process passengers from only one track at those stations.

The exception is South Bend, IN, which got a second station platform in 2011 for $434,323 but lacks a grade-separated passenger accessway to that platform. Instead, passengers must walk across busy freight tracks to reach the platform. Waterloo, IN, will get a new station by 2014 thanks to $5.9 million in local and federal funds to add a grade-separated walkway to a second platform on the other side of the tracks.

Toledo’s station could process more than one train at a time, but only one track at MLK Plaza is used by Amtrak – the one next to the track-level waiting room and ticketing area. Cleveland will gain a two-track station, as Amtrak plans to widen the platform over to track 44 but Amtrak may not be able to use that track unless new switches and a crossover track are installed just east of the station.
Cleveland transit roundup

Ohio's largest transit system is growing again with new ridership, expanded services, plus exciting rail improvement and transit-oriented development projects. The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) operates a four-route, 37-mile, 52-station rail system, plus the 7-mile, 59-station HealthLine bus rapid transit. Here is a summary of developments:

2012 Ridership Up: GCRTA has seen system-wide ridership grow 5.7 percent in 2012. Red Line (heavy rail, Airport-Windermere) is up 11 percent, Blue/Green/Waterfront Lines (light rail, Waterfront-Shaker Heights) is up 6.3 percent, and HealthLine (bus rapid transit, Downtown-Windermere) is up 4 percent. Rapid transit lines carry 50,000 trips each weekday.

More Frequent Rail Services: On Dec. 9, Red Line frequencies improved to every 7-8 minutes peak, 15 minutes off-peak while frequencies on the Blue/Green Lines were improved to 10 minutes each peak, with 5-minute headways on the shared portion.

Red Line Reconstruction: The Airport Station and its subway tunnel were closed Nov. 27 for six months for major renovations totaling $10.1 million. Substitute buses operate from the Brookpark Station. In April-May 2013, the soggy floor of the S-Curve between the West 117th and West Boulevard station will be replaced for $7 million. This will require substitute shuttle buses.

Also the Red Line's 60 1984-built Tokyu cars are being refurbished for $6.7 million. The Blue/Green Lines' 48 1981-built Breda cars were rebuilt in 2007. All railcars are due to be replaced about 2020.

Downtown Lakefront Multimodal Project: A major funding piece eludes the City of Cleveland in its efforts to build a $50 million mix of walkways, parking, transit station and Amtrak station. The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority’s pledge of the last $20 million depends on a new levy; voters defeated the levy in November. More ballot attempts will be made.

Collar-County Expansion I: Akron Metro Regional Transit Authority (Metro) doubled service on one of its two weekday Cleveland routes in August. Midday service is offered on the X61 route (Downtown Akron-Fairlawn-Downtown Cleveland) that was extended east to Cleveland’s University Circle (new home of the VA Hospital). The X60 route (Cuyahoga Falls-Hudson-Twinsburg-Downtown Cleveland) is unchanged. The two routes offer a total of 11 weekday round trips. More details at cleveland.com or (800) 227-9905.

Collar-County Expansion II: Lorain County Transit is offering an experimental new service from Elyria (Port Authority at 530 South Abbe Rd., Transportation Center at 40 East Ave. downtown) and Lorain (County Elections Board, 1985 N. Ridge Rd., East) to Downtown Cleveland (Casino Public Square entrance). There are eight weekday buses in each direction including midday trips. If it averages at least 12 people per bus by the end of February, the service will be kept. More details at loraincounty.us/clevelandcommuter or (440) 329-5525.

Collar-County Expansion III: Canton’s Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) is also planning to start bus service from Canton to downtown Cleveland. This may be an extension of its hourly Canton-Akron service which has connections to Cleveland via Metro (see above). Route, schedule and start-up date details are not available. Contact SARTA at sartaonline.com or 330-47-SARTA.

New/Rebuilt Rail Stations: The Buckeye-Woodhill Station on the joint Blue/Green Lines opened Oct. 22 after a $3.3 million replacement project. Construction started Sept. 18 on a $15.1 million replacement of the University Circle-Cedar Station on the Red Line. President Barack Obama signed an executive order to expedite environmental reviews for building the new University Circle-Little Italy Station at Mayfield Road for $17.5 million. Construction will start in 2013. When it opens, the nearby Euclid-East 120th Red Line Station will close. Reconstruction of the Blue Line’s Lee-Van Aken Station in Shaker Heights for $3.5 million is due to start at the end of 2013.

The first phase of the $500 million Flats East Bank (including 21-story office tower, 8-story Aloft Hotel, restaurants and landscaping) will open in spring 2013 at the Waterfront Line’s Flats East Bank Station and cause the rail line to return to daily operation.

TOD II: The $100 million, mixed-use Intesa development (two 12-story buildings and one 10-story building stacking retail, offices and residential) is due to start construc-
Calendar of Events/Meetings

All meetings are subject to change. We firmly suggest that you confirm dates, times and locations for all meetings.

**January 2013**

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<thead>
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<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Akron Metro RTA Transit Center, 631 S. Broadway St., Akron</td>
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The Cincinnati Local meetings are held on a regular basis generally in Tower A at Union Terminal. We are active in Amtrak's Cardinal and local transit issues. Contact Beau Tuke at beautuke@yahoo.com to participate and receive local emails. We look forward to hearing from you!