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Contact: Ken Prendergast,  
Executive Director, All Aboard Ohio  
(216) 288-4883  
[KenPrendergast@AllAboardOhio.org](mailto:KenPrendergast@AllAboardOhio.org)

## Rail passengers rally at Cleveland to raise the alarm – *and* hope!

CLEVELAND – Northeast Ohio rail passengers gathered today at the Cleveland Amtrak Lakefront Station to sound a cautionary alarm but also a message of hope about federal transportation funding. The concern isn't just about Amtrak funding but also for capital improvement funding for the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority's (GCRTA) rapid transit train system.

The Trump Administration's 2018 proposed budget would eliminate the Federal Transit Administration and its \$4 billion annual budget within four years. It would also slash all funding to Amtrak's National Network that has seen ridership grow 18 percent since 2000.

"I remain hopeful because on May 1, Congress agreed to a omnibus spending plan for 2017 that would have increased funding for public transportation and Amtrak," said Ken Prendergast, executive director of All Aboard Ohio. "I believe Congress will fund trains and transit in 2018 as it outlined in its five-year Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act of 2015."

For GCRTA riders, Northeast Ohio employers and our quality of life, the cuts to public transportation would be devastating:

- GCRTA gets about \$34 million per year in federal funding for capital purchases and preventative maintenance. About 80 percent of that goes to the rail system that GCRTA owns and is wholly responsible for, unlike the road system to which GCRTA pays no fuel taxes or other fees to support.
- One out of five GCRTA boardings is on the three-route rail system (GCRTA has nearly 100 bus routes). Rail accounts for only 17 percent of GCRTA's operating budget. About 150,000 people board GCRTA buses and trains each day. Additional weekday boardings in downtown Cleveland and University Circle are on Akron Metro RTA, Laketrans, Portage Area RTA and Stark Area RTA who would also be hurt by the proposed budget cuts.
- This comes on top of a nearly 10 percent loss in sales tax revenues from Managed Care Organization transactions starting later this year. Many Northeast Ohioans depend on public transportation to get to work, school, health care and shopping.

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- These federal cuts are proposed as transit in Cleveland faces a backlog of more than a half-billion dollars worth of unfunded state-of-good-repair needs. Due to GCRTA owning its rail system, this backlog and the proposed federal cuts would hit disproportionately hard on the rail system.
- The backlog of state-of-good-repair needs include track, signal and bridge work, bringing stations up to ADA compliance, and replacing train cars whose average age is about 35 years -- well past their normal life expectancy.
- Without federal funds, public transit in Greater Cleveland could be cut back to a handful of bus routes. Rapid transit trains would stop running in 5-10 years due to declining train, track, signal and bridge conditions. Bus replacements, garage repairs, equipment replacements, and other unfunded capital needs will hit the bus system hard as well.

Amtrak budget cuts would cost Northeast Ohio these emerging opportunities:

- All Ohio Amtrak trains (part of the National Network) would end as a result of the proposed cuts and push higher costs and a loss of connecting passenger revenues onto surviving routes which may not be able to offer the same level of service.
- The existing Amtrak trains that travel through Cleveland and Toledo each night are used by 650,000 people per year, enough to fill every seat on more than a dozen Boeing 737 jets per day. They link big cities to small towns that have no other intercity public transportation, like Bryan, OH and Alliance, OH.
- Nearly 50,000 people boarded four nightly Amtrak trains last year in Cleveland, an increase of almost 40 percent over the past decade. For perspective, Greyhound boards 250,000 people per year at Cleveland but that's on roughly 30 buses per day.
- The city of Cleveland, Amtrak, Greyhound and GCRTA are planning a multi-modal transportation center at the site of our rally to improve connectivity and promote downtown development. This and Ohio rail improvements will need federal funds: <http://allaboardohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Pass-Rail-Needs-Summary.pdf>
- The Federal Railroad Administration (see <https://www.midwestrailplan.org/>) and nearby states surrounding Ohio (<http://www.altoonamirror.com/news/local-news/2017/06/senate-approves-state-rail-study/>) are seeking Ohio passenger rail improvements. If we lose our existing train services, we cannot improve them.
- Restoring lost trains is very difficult. Columbus and Dayton lost their Amtrak trains in 1979 due to federal budget cuts. Akron and Youngstown lost their trains in 2005. None have returned due to the difficulty of restoring lost trains or instituting new services.
- Despite having only five trains a day serving Ohio, Amtrak in 2016 spent \$30 million into Ohio's economy buying goods and services from Ohio companies.

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