

Ohio Passenger Rail News

Intermodal + Intercity Rail + Commuter Rail + Public Transit

Issue E-18

All Aboard Ohio

July 2017



Calendar of Events:

AAO LOCAL MEETINGS:

Meetings start at 10 AM on the 2nd Saturday (except for **Toledo** – see below):

CLEVELAND – 3rd-level conf. room above AAO ofc. & Tower City food court, 230 West Huron Rd., Cleveland.

COLUMBUS – Grandview Public Library, 1685 West First Ave., Columbus.

TOLEDO – NO SUMMER MEETINGS AAO office, 3rd floor (by old ticket counter), 300 MLK Drive, Toledo.

COMING EVENTS:

AAO Summer Meeting
12 noon, Saturday Aug. 12
Dutch Valley Restaurant & Age of Steam roundhouse; Sugar creek, Ohio.

NOTE: most bold text in our E-newsletter is a Web link to more info & resources!

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Ohio cuts funding for transit, rail that create, access jobs and development

Ohio leaders seem hell-bent on following the Kansas model of creating an austerity-induced recession that's forcing less investment in transportation that creates jobs and improves access to them.

In Ohio's two-year **general revenue fund budget** passed at the end of June, Gov. John Kasich and the Ohio General Assembly slashed many programs due to declining state revenue resulting from recent and continuing tax cuts plus stagnant job growth.

Freight rail development was cut from \$2 million in Fiscal Year 2017 (ended June 30) to \$985,000 in FY2018 and \$1 million in FY2019. There was no funding again for passenger rail. Public transit funding was cut from \$7.3 million in 2017 to \$6.5 million per year.



Private capital follows public capital. This is in evidence around the 2015-built **Little Italy rail station** in Cleveland where five mid-rise, multi-family/mixed-use buildings are planned or under construction (Ken Prendergast photo).

This loss of operating funds was offset by \$10 million per year in new capital and operating transit funds from the **Ohio Department of Transportation budget** passed in April. So in other words, Ohio transit agencies will have a little more money to work with but the amount is far below the recommendations of the **Ohio Transit Needs Study** released in 2015.

A victory was the Ohio House overturning Gov. Kasich's veto of an amendment by Sen. Matt Dolan and Rep. Bill Seitz to fix a loss of up to 10% of sales tax revenues to transit agencies from Medicaid Managed Care Organizations. The Ohio Senate has yet to act. Even if it does, Gov. Kasich's administration would be responsible for securing new funds.

NOACA OK's a robust transit plan

The Northeast Ohio Area-wide Coordinating Agency (**NOACA**), a metropolitan planning organization that distributes federal transportation funds to meet local needs, unanimously approved a \$15.8 billion, 20-year transportation plan for Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina counties that comprise Greater Cleveland.

Called **AIM Forward 2040**, more than 90% of the

funds identified in the plan will go toward maintaining existing infrastructure and investing in new transit and livability projects.

"We heard over and over again that adding more lanes and widening roads was not necessarily a priority," said NOACA Executive Director Grace Gallucci. "What we did hear was a strong desire for more options for getting around and fixing

what we already have. We believe this plan addresses that sentiment."

By 2021, NOACA will invest \$45 million to renew rail infrastructure of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority's (GCRTA) **Red Line** from Tower City west to the airport. Nearly 30,000 weekday Red Line riders endure slower trips from worn-out tracks and poor drainage.

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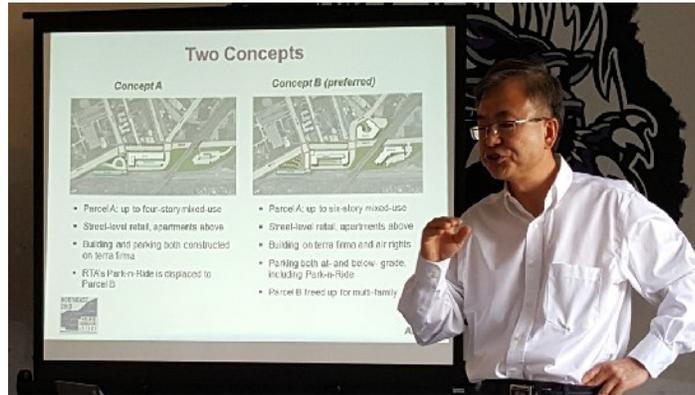
NOACA OK's a robust transit plan – CONTINUED

Also by 2021, NOACA will provide nearly \$68 million for replacing 260 transit buses in Cuyahoga and Lake counties. This does not yet include the already overdue replacement of GCRTA's rail fleet, some of which dates back to the Carter Administration. GCRTA intends to replace its light- and heavy-rail cars, presumably with a single type of equipment, in the next four-year cycle of urban formula grants. The cost of replacing the rail fleet with nearly 70 light-rail cars may be **as much as \$300 million**.

NOACA also is sponsoring planning of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) mostly around rail stations. This includes a **TOD pilot program** focused at three sites on high-frequency transit routes:

- West Blvd/Cudell Red Line station
- East 116th Blue/Green Line station
- Slavic Village bus corridor.

Additional transit-supportive land-use planning is occurring near GCRTA's two **East 79th Street rail stations** that are in need of major rehabilitation. Station-area development has been built, is under construction or is planned within walking distance of dozens of rail and BRT stations. This ranges from kennels to skyscrapers.



Perhaps most exciting is what's in NOACA's "aspirational" or long-range transportation plan. It would expand the number of rail stations from 50 to 162, and expand rail service to improve job access in places such as Euclid, Lorain, Westlake, Lakewood, Solon, Strongsville and Medina, as well as promote walkable communities around rail stations.

Mrs. Gallucci pointed out that, under existing flexible transportation funding provisions, the financial resources already exist to build this aspirational transit system. In fact, the Ohio Department of Transportation has awarded to NOACA \$200,000 to begin planning a multi-county transit system as an overlay to connect and enhance

existing county-based transit networks to improve access to job hubs.

Extending transit to reach existing jobs, and attracting housing and jobs to within walking distance of the existing transit system is essential to address Cleveland's 30 percent poverty rate. **Greater Cleveland has a severe spatial disconnect between jobs and job seekers.** Only 10 percent of available jobs are within a 60-minute one-way transit ride.

NOACA has demonstrated its commitment to address these issues with its short- and long-term plans. And it's directing resources to help rebuild communities around transit and to extend transit to growing job hubs.

AECOM architect Yong Woo Lee discusses options for Transit Oriented Development at Cleveland's West Blvd/Cudell rail station at a public meeting held June 20 at the Cudell Recreation Center. Public reactions to the project were very positive (Ken Prendgast photo).

Nashville studies airport lease to expand transit

With local and state governments facing growing tabs for infrastructure improvements and public hostility to tax increases, the concept of leasing public facilities to private operators has gained favor. The latest comes in Nashville that has a **\$6 billion plan** to expand public transportation with four light-rail lines, extend the Music City Star east-side commuter rail line to the west side of the metro area, and add a new bus rapid transit line.

A funding option **being considered** is to lease the Nashville International Airport to a private company that could take over operations for 20-40 years. The lease could produce revenues to retire a bond issue large enough to pay about half of the transit expansion plan's capital costs. The rest could be covered with federal funding and/or new local taxes.



Music City Star commuter rail (NPR photo).

The city still intends to hold a public vote in May 2018 to fund expanded transit with dedicated taxes. Many are critical of the airport lease idea.

"There are struggling commercial airports all across this country, we just happen to not be one. If I was St. Louis, Cincinnati, Memphis or Pittsburgh, my door would be open to these discussions," Airport Authority board chairman Bobby Joslin said.

St. Louis, MO, Westchester County, NY and other commercial airport owners are considering the very same thing. **Oaktree Capital Management**, a California-based investment firm with \$100 billion in assets under management that specializes in distressed assets, has made offers to governments to run their airports in exchange for lucrative payments.

In St. Louis, the local chapter of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People has urged the city to **adopt numerous constraints** before proceeding with any airport lease. Among the constraints:

- ensure proceeds from an airport lease will benefit all of St. Louis;
- enact a charter amendment specifying the use of the proceeds;
- protect workers, create competition,
- minorities/women inclusion & equity.

Ohio hosts a trio of “Rally For Trains” events

Ohio citizens joined others from across the nation in a “Rally for Trains” on June 23-24 to protest cuts to Amtrak intercity and urban transit trains. Congress was urged to reject the Trump Administration’s proposed \$1 billion per year Amtrak budget cut plus the elimination of the Federal Transit Administration and its \$4 billion per year. Rallies were held in Cleveland, Columbus and Toledo, with detailed press releases about the impacts on these communities posted on our [Web site](#).

Cutting Amtrak by \$525 million in the first year and \$1 billion per year thereafter could result in the loss of all Amtrak trains, including the Northeast Corridor that depends on significant annual capital funding. The same holds true for rail transit in Cleveland that gets about \$34 million year in federal transit funding, 80 percent of which goes to rail. Without this funding, these systems will break down.

The first rally was in Columbus across High Street from where Union Station stood. It saw Columbus’ last passenger train, Amtrak’s *National Limited*, on Sept. 30, 1979.

“Once you lose your train, like Colum-



Rail passengers rally for trains outside MLK Plaza, site of Toledo’s Amtrak station, on June 24 (Bill Gill photo).

bus did 38 years ago, it could take generations to get it back. That’s why we are sounding the alarm today in Columbus – North America’s largest city without a train,” said AAO Columbus Coordinator Larry Robertson. Also represented at the rally were the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) and Transit-Columbus. **Columbus-Chicago** passenger rail gave hope for the future.

Cleveland rallied next at its Amtrak station that is served by light-rail trains, too. Both rail modes would succumb to federal budget cuts.

Attending were Marty Keane, chair of Cleveland City Council’s Transportation Committee, staffers for Con-

gresswomen Marcia Fudge and Marcy Kaptur, Northeast Ohio Area-wide Coordinating Agency, Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers and Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail.

“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,” said Ken Prendergast, executive director of All Aboard Ohio.

Toledo held its rally on June 24 at MLK Plaza, site of Amtrak’s station. Ohio Rep. Michael Sheehy (D-46), J. Michael Galbraith (5th Congressional seat candidate), and NARP VP Bruce Becker, joined with representatives of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, Toledo Design Center, the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, NW Ohio Passenger Rail Association and AAO.

“A train ride as a boy taught me to appreciate the geographic diversity of my home state,” said Rep. Sheehy. The proposed federal budget cuts would be “Another nail in the coffin of the economy in the state of Ohio.” For more, see NARP’s new Towns Without Trains Web site [HERE](#).

Cincy transit vote delayed until after mayoral vote

Cincinnati has a transit crisis, affecting people’s ability to get to work, school and more. Cincinnati also has a mayoral election in November in which the sitting mayor faces a strong challenger. The mayoral election took greater precedence at the transit agency’s June 20 board meeting.

Mayor John Cranley has a better chance of getting re-elected with a smaller voter turnout. That means having fewer issues of importance on the November ballot. So Mayor Cranley urged his appointees to the **Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) board** to delay putting a new sales tax on the county-wide ballot to improve and expand Cincinnati Metro transit services, overseen by SORTA.

On the positive side, delaying the vote



KLH Engineers photo

until 2018 will give SORTA time to mount a better levy campaign. Metro faces a **growing funding gap**, from a \$3 million shortfall in 2018 to more than a \$20 million deficit in the next five years. Mayor Cranley said the city could cover the 2018 shortfall.

About half of Metro bus operations are funded by a 0.3% city of Cincinnati’s earnings tax. The next largest funding source is fares. Consultant AECOM evaluated three funding options for SORTA’s board to submit to voters. The options were:

- ½-cent increase: wouldn’t close gap, but would help increase service;
- ¾-cent increase: would close budget gap, increase service by 22%;
- 1-cent increase: would close budget gap, increase service by 55%.

Metro can’t offer transit service to reach the growing number of jobs that are outside of the city of Cincinnati. One in five adults in Cincinnati doesn’t have a car. Many more share cars with other adults. **Only 4% of the metro area’s jobs are accessible** within a 1-hour transit commute.

All Aboard Ohio

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[Click here to JOIN All Aboard Ohio!](#)

Illustration of the month



A few raindrops – OK a lot of raindrops! – didn't stop All Aboard Ohio, the National Association of Railroad Passengers and TransitColumbus representatives from participating in the Columbus Rally4Trains event on June 23 at the corner of High Street and Nationwide Boulevard, downtown. Their message was partly cautionary, as Columbus is an example of what happens when you lose your passenger trains. It's hard to get them back. But it was also partly hopeful as Central Ohio has joined the planning for Columbus-Chicago passenger rail service by contributing \$350,000 to the effort. Here, from left, are All Aboard Ohio Chairman Jack Shaner, Transit-Columbus Chairwoman Elissa Schneider, and All Aboard Ohio Columbus Coordinator Larry Robertson (Ron Pilatowski photo).

Join us at Age of Steam roundhouse Aug. 12!

Join us Saturday August 12th at 12 noon for All Aboard Ohio's Summer Meeting & Family Outing at the **Dutch Valley Restaurant** 1343 Old Rte 39 NE, Sugarcreek, OH (**MAP**) and then for a private tour of the **Age of Steam Roundhouse**, 213 Smokey Lane Rd SW, Sugarcreek. Order off the menu at your expense.

AGENDA

- 12 noon — Welcome, Dutch Valley Restaurant
- Brief business meeting during lunch
- Leave Dutch Valley Restaurant at about 1:30 p.m.
- Carpool to Age of Steam Roundhouse a few miles away on the other side of Sugarcreek
- 2 p.m. — Tour of Age of Steam Roundhouse
 - + Children younger than 10 years are not permitted. Sorry!
 - + Wear long pants, closed-toe shoes and be prepared for a dirty workshop



All Aboard Ohio gets an exclusive tour Aug. 12 of the Age of Steam Roundhouse in Sugarcreek, Ohio. Don't miss it!

environment.

- + You will be required to sign a release before entering. Copies will be available at the restaurant.
- Adjourn by about 3:30 p.m.

Cost is \$25 per person for the tour. There are three ways to pay:

- Online **HERE**;
- With check/money order payable to "All Aboard Ohio" at 230 West Huron #85.53, Cleveland, OH 44113; or
- At the door after you RSVP to Executive Director Ken Prendergast at (216) 288-4883 or e-mail him at

kenprendergast@allaboardohio.org. Please mention the Summer Meeting and leave your full name, number of persons in your party and your phone number.

DEADLINES: Please submit payment by mail before Aug. 5, online by Aug. 7, or give late-registration RSVP via phone/e-mail by Aug. 7.

Special thanks to All Aboard Ohio At-Large Director Michael Connor of Dover who also is a board member of the Age of Steam Roundhouse for organizing this meeting!