We move people. People move us.
And together, we're moving our community forward.
A MESSAGE from the BOARD CHAIR AND PRESIDENT/CEO

By aligning the goals of the Central Ohio Transit Authority with the goals of our community, COTA is moving central Ohio forward. The past year has been one of collaboration, accomplishment and recognition.

Innovative projects and planning efforts have gained momentum and widespread support:

- Final design is underway for CMAX, a Bus Rapid Transit project that will introduce a transit option to central Ohio.
- The Transit System Redesign will, for the first time in COTA’s history, provide high frequency transit service that is more reliable and more efficient, while increasing access to more jobs for more people in central Ohio. In addition, the reallocation of service will substantially improve bus service downtown by distributing traffic from High Street to other downtown streets and provide direct service to Port Columbus International Airport from downtown.
- COTA’s strategic planning process, NextGen, promises to offer our community a comprehensive plan for public transit for the future of our rapidly growing region.
- In just over one year, CBUS has provided over 700,000 trips to downtown area residents, employees and visitors. The circulator concept has surpassed all expectations and changed the conversation about transit in our city.

“We move people. People move us.” This is how we approach each and every day; connecting our residents, our workforce, and visitors to each other and to our collective future.

Thank you for your continued support.

HARRY W. PROCTOR
Retired – Administrative Organizer
SEIU District 1199 (WV/KY/OH)
Appointed by Franklin County

AMY M. SCHMITTAEUER
President
Vlog Boss Studios
Appointed by City of Columbus

CRAIG P. TRENEFF
Attorney at Law
Craig P. Treneff Law Office
Appointed by City of Westerville

RICHARD R. ZITZKE
Chief of Police
City of Whitehall
Appointed by City of Whitehall

One vacancy, City of Columbus

DAWN TYLER LEE
Chair, Board of Trustees

W. CURTIS STITT
President/CEO

VISION

COTA will be the region’s transportation leader.

MISSION

COTA is committed to excellence in serving our stakeholders including customers, employees and taxpayers. We will deliver quality transportation services and conduct business courteously, safely, ethically and reliably. We will demonstrate leadership that is fiscally responsible and environmentally conscious.

HISTORY

COTA was created by an agreement executed on Feb. 17, 1971, with Franklin County and the cities of Bexley, Columbus, OH, Grandview Heights, Grove City, Hilliard, Reynoldsburg, Upper Arlington, Westerville, Whitehall and Worthington. In 2008, an amended agreement added the City of Dublin.

COTA’s first day providing public transportation services was Jan. 1, 1974.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

DAWN TYLER LEE, CHAIR
Senior Vice President of Community Impact
United Way of Central Ohio
Appointed by City of Columbus

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ACHIEVEMENTS

19.3 MILLION
passenger trips in 2014

Highest Annual Ridership since
1986

28 YEAR RIDERSHIP HIGH

2015 INTERNATIONAL BUS ROADEO GRAND CHAMPION

700,000 CBUS® TRIPS
since May 2014

THANK YOU to our GENEROUS SPONSORS

Capital Crossroads SID
Columbia Gas of Ohio
Fifth Third Bank
Franklin County Commission
Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority
Grange Insurance
Huntington Bank
Nationwide Realty Investors
Ohio Health
The Pizzuti Companies and The Joseph

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT FOR CBUS

At the 2014 Capital Crossroads & Discovery District Special Improvement District annual meeting, COTA received the Outstanding Achievement Award for launching the CBUS, a free downtown circulator service.

APTA INTERNATIONAL BUS ROADEO GRAND CHAMPION

In 2015, COTA won the Grand Champion Award at the 40th Annual International Bus Roadeo, an event that highlights the best bus operators and bus maintenance teams in North America. The Grand Champion Award recognizes the transit system with the highest combined bus operator and maintenance team score. COTA staff members who competed in the event include Bus Operator Howard Yoder, and Vehicle Maintenance Team members Tom Belcher, Don Readnour and Steve Woods.

COLUMBUS CEO HR INNOVATION AWARD

COTA was honored with the 2015 HR Excellence Award for HR Innovation by Columbus CEO magazine. The HR Innovation award is given to an individual or public, private or nonprofit organization for achieving proven results in areas such as compensation and benefits; employee recognition and/or retention; strategic alignment; succession planning; talent acquisition and/or assessment; use of technology; and work-life balance.

In recent years, COTA successfully implemented an outcomes-based wellness program, working to change the culture and improve the health and wellness of employees and their families. The program has helped contain costs, and introduced successful and popular employee wellness initiatives.

2015 SHORT NORTH ARTS DISTRICT’S COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD

COTA was honored with the Short North Arts District’s Community Partner Award for improving the quality of transit in and around the Short North Arts District, for working to move the Columbus community forward through the NextGen planning effort, and for launching the CBUS.

Honorees of the Community Partner Award have deep collaborations with the Short North Arts District resulting in significant advancement of the District success in commerce and quality of life.

CNG CONVERSION

In May 2013, a COTA-owned and operated Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) fueling station opened on the grounds of the McKinley Operations Facility. That year, COTA began phasing diesel-powered vehicles out of its fleet and all new buses acquired are powered by CNG. COTA now operates 104 CNG buses out of a fleet of more than 350 active fixed-route buses. The commitment to CNG will result in air quality improvements in central Ohio and a substantial reduction in operating fuel costs. Since May 2013, COTA has saved more than $3.4 million in fuel costs.
COTA has completed the final design for the CMAX Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)/Enhanced Bus Corridor line along Cleveland Avenue, the second busiest transit corridor in the system. The 15.6-mile route will serve customers every 10 minutes between downtown Columbus and SR-161 during rush hours, with enhanced service to Polaris Parkway/Africa Road every 30 minutes. Traffic signal priority and limited stops will allow customers to reach their destinations up to 15 minutes faster.

CMAX buses and stops will be uniquely branded to attract riders and develop community infrastructure along the corridor. Enhanced shelters and stations will display real time information and feature community art. These enhancements are projected to attract 20 percent more riders to our service within five years.

The project cost is approximately $47 million, of which the Federal Transit Administration has recommended federal funding for 80 percent from the Small Starts program pending Congressional approval. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2016, with service launching in September 2017.

COTA has made significant investments in its two downtown transit terminals with both being renovated to “like new” condition.

The Spring Street Terminal is an open canopy structure located at 33 W. Spring Street between High and Front streets. The terminal features five bus bays. The renovation included construction of a brand new customer waiting area, new 14’ canopy to accommodate CNG buses, new lighting, and installation of customer information monitors and a ticket vending machine.

Located at 25 E. Rich Street adjacent to Columbus Commons, the COTA Transit Terminal is a 41,000 sq. ft. facility featuring 10 bus bays. Upgrades included modifying the facility to accommodate CNG buses, improved lighting, signage and restroom upgrades, and installation of a new ceiling and floors. Both facilities were fully operational in 2015.

COTA’s NextGen planning effort will guide central Ohio toward improvements to add and enhance an array of transit options that will be needed to support our growing region.

“While these are individual planning efforts, specific to the goals and needs of each agency, our efforts are collaborative. These initiatives will not be successful if we don’t work together to coordinate and engage stakeholders for each of these plans.”

-PATTI AUSTIN
Columbus City Planning and Operations Administrator of Transportation Management

“NEXTGEN
IT’S YOUR MOVE

COTA’s NextGen planning effort will guide central Ohio toward improvements to add and enhance an array of transit options that will be needed to support our growing region.”

-THEA WALSH
MORPC Director of Transportation Systems & Funding

NEXTGEN

As our region attracts new investment with an estimated 500,000 more people and 300,000 new jobs by 2050, demand and expectations for transportation are changing. NextGen is COTA’s long-range planning effort to identify transit needs and opportunities for 2025, 2040 and 2050. Extensive public input, as well as a comprehensive review of regional growth projections and community development plans, are taking place in 2015 and 2016. NextGen will recommend transit system enhancements, including a prioritized list of bus and rail projects. The final report will feature estimated costs for these projects, and strategies for implementation by public agencies and the private sector.

The NextGen plan coincides with the City of Columbus thoroughfare plan. Connect Columbus, and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) multi-modal Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

The plan will be completed in spring 2016.

TRANSIT SYSTEM REDESIGN

COTA is restructuring its bus network to maximize resources and meet the increasing demand for high-quality transit in central Ohio.

With extensive involvement from customers, taxpayers, business leaders and community partners, a comprehensive review of COTA’s network was completed in 2014. The resulting plan - the Transit System Redesign (TSR) - features more frequent and direct routes that increase service to more residents and more jobs without increasing taxpayer contributions. More than twice as many routes will run every 15 minutes or better, seven days a week, to encourage transit use, and reduce cars on our roadways.

Over the next year, COTA is refining the TSR based on community input. A robust public engagement effort for the Downtown Plan occurred in summer 2015, and reached hundreds of stakeholders. COTA will conduct outreach on the full plan in fall 2015.

Full implementation of the TSR is scheduled for May 2017.
More than 100 transportation supporters gathered on April 9, 2015 at COTA’s new Spring Street Terminal to ‘Stand Up 4 Transportation’ and advocate on behalf of a long-term federal transportation infrastructure bill. Stand Up 4 Transportation Day, spearheaded by the American Public Transportation Association, featured events hosted by more than 300 organizations nationwide. It highlighted the urgent need for Congress to renew federal transportation funding before the MAP-21 expired on May 31, 2015.

On December 4 & 5, 2014, COTA, The Ohio State University and Congresswoman Joyce Beatty presented Ohio’s 10th Annual Statewide Tribute to Rosa Parks. The event featured a production of “The Meeting,” a powerful drama about the philosophies and times of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. A timely dialogue about civil rights was generated during a panel discussion on “Personal Encounters…Communities (Re)Defining Justice: From Ferguson, Missouri and Bevercreek, Ohio to Staten Island, New York and Los Angeles, California.” A Children’s Assembly on Friday featured a theatrical performance by the Columbus Children’s Theatre of the Ruby Bridges story. More than 500 students attended from Columbus City Schools.

COTA is participating in a pilot downtown employer pass program with the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District. The program provides unlimited access to COTA service for employees at five downtown companies over a 20-month period. The pilot program is funded by MORPC and designed to measure the impact of incentives on the use of public transit. Depending upon results of the program, private property owners in the Downtown core might choose to help fund a program for all employees, beginning in 2017, to address downtown parking shortages and increase the use of COTA. The program runs through December 2016.

In 2015, COTA and the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium continued their longstanding partnership to provide the Zoo Bus, a convenient and affordable option for families to travel to the Zoo throughout the summer months. Riders receive half-off regular Zoo admission or $4 off Zooborealis admission at the entrance. On June 19, 2015, the two organizations hosted an event to celebrate the partnership. The event took place in front of the Statehouse, where riders catch the Zoo Bus. COTA and the Zoo invited families from the St. Stephen’s Community House Family to Family Initiative. Zoo animals greeted children as they arrived. Together with their families and staff from COTA and the Zoo, the children rode the bus to the Zoo for a day of fun and education.

July 2015 was the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was signed on July 26, 1990 by President George H.W. Bush. COTA participated in local events recognizing this milestone. Mobility Services hosted a booth at Columbus Commons on July 23 with several organizations to provide awareness of services and materials that support individuals with disabilities. The National Legacy Tour bus also visited Columbus Commons that day as part of its year-long journey to raise awareness of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
COST PER REVENUE HOUR

FUNDING

COTA's operations are funded by a 0.5% sales and use tax, of which 0.25% is continuing and 0.25% is renewable. The tax is collected in Franklin County and parts of Delaware, Fairfield, Licking and Union counties. The 10-year renewable sales and use tax was approved by voters in 2006 to begin implementation of COTA's Long-Range Transit Plan. Sales tax revenue makes up 83% of COTA's operating revenue, while fare box revenue accounts for 17%. In July 2015, COTA's Board of Trustees passed a resolution to seek renewal of the expiring .25% sales tax in the November 2016 General Election.

SUCCESSFUL LABOR NEGOTIATIONS

In January 2015, COTA and TWU, Local 208 signed a contract that is effective Jan. 1, 2015 through December 28, 2017. COTA management and the leadership officials of TWU Local 208 were committed to reaching an agreement that would provide a fair and just wage and benefit package to represented employees; enhance the safe and efficient service COTA provides to the public; and ensure that COTA continues to maintain sound financial stewardship of public resources.

GOOD STEWARDS OF PUBLIC FUNDS

FINANCIAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The Auditor of State Award with Distinction (2013) is given to those entities that receive a “clean” audit report, as well as file an annual Comprehensive Annual Financial Report and timely financial reports in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. Additional Achievements include a “clean” audit report for seven consecutive years (2008-2014), and 25 consecutive years for receiving the Government Finance Officers Association’s “Excellence in Financial Reporting Certificate” (1989-2013).

Since passage of the 2006 levy, COTA has positioned the Authority for the future by:
- Expanding service by 67%
- Modernizing our bus fleet
- Initiating a transition to compressed natural gas to fuel our fleet
- Investing in infrastructure
At the same time, COTA has achieved a cost ratio per revenue hour that is better than our industry peers.

Since September 2014, COTA introduced reverse commute service from downtown and the Easton Transit Center to the New Albany International Business Park. The business park boasts over 13,000 jobs, but employers are challenged to find people to fill them. The City of New Albany recognized that a lack of accessibility was playing a role in the jobs going unfilled. COTA and the City partnered to find a solution. New Albany contributed funds for the development of a new COTA Park & Ride facility and took the initiative to provide shuttle service, named SMARTRIDE, that connects COTA riders with the companies located throughout the business park. This unique partnership provides the connectivity needed to fill jobs at the business park and further contribute to the economic and workforce development of the region.

GREAT GROVEPORT RICKENBACKER EMPLOYEE ACCESS TRANSIT

GROVEPORT RICKENBACKER AREA

The area around Rickenbacker International Airport has evolved into a hub for industrial and logistics-related development. Currently, there are more than 20,000 jobs in the area, and that number is expected to increase to at least 50,000 in the next 15 years. In response to this growth, COTA has incrementally increased service to this area. Starting in September 2015, COTA will begin operating all day service and weekend service to the area, which will provide the opportunity for people to connect to job sites operating seven days a week. COTA is also partnering in the development of Groveport-Rickenbacker Employee Access Transit (GREAT), a shuttle service which will travel between COTA bus stops and businesses throughout the area. GREAT is being developed and funded by the City of Groveport with additional funding and support from the Village of Obetz, and is targeted to begin operation in October.

SERVICE TO RICKENBACKER AREA

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REVERSE COMMUTE SERVICE TO NEW ALBANY

BUS ON SHOULDER PROGRAM EXPANDS TO I-670

Since 2006, COTA buses have been authorized to travel in the right shoulder lane on I-70 East between downtown Columbus and State Route 256. Beginning this September, COTA will expand the Bus on Shoulder program to include the left shoulder lane on I-670 between downtown and I-70. Buses may use the designated shoulder lanes when traffic is stopped or moving slower than 35 mph. The program encourages the use of COTA as a faster alternative to driving, reduces traffic, and allows utilization of the full capacity of central Ohio’s highway system. COTA partnered with the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) to implement the program.

EXPANDED SERVICE by 67%

MODERNIZED bus fleet

lower COST PER REVENUE HOUR

Since 2006, COTA buses have been authorized to travel in the right shoulder lane on I-70 East between downtown Columbus and State Route 256. Beginning this September, COTA will expand the Bus on Shoulder program to include the left shoulder lane on I-670 between downtown and I-70. Buses may use the designated shoulder lanes when traffic is stopped or moving slower than 35 mph. The program encourages the use of COTA as a faster alternative to driving, reduces traffic, and allows utilization of the full capacity of central Ohio’s highway system. COTA partnered with the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) to implement the program.

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