New ODOT Director Embraces a Multi-modal Approach to Transportation
by Dave Seech, ODOT

With a mission of targeting resources where the need and opportunity are greatest, the new Director of the Ohio Department of Transportation is asking lawmakers to increase state funding directed at a multi-modal approach to transportation.

ODOT Director James G. Beasley recently testified before the Ohio Legislature in favor of additional general revenue fund spending for transit, railway and aviation and that the state must embrace a multi-modal approach.

“If we are going to turn-around Ohio and open a gateway to international commerce, we must embrace a multi-modal approach to transportation,” said Beasley, noting the importance of this multi-modal effort to the state's economic development.

“We must find every possible way to link workers to jobs, especially in the area of public transit,” he added. “More than 60-percent of public transit trips in Ohio are work related.”

At a time when demand for public transit is up and more people are riding buses, the state's transit systems have been forced to cut back their budgets and shrink routes due largely to historic reductions in state support.

In the state budget proposed by Governor Strickland, $20.3 million in each of the next two years was directed at public transit. That would be up from 2007, but only restores some of the funding that has been cut from a high of $44 million in 2000.

In many cases, those dollars will go to replacing aging buses. One of every four buses in Ohio is far beyond the average useful life of 12 years. With this investment, both rural and urban systems hope to save dollars with newer buses that are fuel-efficient and, when possible, flex-fuel capable.

Director Beasley pointed out to lawmakers that a multi-modal approach targets the headache of all motorists, congestion and roadway wear-and-tear.

“By putting more people in buses and more freight on trains, we ease traffic congestion and preserve our highway conditions,” he testified.
Strickland Budget Includes Funding Hike for Public Transportation

Governor Ted Strickland wants to boost funding for public transit by nearly 25% over 2007 levels, the largest appropriation after years of riding at the back of the budget bus.

The executive budget includes a $20 million General Revenue Fund (GRF) appropriation to assist the state’s 24 urban and 36 rural transit systems, according to the administration’s budget documents.

“State funding in 2001 was $43.35 million in GRF and since 2001, public transit has been reduced over the last seven years by 63% back to the 1980’s level,” said Rick Ayish, a lobbyist for the Ohio Public Transit Association.

“This is a good faith, excellent attempt by the governor to stop the bleeding,” he said. “The Strickland Administration has recognized that public transportation is still an integral part of many people’s lives, whether they’re going to work, can’t afford gas, or are elderly or disabled.”

The increased funding would help transit systems from slashing more bus routes, cutting jobs, and increasing fares, he said.

Budget cuts over the years have disproportionately affected public transportation since the lion’s share of the Department of Transportation’s funding depends on fuel tax revenues, which must be used for highway construction and maintenance, Ayish said.

The increase would especially benefit transit systems in small communities and coordination projects that serve rural areas and special needs populations in areas that don’t have a large tax base, he said.

While Ohio has the 12th largest public transit ridership in the U.S., it ranks 28th in per capita state funding with $1.58 per person, Mr. Ayish said, noting Pennsylvania and Illinois spend more than $60 per capita on public transportation.

Ohio Announces 2007 Specialized Transportation Program Awards

by Pat Pikula, ODOT

To continue serving the transportation needs of elderly individuals and individuals with disabilities, ODOT awarded $1,974,393 in Federal Section 5310 funds for Federal Fiscal Year 2007 through Ohio’s Specialized Transportation Program (STP). These federal funds will support 48 non-profit agencies and six Ohio Coordination Program projects to purchase 70 vehicles and three computers. A list of the agencies with their locations, vehicles and equipment awarded can be accessed at the Office of Transit’s website at http://www.dot.state.oh.us/ptrans/. For additional information on the STP awards, contact Pat Pikula at pat.pikula@dot.state.oh.us or 614-644-7237.

Greater emphasis was placed on transportation coordination in the 2007 program. This was in preparation for the new federal requirement that all future Specialized Transportation Program projects be derived from a Locally Developed Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan. The Coordinated Plan is required for participation in the New Freedom and Job Access and Reverse Commute Programs as well. Each plan must include at least these sections: Needs Assessment, Service Gap Identification, Strategies to Meet Service Gaps, and Prioritization of Strategies. Broad participation in plan development is also required. This includes inviting all transportation coordination stakeholders to the table – public transit systems, Ohio Coordination Program lead agencies and partners, human service agency representatives and consumers, elected officials, private transportation operators, advocates, etc. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) through United We Ride, the federal initiative for transportation coordination, has published two documents which will be helpful in plan development. The Framework for Action and the Facilitator’s Guide can both be downloaded from the website unitedweride.gov. From the home page, click on Planning and Assessment, and you will see the documents. For additional information on the Coordinated Plan, see the winter issue of Ohio Transfer or contact Lynn Rathke, ODOT, at lynn.rathke@dot.state.oh.us or 614-644-7362.
United We Ride
Divided We Stall Conference Encourages Interaction
by Dave Seech, ODOT

“Coordination Works For Everyone” is the theme of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA) and Ohio Statewide Transportation Coordination Task Force (Task Force) Conference being held on May 15-16, 2007 in Dublin, Ohio. For coordination to work effectively, transportation providers need to interact and develop cooperative agreements. Through these agreements, redundant, inefficient, and costly transportation services can be reduced enabling transportation systems to operate more efficiently. An efficient transportation system benefits everyone by increasing personal mobility, stimulating economic development, and preserving federal, state, and local resources.

The Conference sessions offer plenty of opportunities to interact with statewide transportation providers and federal, state, and local agency staff. The “Medicaid Transportation: How Do We Fit In?” session will provide the most up-to-date information about Medicaid transportation from the program managers. Several sessions address locally developed coordinated plans including the “Small Operators Meeting” and the “Locally Developed Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans: What’s in it for me?” session. ODOT has received plenty of questions on the coordinated plans and these sessions will provide an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the federal requirement.

Other sessions encourage interaction of systems and agencies by sharing best practices such as necessary policies and procedures, innovative community development, determining the actual cost of providing service, proactive transit advocacy, up-to-date security and emergency management activities, real-life ADA implementation, and coordination best practices.

Last but not least, the Conference concludes with a Federal and State Coordination Update and questions and answers session. Representatives from the Federal Transit Administration and the Task Force will present the latest United We Ride Program information and Ohio initiatives. The presenters are expecting a lot of questions. It should be a lively and informative session.

You can register for the Conference by visiting the OPTA website at http://www.ohiopublictransit.org/04conference.html or call OPTA at 614-481-9500 if you have questions.
Upcoming Training
by Kim White, ODOT

Contract Negotiations Workshop, June 2007
The Ohio Statewide Transportation Coordination Task Force (Task Force) will host a Contract Negotiations Workshop on June 27, 2007, at the ODOT auditorium in Columbus. This is a follow up to the regional “Is Your Price Right? Fully Allocated Costs” training sponsored by the Task Force in March and April 2007.

The workshop targets transportation service providers who contract to provide service for other agencies. Now that you know the true costs of providing transportation service, this workshop focuses on negotiating the terms of the contract.

More information will be available at the “United We Ride, Divided We Stall” conference on May 15-16, 2007, and on the ODOT Office of Transit website by the end of May 2007. The workshop will be from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. and is free; however, you must register to attend. Lunch will be on your own.

Vehicle Maintenance Expo, September 2007
The ODOT Office of Transit is planning a Vehicle Maintenance Expo for September 2007. The Expo will be held September 6-7, 2007, at a location to be determined.

Representatives from the Sure-Loc and Q'Straint companies will provide the latest information on wheelchair securement. There will also be representatives from Braun and Ricon to address lift maintenance. The Expo will feature several breakout sessions including: contract maintenance versus in-house maintenance, keeping up-to-date maintenance records, term contract purchases, and vehicle safety.

The Expo is not limited to mechanics. Operations managers and other transportation professionals are encouraged to attend. More information will be available this summer.

If you have any questions, please contact Kim White at 614-644-0301 or kim.white@dot.state.oh.us.

WSU Offers One Credit Hour Transit Courses
by Kim White

ODOT is working with Wright State University (WSU) to create a series of one-credit hour transit courses as part of the Public and Social Service Transportation Certificate Program at WSU. The first course will focus on safety and security and will be offered on Saturday, August 4, and Saturday, August 11, 2007, in Dayton, Ohio. The course is open to everyone. You must attend both Saturday sessions to receive academic or continuing education credit for the course. More information on the courses will be available on the ODOT Office of Transit web site. If you have any questions, please contact Kim White at 614-644-0301 or kim.white@dot.state.oh.us.

What’s Happening in Transit? by Dave Seech, ODOT

• In March 2007, the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority was one of three transportation organizations in the United States to receive the Federal Transit Administration’s 2007 Award for Success in Enhancing Ridership in the one million served population category. Joe Calabrese, RTA chief executive officer and general manager, accepted the award in Washington, D.C.

• In February 2007, the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial
Reporting to METRO Regional Transit Authority (Akron) for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for fiscal year 2005. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government agency and its management. METRO has received this award seven times. METRO has also been awarded the Auditor of State’s Award for outstanding commitment to the highest standards of financial reporting, also based on the CAFR. The awards were presented to METRO’s Director of Finance, Dean J. Harris, as the primary individual responsible for preparing the award-winning reports.

- In March 2007, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognized Central Ohio’s New Clean Diesel Collaborative by awarding $150,000 to the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) to help launch a new central Ohio clean diesel collaborative. “While new diesel engines keep improving with the latest models now at nearly zero emissions levels, we cannot forget that there are 11 million older diesel engines still in our buses, trains and trucks. Older diesel engines are one of the sources holding us back from meeting federal particle pollution standards in four central Ohio counties,” said MORPC Chairwomen Virginia Barney. Members of the Mid-Ohio Public Diesel Fleet Initiative include MORPC, the City of Columbus, the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) and the Ohio Environmental Council. COTA also plans to install diesel oxidation catalysts (DOC), a device to capture carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and particle matter, on 40 transit buses from the 2001 model year. DOCs are estimated to reduce particle matter by 25%, Carbon Monoxide by 50% and Hydrocarbon by 50%.

- In March 2007, the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA) was one of 12 transportation organizations in the United States to receive the Federal Transit Administration’s 2007 Award for Success in Enhancing Ridership. PARTA was in the 50,000 to 200,000 population served category. Rick Bissler, PARTA Board President, and Bryan Smith, Business Development Director, received the award in Washington, D.C. Pictured from left to right are: James Simpson, FTA Administrator, Bryan Smith, Rick Bissler, and Howard Silver, Chair of the APTA Executive Committee.

- In March 2007, Linda Good, Executive Director of Seneca County Agency Transportation (SCAT), was given the “Everyday Hero” award by the Seneca County Red Cross for the exponential growth of her organization and going beyond the call of duty to perform selfless acts of courage and committing to always exceed the expectations of her clients. Furthermore, Linda was recognized as a “role model for other transportation entities across Ohio as well as her sound work ethic, honesty, and integrity.”

- In February 2007, Lamont Taylor, chairman of Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority board of trustees, was named the recipient of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Commission Award for Economic Opportunity. The Holiday Commission, created in 1985, promotes the values and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and annually recognizes Ohioans whose efforts to secure equal rights for all citizens are a tribute to the legacy of Dr. King. Taylor was also named a winner of Fifth Third Bank’s “Profiles in Courage” award which honors individuals whose achievements in the face of great obstacles serve as an inspiration to others in the community.

- In April 2007, Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority/METRO announced that they will run all 390 buses on 50% soybean biodiesel by summer. METRO’s biodiesel is manufactured in Cincinnati using Ohio soybeans. Ohio is the sixth largest producer of soybeans in the nation. Riding transit is one of the top ways to make a difference and riding on a METRO bus powered by biodiesel is an even more earth-friendly choice. METRO’s use of biodiesel impacts more than the environment; it also affects the agency’s bottom line. The transit system estimates that its use of biodiesel saved almost $450,000 in 2006, compared to the market value of diesel fuel.
Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals
Excerpts from an article by Easter Seals Project ACTION, August 2006

In recognition of the critical role that service animals play in the independent travel of people with disabilities, Easter Seals Project ACTION developed a list of commonly asked questions and answers concerning service animals in the context of ground transportation. The answers are based on the Americans with Disabilities Act and its stipulations about the rights and responsibilities of people traveling with service animals. Excerpts from the article are listed below.

Q: What is a service animal?
A: The ADA defines a service animal as any guide dog, signal dog or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability. If they meet this definition, animals are considered service animals under the ADA regardless of whether they have been licensed or certified by a state or local government.

Service animals perform tasks to help a person with a disability live independently. Guide dogs are one type of service animal used by some individuals who are blind or who have low vision. This is the type of service animal with which most people are familiar. But there are other service animals – monkeys, cats and birds, for example – that assist people with other kinds of disabilities in their day-to-day activities. Some examples include:

- Alerting people who are deaf
- Alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure
- Pulling wheelchairs or carrying and picking up things for individuals with mobility disabilities
- Assisting people having mobility disabilities involving balance.

A service animal is not a pet – nor does it have to be described by the term “service animal.” A customer may use another term when describing her animal, such as mobility animal, assistance animal, etc. To determine whether the provisions of the ADA apply, transportation providers must consider the role of the animal and not just the term used to describe the animal.

Identification of the role of the animal should be as brief as possible and providers should not ask personal or intrusive questions. If the transportation provider and the customer need to have a lengthy conversation, the conversation should not happen on the vehicle in front of other passengers.

Q: How can an operator tell if an animal is really a service animal and not just a pet?
A: Some, but not all, service animals wear special collars and harnesses. If drivers are unsure that an animal is a service animal, they may inquire if the animal is a pet. If the customer responds the animal is a service animal, they may ask what tasks the animal has been trained to perform. They cannot require special identification for a service animal, inquire about a customer’s disability, or ask for a demonstration of the tasks that a service animal has been trained to perform.

Q: Under what circumstances can a provider refuse to transport a service animal?
A: The only thing that can prevent a transportation provider from being able to transport a service animal with the individual is if the animal is not under control of the handler or it is being disruptive or threatening to the safety of others. Transportation providers are cautioned against making assumptions based on past experiences with other animals and to consider the behavior of each animal individually. Allergies and fear of animals are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people with service animals.

Q: Can a customer travel with more than one service animal?
A: Yes. Nothing in the ADA limits the number of animals with which an individual can travel, other than stating that the animal needs to be under the customer’s control at all times.

Q: Where can I get more information on this topic?
A: Contact Easter Seals Project ACTION at (800) 659-6428 or visit www.projectaction.org. The Clearinghouse page provides the opportunity to order or download a copy of the document titled, “Serving Passengers Traveling with Service Animals.”
Transit-Friendly Development Newsletter
by Dave Seech, ODOT

New Jersey Transit and the Bloustein School’s Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University are working together to produce a series of transit-friendly development newsletters. The purpose of the newsletter is to keep municipal officials, planners and advocates up-to-date on the potential for development and redevelopment around transit stations. The newsletter highlights transit oriented development (TOD) and land use in New Jersey and around the country including best practices, model programs, legislation and local problem-solving experiences. The newsletter is available at http://policy.rutgers.edu/vtc/tod/newsletter.

The latest issue of the newsletter addresses the issue of parking in TODs. New approaches to demand and pricing are enabling more creative and cost-effective solutions. The articles are informative and useful. Each newsletter has a different focus that is relevant in today’s transportation environment. They also welcome your feedback and input. Check it out. It’s worth your time.

PT Patter
by Dave Seech, ODOT

- Congratulations to Brandy Dunlap on her new position at the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority as a Long Range Planner. Brandy formerly worked as a college intern for the ODOT Office of Transit.
- Welcome to Lydell Samples, Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority Finance Manager, and congratulations to Mike Kline on his retirement in May 2007.
- Welcome to Dave Dysard, ODOT District 2 Deputy Director. Mr. Dysard was formerly the Vice President of Transportation for the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG).
- Welcome back to Dave Etienne, Manager of Marketing and Communications, Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority.

New Resources
Threat and Vulnerability Toolbox

The National Rural Technical Assistance Program released a “Threat and Vulnerability Toolbox” on March 2, 2007. The Toolbox is a package of instructional materials and practical exercises to help transit managers set priorities for safety, security, and emergency preparedness. The materials lead users through a planning process in which they:

1. Identify which assets are most essential to their mission;
2. Assess/prioritize safety hazards and security threats to those critical assets;
3. Develop plans to reduce the likelihood and/or impact of those risks; and
4. Establish protocols for managing critical incidents if and when incidents do occur.

The 10-minute “On the Move” video and a student workbook can be downloaded from www.nationalrtap.org/vulnerability.asp. ODOT will also be sponsoring a Safety and Security training course later this summer 2007.

Employee Drug Awareness Training Video

“Clean, Sober, and Safe” is a 23-minute training video produced by the Center for Urban Transportation Research in Tampa, Florida. It begins by taking a look back at how and why DOT drug and alcohol testing became required. The viewer is then educated on the harmful effects of the five prohibited drugs and the dangers of misusing alcohol. In closing, employees are briefly familiarized with the collection process and the circumstances under which they are subject to testing.

The video and its accompanying handbook will aid transit agencies in meeting the 60 minutes of required drug awareness education for all safety sensitive employees. Funding for this important training tool was provided by the Florida Department of Transportation. The video and handbook can be downloaded free of charge at http://www.cutr.usf.edu/bvnessamsite.

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