

Minutes

RTA External & Stakeholder Relations & Advocacy Committee

9:02 a.m. February 6, 2024

Committee Members: Koomar (Vice), Biasiotta, McPherson, Welch

Other Board Members: Love, Lucas, Mersmann, Pacetti, Sleasman, Weiss

Not present: None

Staff/Other: Birdsong Terry, Burney, Catalusci, Caver, Dangelo, Davidson, Dimmick, Feke, Fields, Fleig, Freilich, Garofoli, Gautam, Hudson, Jones, Jupina, Kirkland, Laule, Miller, Moore, Schipper, Shaffer, Sutula, Talley, Togher, Walker Minor

Public: Benko, Gibbons, Khaled, Loh, O'Donnell, Yarbrough

The meeting was called to order at 9:02 a.m. Four (4) committee members were present.

State of Ohio Advocacy Update

Terrence O'Donnell, Government Relations Practice Group Chair, Dickinson Wright, gave the presentation.

Terrence O'Donnell is the Chair of Dickinson Wright's Government Relations Practice Group and brings 25 years of experience to his public policy practice. His focus is advocacy at the Ohio statehouse, administrative law, regulatory compliance, and policy-related appellate litigation. He represents dozens of companies, trade groups, and nonprofits before the state's General Assembly and executive agencies. The contract with Dickinson Wright was initiated in May 2020 for two years with two option years. They provide state advocacy for public transportation, policy and legislation and provide impact assessment and assistance to guide GCRTA's funding, programs and projects in accordance with legislative opportunities and landscape. They work with Murray Murphy Moul Basil LLP.

Ohio's elected leaders include Governor Mike DeWine, Lt. Governor Jon Husted, Speaker Jason Stephens and Senate President Matt Huffman. Huffman toured RTA's rail facility to see the need upfront. The Cuyahoga County Delegation in the Ohio House and Ohio Senate are aware of the service RTA provides. Transit is a non-partisan issue. The state passes several budgets in a two-year cycle. They focus on the one specific to transportation. They pass it every other year. They've collaborated with OPTA and sustained record funding for public transportation in Ohio. They sustained \$70 million for public transportation in the two most recent budgets. An additional \$30 million of new funding was secured for the Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership in 2023 transportation budget. GM/CEO Terry has testified before the Ohio House Finance Committee.

They have successfully secured Transportation Review Advisory Commission (TRAC) funding for railcar replacement and track reconstruction. Historically this funding was for roads and bridges. GCRTA received \$4.2 million for light rail reconstruction at Blue Line Van Aken Yard and \$12.0 million for the 25 Connects/MetroHealth Line BRT project. They put in the eligibility language in the new statute.

Up next are meetings with representatives during Ohio Loves Transit Day, Feb. 13, further dialogue with ODOT about funding, legislation to prevent concealed carry-on public transit, more TRAC funding and the 2025 Transportation Budget.

Ms. Mersmann asked about the transit messaging they find most resonant at the State House. He said there is a focus on workforce. Dr. Walker Minor said we are involved in marketing committees at APTA. President Lucas thanked Mr. O'Donnell for his work. Mayor Weiss asked about the concealed weapon bill. Mr. O'Donnell said no bill has been introduced. This could be an amendment to an existing bill. Mr. Love asked if the workforce mobility program will be managed by ODOT and if it is competitive. Mr. O'Donnell said it is competitive. Dr. Walker Minor added that they have worked closely with major employers and Lorain Community College. Mr. Schipper said the first funding round will be announced soon. There will be at least one or two additional funding rounds. RTA is awaiting announcement on their applications.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:23 a.m.


Rajan D. Gautam
Secretary/Treasurer


Theresa A. Burrage
Executive Assistant