

**Testimony**  
**U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs**  
**Local Views on Public Transportation, Transit Infrastructure and Operations,**  
**and Federal Transit Programs**

**March 16, 2023**

**By: India L. Birdsong Terry, General Manager & Chief Executive Officer**  
**Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority**

My name is India L. Birdsong Terry and I serve as the General Manager and Chief Executive Officer for the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA). My transit career began at the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), where I held key roles in planning, training and instruction, and operations. My career continued at WeGo Public Transit in Nashville, Tennessee, where I served as Chief Operating Officer until my move to Cleveland, Ohio, to serve as Chief Executive Officer in September 2019.

The GCRTA is a legacy multi-modal transit system providing bus, heavy and light rail, bus rapid transit (BRT) as well as paratransit, servicing approximately 100,000 customers daily. Our agency's annual operating budget stands at \$324M, and our annual capital budget varies between \$100-120M per year.

Our newly crafted mission, Connecting the Community, allows us to support the diverse interests of Greater Cleveland. Understanding that public transportation is the connective tissue between neighborhoods and citizens, it is no surprise that the most frequent trips taken on GCRTA are comprised of journeys to work (60%), school (23%) and healthcare (9%).

As with many legacy public transportation systems throughout the country, GCRTA faces a tremendous hurdle --- keeping up with our aging infrastructure's state of good repair needs. This most basic need is not only a facet of our daily operations at the garage level, but is also a part of the everyday experience for our customers as well. Basic expectations of a system that is timely, clean, safe and flexible become more difficult to manage as our infrastructure ages with time.

Federal funding such as the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA) are instrumental in our ability to manage the reasonable expectations of the riding public and deliver effective transportation services as planned. Simply put, the historic increases in federal transit funding are essential, and are making a huge impact in Greater Cleveland. We thank you for the investment in GCRTA and the residents we serve.

Impacts of the IIJA in Greater Cleveland:

- The IIJA increased GCRTA's annual formula funds by 30%, for the next five years. During that timeframe, GCRTA is positioned to plan and complete multiple projects, including the rehabilitation of our Waterfront Line Bridge that serves the downtown community, including the Cleveland Brown's Stadium, the Great Lakes Science Museum, the Flats at East bank residential and entertainment district, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.
- Additionally, the IIJA created two new competitive grant programs that help to address GCRTA infrastructure needs, including:
  - **Rail Vehicle Replacement Program:** to address the need to replace aging rail fleets. Operating beyond their useful life, GCRTA's rail vehicles currently average between 38 to 41 years of age and need immediate replacement. To date, our agency has

raised \$213M towards an overall program goal estimated at \$393M and have applied for funding to help close the gap.

- **All-Station Accessibility Program (ASAP):** to address the need to bring older non-ADA Key Stations into ADA compliance. GCRTA has 17 identified key stations and we were recently awarded an ASAP grant to reconstruct our East 79<sup>th</sup> Street Light Rail Station. Projects like these are integral to our ability to level the playing field, regardless of physical ability or location. Our commitment to equitable mobility and access is reflected not only in our construction efforts, but also in our agency leadership, as evidenced by our Board President, Reverend Charles P. Lucas, who serves as a community trailblazer and advocate for the paratransit community. We couldn't be prouder to have him at the helm of our agency in this regard.
- **Low-No Emission Bus Program:** support the transition to zero emission fleet planning. We currently have converted over half of our overall bus fleet from diesel to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), including our Healthline Vehicles. As our diesel to CNG conversion continues, GCRTA's Strategic Plan calls for our agency to begin piloting zero emission/ electric bus technology. We will continue application for funding, and should we be awarded we are in a ready position to launch the program.
- Over the next year, we will retire all 40-ft diesel buses and will continue a policy of purchasing only clean air or zero emission buses. The Alternative Fuel Tax Credit has resulted in a considerable savings in our fuel expense.
- The Capital Improvement Grant (CIG) opens the funding pipeline for several New Starts/Small Starts projects around the country. A great example of this is GCRTA's West 25<sup>th</sup> Street/Metro Health Line BRT, which was recently recommended for 25% funding of the total project cost by the Ohio Department of Transportation.

Public safety is the cornerstone of our operations at GCRTA. To support this charge, we have worked in partnership with our local unions to update our Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP). This effort was celebrated in the form of successful Board adoption of the new PTASP, created by management and union leadership. We understand that communication and realistic goal setting paves the way for positive change.

Safety in policy can only become real through boots-on-the-ground leadership. As such, our agency has taken several actions to transform our transit police with practices that include and compliment our mission of Connecting the Community. In addition to assigning officers to community policing, we have added a Transit Ambassador program that includes 10 Ambassadors and six Crisis Intervention Specialists. These social service professionals work in close partnership with social service agencies to address the needs of our most vulnerable customers.

As we continue to invest in the safety and experience of our customers, we also recognize the need to address current workforce challenges facing our industry, as it relates to the hiring and retention of local talent, in addition to growing the next generation of transportation professionals. To do this, GCRTA has partnered with local educational institutions, starting with Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C). This partnership is special, as our Job Hub program has blossomed as a national model of community workforce development, to connect job seekers to college curriculum and pathways to permanent employment. Together, we are creating a learning culture centered on recruitment, retention, and development of employees at all levels.

On behalf of GCRTA, I urge your continued support of funding for public transportation. It is my honor to serve our community and testify on behalf of the Greater Cleveland community. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.