



External Stakeholder Relations Committee Minutes

Tuesday, July 7, 2026 at 3:30 PM

COTA-WG Porter Boardroom, 33 N High St, Columbus OH

1. Call to Order

External Stakeholder Relations Committee Chair Erika Clark Jones called the July 7, 2026 meeting of the External Stakeholder Committee to order at 3:30 pm.

2. Roll Call

Committee Members Present

Erika Clark Jones, Chair

Pete Bucher, Trustee

Brent Pastorek, Trustee

Heather Ulrey, Trustee

3. Approval of External Stakeholder Relations Committee Minutes

A. May 5, 2026 External Stakeholder Relations Committee Minutes

Trustee Pete Bucher moved to approve the May 5, 2026 External Stakeholder Relations Committee meeting minutes, seconded by Trustee Heather Ulrey. Motion carried.

4. New Business

A. Customer Experience Action Plan - Sarah McQuaide, COTA Marketing and Engagement Director

COTA Marketing and Engagement Director Sarah McQuaide presented COTA's Customer Experience (CX) Action Plan, outlining COTA's plan to elevate customer experience in preparation for significant system growth. Through extensive customer research, employee engagement, surveys, and peer agency benchmarking, Ms. Quaide noted key themes that emerged from the discovery phase and said reliability and predictability matter the most. The plan aligns with COTA's Strategic Plan and focuses on improving service reliability, communication, accessibility, safety, and convenience through 44 initiatives (33 customer experience projects and 11 employee engagement projects), while establishing stronger governance, accountability, and feedback

systems to create a more customer-centric culture and drive continuous improvement. The plan has a phased timeline from discovery through implementation.

B. Government Affairs Update - Casey Blazer, COTA Government Affairs Director

COTA Government Affairs Director Casey Blazer presented the July 2026 Government Affairs update, reporting that proposed changes under the BUILD America 250 legislation, which is currently at the House committee level, would change the Small Starts Program to Streamlined Starts, increasing the project cap to \$1 Billion, and maintain \$3 billion annually for Capital Investment Grants. It would also streamline some transit project delivery work. She said there are concerns about reduced public transit funding, new mandates on transit agencies, and uncertainty around congressional passage. Ms. Blazer outlined FY2027 appropriations activity, including congressional funding requests for Columbus City Schools transit stop improvements and a proposed 78 percent reduction in Capital Investment Grant funding, though funding for the East Main Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project remains included as a project expected to receive a grant agreement.

C. Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee Update – Amy Hockman, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, On Demand and Customer Care

COTA Program Manager, Social Services Corrina Hyde presented the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) update, noting ATAC is a systemwide advisory group required under Board Governance Guidelines and U.S. Department of Transportation ADA regulations, bringing together riders with disabilities, advocates, and community organizations to promote ongoing dialogue and improve transit accessibility. She said the committee's purpose is to provide a collective voice that meaningfully influences decisions, foster a culture of accessibility, identify and remove barriers, and ensure inclusive design in transit planning and service delivery. Ms. Hyde said recent discussions have focused on storm and snow removal planning, ADA empathy training, the Director of Accessibility position, and new rider-support technologies. She highlighted how ATAC gathers valuable community feedback, said engagement has led to better relationships between COTA, riders and the community, and providing more one-on-one support has been an outcome of this process.

D. COTA Advisory Panel Update - Casey Blazer, COTA Government Affairs Director and Kenny Ganter, COTA Service Planner

COTA Government Affairs Director Casey Blazer and COTA Service Planner Kenny Ganter provided an update on the COTA Advisory Panel (CAP), noting CAP is a quarterly advisory body established under the COTA Charter to provide guidance to COTA management on the development and implementation of public transit in Central Ohio and to inform programs presented to the Board. The panel is composed

of representatives appointed by participating municipalities, Franklin County, and at-large members, all of whom must be residents familiar with regional transit needs. The current roster includes representatives from local governments and agencies across the COTA service area. CAP discussions focus on topics such as service changes, LinkUS, ridership data, the Short-Range Transit Plan, COTA//Plus, community development and mobility initiatives, facility tours, and emerging transportation trends.

E. LinkUS Public Engagement Update- Jeff Pullin, COTA Public and Media Relations Director

COTA Public and Media Relations Director Jeff Pullin presented the July 2026 LinkUS Public Engagement update, introducing new staff and outlining the development of a new public-facing LinkUS dashboard, which is designed to increase transparency, accountability, and trust by showing project progress in a clear, accessible format. Mr. Pullin said they are taking a phased approach. The dashboard will elevate to the top whatever is happening in real time, providing visual updates for stakeholders, media, and the public. An initial rollout is planned for August 2026, followed by public promotion in September and ongoing enhancements as data and reporting needs evolve.

5. Other Business

No other business was brought before the committee.

6. Adjournment

Trustee Bucher moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Trustee Ulrey. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 4:21 pm.

Adopted: September 8, 2026

Signed:

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Erika Clark Jones
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Chair, External Stakeholder Relations Committee

Attest:

Signed by:
Monica Sally Fowler
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President/CEO