COTA May 2023 Service Change -Public Comment Meetings  
April 13 & 18, 2023 I 33 N. High Street, William G. Porter Board Room

April 13th ,2023 – Meeting #1  
Members of the public in-person: 12

Viewers on Facebook Live: 23  
COTA Staff in-person: Amber B, Andrew N, Andrew M, Paul E, Ray G, Alex H, Jeff P, John M, Richard S, D’Laveance BS

**Presentations/Announcements**

Opening Items: Jeff Pullin

Service Changes & Construction Impacts: Amber Boyd

Short Range Transit Plan: Andrew Neutzling

**Questions/Comments – Provided via WebEx Chat during meeting**

No comments received

**Questions/Comments – Provided via Facebook Livestream during meeting**

1. What are the Line 22 service changes?
   1. Answer (HS): Answered in chat.
2. What is COTA doing about the Goodwill and Join Team COTA ads?
   1. Answer (JP): Advertising will continue especially for the Team COTA ads during the time of hiring needs. We will continue to look into the frequency of audio ads on vehicles.
3. Is there COTA//Plus in Polaris/Crosswoods area? Would you reroute the 102 to help on-time performance?
   1. Answer (AB): COTA//Plus Westerville encompasses the Polaris area including Top Golf and the mall.
4. Line 4 should run a 30-minute line gap during weekday peak hours or run south of downtown every 30 minutes on weekdays
   1. Answer (AB): Thanks. We will take your comment into consideration. Know that COTA staff are monitoring lines with reduced levels of service for overcrowding. Lines hitting maximum capacity will be sent to Transportation as priority for supplemental service.
5. [Comment] The public wants full service back
   1. Answer (JP): So do we.
6. [Comment] $45/hr after a few years will keep drivers
   1. Answer (JP): Thank you for your suggestion.
7. When will the midnight Late Night Lineup be restored so passengers working until 11pm can get home?
   1. Answer (JP): This will be a top priority
8. How long does the background check take?
   1. Answer (AH): Varies by the individual depending on their record. Timeframe varies from same day to a week.
9. What steps is COTA taking to retain and get more drivers in the door?
   1. Answer (JP): Annual performance bonuses. Domestic partner benefits. Pay $100/month towards student loans. Tuition reimbursement. Sign-on bonuses. COTA is always open to other ideas, operators should send them in.
10. The South Terminal smells bad. What are you doing to combat potential health issues?
    1. Answer (JP): We will take your comment back to COTA Facilites
11. How often is the South Terminal cleaned and sanitized?
    1. Answer (HS): Answered in chat.
12. Will the next service reduction be the last?
    1. Answer (HS): Answered in chat.
13. [Regarding stop ID #\*\*\*\*] Passenger want to exit the bus closer to the intersection of Main & High instead of walking to the stop. Can you add a placard on the bus stating that COTA does not stop anywhere outside of bus stops?
    1. Answer (JP): Thank you for your suggestion. We will take to Marketing.
14. [Question from a COTA operator]: Why isn't COTA offering bonuses to current employees like they do new hires?
    1. Answer (JP): Will take to Human Resources. Please make your suggestions to supervisors.

**Questions/Comments – Provided in-person during the meeting**

1. [Question from a COTA operator]: Customer suggests a $6 raise for operators. $2,000 hiring bonus is not enough money. Raise pay every 5 years. Line 8 travels down 161 with buses empty sometimes. Should you scale back Line 8? The CMAX is impacted by the service reductions. Passengers are unable to make connections. Zoo Bus should run July 1 through September for job opportunities. Line 102 should run every 30 minutes.
   1. Answer (JP): Thanks for your comment
2. Customer suggests raising operator wages. The shortage is a huge impact on people's ability to get around the city. Regarding the SRTP, is COTA assuming that we will get back to the number of drivers we had? Or are you assuming we will not?
   1. Answer (AN): COTA’s first priority is to return to previous operator levels. SRTP is aspirational. We may not be able to implement all the proposals.
3. Line 4 arrives downtown around every half hour, which does not align with office jobs. Do schedulers plan with job start times in mind? Would like Line 4 (from Old North) to get downtown around 8:45am.
   1. Answer (AB): We will look at trip times. Be mindful that this will impact transfers along the line.
4. Customer understands COTA’s operator shortage. When will late night service return?
   1. Answer (AB): Restoring late night service is a priority. However, we may have to stagger which lines will have later service restored first.
5. Restore Line 8 service at the Walmart in Easton? Line 34 runs every 30 minutes but is not convenient.
   1. Answer (AB): Line 34 is running at a reduced frequency. We are still having to reduce service to match operator levels to avoid canceling trips. When we can hire more operators, we will restore more trips.
6. When will service be restored? Is there an estimated date?
   1. Answer (JP): Stopped giving estimates about a year ago because they were often not correct. We will continue to work on innovative ways to hire. We hope we will see a good turnout on April 26, which will give us an idea of if we need to do more events. If it is successful, we may do more hiring events this year. I hope we will be restoring service sooner than later. APTA (American Public Transportation Association) did a survey of transit agencies that found that 90%+ were having workforce challenges
7. The Transit Stop Amenity Programs are missing from the website. Please restore them.
   1. Answer (PE): It was temporarily down. Is has been restored.
8. Is COTA considering free public transit?
   1. Answer (JP): We get a lot of comments about no fare transit. There are certain cities that have implemented it. We’re considering this. Current focus on more service and amenities for customers. Free fares are not happening soon but are being taken into consideration. We do have a low-income fare program that provides discounts. Provide discounts for seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities.
9. Customer is requesting a two new route that travels along (1) Cleveland Ave and Westerville Rd and (2) Cleveland Ave, Morse Rd, and 161. Needed earlier CMAX service. Columbus is growing fastly. We must have better transit now. I had to change my work schedule because of the transit schedules. People want later service to get to jobs (New Albany, etc.). Review costs of technology for visually impaired and blind passengers. Place paper bus schedules in retail stores. Suggests variable fares throughout the day, maybe charge more at night time(?). Give first 50 people at hiring event free food. COTA is a stressful job. If it were me every driver would get paid $50/hour. We have to walk miles and sit on the bus for hours. Hiring incentives could include paying for car payments. Think of creative hiring incentives to attract operators.
   1. Answer (JP): Thank you.
10. Line 102 was overcrowded on February 8 [customer sent image to COTA’s Facebook]. Please add additional rush hour service. The bus passed someone on North Broadway with a stroller, meaning she had to wait another hour for another bus. At least add service during peak hours. The 102 is often overcrowded during the 7am/8am hours.
    1. Answer (AB): Thank you for sharing. Staff is monitoring lines and times where we are observing higher passenger loads. We are working with Transportation to send out additional buses if we have staff available.
11. Is COTA purchasing the old Greyhound Terminal? Will it be a new layover or transit center? The waiting conditions are terrible. Customer is happy with the new 102 layover.
    1. Answer (JP): That was purchased by COTA. It is in the federal process. We have to get approval. Working with downtown development groups who are doing a downtown transit plan. Seeing what will align.
12. Customer has a positive experience using COTA//Plus in Grove City. The pickup time was short, and the ride was smooth. Would like to express accolades to his COTA//Plus driver.
    1. Answer (JP): If you ever have an experience like that you would like to share if you can get the operator name and number and let us know they get accommodations for it. You can always call customer care and they can help track down who the helpful driver was. Compliments go toward deciding operator bonuses.
13. Please increase Line 102 frequency. Increase operator wages.
    1. Answer (JP): Thank you.
14. The reduction of the frequent network on weekends is a hinderance. Customer works on weekends with a start time of 7am. Customer ends up spending the majority of his check on Uber. Why has it taken so long to have a big hiring event? Why stop at one? Regardless of whether the first is a success, keep doing it.
    1. Answer (JP): Don’t think it will just be one event. Just announcing one.
15. [*Customer was traveling to Huber Village Plaza in Westerville*] Customer took the CMAX to Northland Transit Center, not knowing the Northeast On-Demand zone did not travel into Westerville. The bus operator still took the customer to her destination and even called COTA’s CCC for her return trip. Would like to formally thank the operator but did not catch his name.
16. CMAX should begin at 5am in September. Increase fares from $2 to $4.
17. Customer sent in several emails. Buses are coming late frequently even when no construction impacts are active. Buses are leaving late from transit centers on purpose. Please extend bus service on the far eastside. Extend Line 1 along 256 in the Reynoldsburg area. This customer has been a loyal COTA customer for years. Suggests adding a stop near the intersection of Gender and Winchester Blvd for Line 25.
    1. Answer (AB): Thank you. Some of your suggestions are included in COTA’s SRTP. Attend one of the public meetings to learn more.
18. Does COTA plan to add benches or shelters at more stops? It would be nice for passengers.
    1. Answer (PE): We have been aggressively trying to add shelters/benches. We’ve added about 50 new shelters/benches a year over the last few years. We are trying to continue that much or more for 2023/24. We place based on ridership, transfer location, or event centers. We have about 3000 stops so not all. Let us know if there is a specific location where you would like to see a stop.

**Questions/Comments – Provided via Comment Card**

1. Restore frequency on Lines 1, 2, 10, CMAX. Restore 30-minute frequency on Lines 3 and 102, at least during peak hours. Uber is expensive, bring back late-night service. Implement at least 3 to 4 hiring fairs this year. Continue to find aggressive and strategic ways to hire and retain more drivers. Offer bonuses to long-time drivers, not sure new hires.
2. Prioritize restoring frequency on Line 4. Adjust the schedules so that Linke 4 arrives downtown around 8:45am instead of 8:30am. Use longer accordion style buses on busier lines, like Line 102.
3. Increase frequency and restore late night service. Improve amenities at stops including sidewalks and lighting. Improve frequency on the South Side. Would prefer fixed route over COTA//Plus. Can Line 8 run every 10 to 15 minutes along S High & Parsons in the evening? If OSU pays for bus service, can they contribute to increased service? Add accordion buses on crowded route, like Line 102.

April 18st, 2023 – Meeting #2  
Members of the public present in-person: 7  
Viewers on Facebook Live: 21

COTA Staff in-person: Drew M, Paul E, Amber B, Charles E, John M, Alex S, Jeff P, Andrew N, Tanya S, Richard S, Michael C, D’Laveance BS,

**Presentations/Announcements**

Opening Items: Jeff Pullin

Service Changes: Amber Boyd

Short Range Transit Plan: Andrew Neutzling

**Questions/Comments – Provided via WebEx Chat during meeting**

No comments received

**Questions/Comments – Provided via Facebook Livestream during meeting**

1. Henderson Rd is flooded with nonstop Goodwill and Team COTA ads. Customer has sensory issues. Why is COTA unable to fix this issue?
   1. Answer (MC): Marketing is working on a long-term solution to improve this. Working to ensure frequency of ads is operating according to schedule, volume is being quality controlled, and that ads cannot override stop notifications, working to increase time between ads. Hear you and are working on that.
2. Will the #4 Parsons Ave bus run every 35mins again?
   1. Answer (AB): We are having to reduce service, and Line 4 is now running hourly. Staff have identified Line 4 as one of our first priorities for changes once operator levels stabilize.
3. If the high frequency routes are reduced, you should consider purchasing articulated buses secondhand to reduce costs.
   1. Answer (JP): Noted.
4. Meeting link does not work. Change the security settings or stop linking to WebEx.
   1. Answer (DS): Answered directly via Facebook
5. If COTA is planning a regional system, you should consider using modes other than buses. COTA should have begun planning years ago. Light rail should be a consideration.
   1. Answer (JP): Noted
6. If COTA is planning to expand service, begin with improving the Rush Hour lines. Rush Hour should run better and longer. Currently they only run once in the morning and evening for the workforce.
   1. Answer (JP): Noted
   2. Answer (AB): We are not seeing increases in Rush Hour ridership. The goal is to make services more efficient and useful to increase ridership, but we cannot restore trips on those lines.
7. The 2014 Jobs, Expansion, and Transportation (JET) Plan recommended a bus route between downtown and the Airport as a temporary holdover until rail transit could be built. Currently the Airport is only served by Line 7, with hourly frequency. The rail connection is one of LinkUS’ prioritized corridors. When can we expect to see airport proposals?
   1. Answer (AN): Go to COTASRTP.com and comment on airport proposals.
8. When will COTA mark the reroutes of Line 31 and 11 on Weber Rd in the GIS maps and GTFS feed, allowing Linden residents the use of route planning tools like the Transit App? The Weber Rd stops have not appeared in Transit since the reroute began. Recently the stops on Weber Rd were upgraded with permanent signage. If you're making permanent signs, will you mark the map in the May Service Change?
   1. Answer (PE): Looking into it right now. Playing catch-up with technology. Actively looking at opportunities to make patches to show temporary stops, hand fliers, and have other means of letting people know.
9. Passengers are not notified when the service is delayed. Line 5 was delayed on 4/17 at 6:40pm and again the previous week in the morning.
   1. Answer (JP): There are delays we cannot predict. We will consider this.
10. The Eclipse bus is a great idea. COTA should plan dedicated Zoo Bus routes during the eclipse.
    1. Answer (JP): Thanks for the suggestion
11. Is COTA considering a COTA//Plus zone in Upper Arlington
    1. Answer (AB): Not currently, but we consider all requests
    2. '’
12. [*Regarding audio announcements*] Get rid of them. Only use audio for stop announcements and driver communication. Ads decrease the signal to noise ratio of what is important communications channel.
    1. Answer (JP): Thank you, noted.
13. Do any of the panel members and leaders use COTA consistently?
    1. Answer (various): Multiple panel members listed their routes
14. Radio/tv ads would be a good way to attract operators.
    1. Answer (JP): Considered. We do some radio/tv ads already. We will also do earned media coverage (news stories).
15. What kind of incentive can be implemented to keep the drivers that we currently have to help stop the shortage of drivers?
    1. Answer (JP): Feel free to leave suggestions in the chat.
16. Bring back the 25-year club dinner again.
    1. Answer (JP): Answered in the chat.
17. [*In response to comment about Hudson/Weber reroute*]: I have never seen a commuter bulletin, the website notices are inscrutable, and the Weber Rd reroute will be in service for two years, meaning it will not be temporary.
    1. Answer (JP): Thank you for your input.
18. Will the presentation slides be available to review? I was unable to join at the start of the meeting.
    1. Answered in Facebook Chat.
19. Are there plans to add a high frequency bus running on SR-161 between Dublin and New Albany? There is no service connecting the two cities, it would be a major generator for Intel commuters.
    1. Answer (AB): I encourage you to attend one of the SRTP meetings. The recommendation is included in our proposals.
20. Do you believe you created a good system and why?
    1. Answer (JP): Better than before, but we always need to improve it.
21. Customers agree we should use visible signage on buses and implement lineups on Sundays.
    1. Answer (JP): Noted.
22. The SRTP QR code has been paused. What link should the qr code lead to?
23. Customer would like to see a new transit center at the old Greyhound terminal for all buses
    1. Answer (JP): Up for consideration. Working out with the FTA (Federal Transit Administration). It will be a lengthy process.

**Questions/Comments – Provided in-person during the meeting**

1. Question about Line 102 in downtown for layover and Mount & 4th St. It said there is a stop behind it? Sometimes he has trouble with CMAX drivers kicking him off before the bus gets around to the layover.
   1. Answer (AB): Yes, you may board or exit the bus at the layover, however the end of line policy applies so you would need to exit the bus there. Yes, you should be able to ride to the layover and not be kicked off.
2. [*Regarding no smoking signs in bus shelters*] No smoking signs are easy to peel off. When calling the issue in to the CCC, the customer finds nothing but problems with that number. Gets busy message or mailbox full message. No one calls him back or responds to an email. Call service issues happened in late February.
   1. Answer (AB): Network outage from December through February. This could have caused your problem.
   2. Answer (JP): The system should be up and running now.
3. How involved is COTA/Columbus with City and State Amtrak planning? Is there a possibility for a commuter rail line to run out to John Glenn Airport?
   1. Answer (JP): Having those discussions. If Amtrak comes downtown COTA would have a seamless connection. Unkown about commuter rail.
4. Columbus will have a solar eclipse in 2024. The traffic will be bad. Is COTA thinking of doing an eclipse bus? The eclipse will be far north. It will start before noon and be done by 5pm.
   1. Answer (JP): Could be a concern among leaders for traffic issues
5. I’m sure the cutbacks are because there are not enough bus drivers. I do not think you have advertised enough to get more bus drivers and I would like to know why. The last meeting I came to I said you need to advertise on TV. Why didn’t you advertise for bus drivers a long time ago and this wouldn’t have happened? Why don’t you advertise at the shelters?
   1. Answer (MC): Our priority since I started June 2022. This feedback is helpful. Thank you for sharing. IT will continue to be a priority. We do advertise on television. We try to focus paid ads on times/places who is most likely to respond. Inventorying shelters right now. We will consider shelter advertisements.
6. [*Regarding Line 8*] It is hard to distinguish between which bus is going where. Transit supervisors don’t know how to help when I ask for directions. I am curious about better training for COTA employees who do not know which line goes where. How will this impact people in retail or making transfers?
   1. Answer (AB): Hopefully some of those lines are with local lines and Sunday lineups will help with transfer time. Another option for 8 on S High is COTA//Plus Southside Zone - more point-to-point trips within the zone.
7. An elevated automated monorail might work for an airport connection.
   1. Answer (AB): We will that into consideration. We are updating the SRTP. Attend one of those meetings.
8. With the Line 12 proposal will the Call Center close on weekends?
   1. Answer (JP): No COTA’s Call Center will remain open. Line 10 will be available for travel along W Broad St.
9. There is a low turnout for customers attending the meeting. Offer a day pass for those who attend as an incentive.
   1. Answer (JP): We will that into consideration.
10. Scheduling of the new buses - one thing that has happened to me several times is drivers from Extra Board being unfamiliar with lines - it would be a good idea to ask drivers when they come back “how did it go, was anything unexpected”. Extra drivers do a great job but may be a useful source of feedback to help improve service for passengers. (2) It used to be if bus went out of service for whatever reason a bus would come to that driver to continue route, even if late. Now bus is disappearing with no backup. For those of us on hourly lines that is the difference between going to work and not. As an example, it was a Sunday during a cold snap. Me and 2 others (1 elderly with groceries) at bus stop - we stood and stood and stood. Looked on app the time just kept changing. Finally after 30 minutes the bus that came went right past us. No shelter, nowhere to sit or put bags down. It is 9F outside. We had to stand there for over an hour to wait. Couldn’t move or go inside because unclear when bus would come. Man with groceries only lived 2 miles but too far for him to walk. She was late for work (she was never late for work - she had to text boss an hour before arriving when she would arrive), this impacts bus operators too because riders are angry. Suggestion: always bring a bus to that bus so everyone can continue on. Where we stood was only 2.9 miles from McKinley. This situation is not uncommon. She advocates for transit but she is late all the time. (3) Regarding weekend lineups. I’m still waiting for lineup signs. Thinks signs should be at stops AND on buses. People ignore audio messages so signs are important onboard buses. (4) Don’t assume drivers and passengers know how to use the lineups. I’m an experienced rider and many people (Driver and passengers) do not know. Many people only ride during the day and won’t know what it is. The first few weeks will probably be terrible and confusing for drivers and passengers. Have COTA reps there all day every day to help. “Go talk to Mike in the red jacket.” Have helper have ability to call to buses to hold for people on their way. I love the idea but if you don’t implement it well it is going to make things worse. Customer has had to guide operators into the lineup who don’t know how to do it. Pay special attention to buses that follow different alignments for lineup like the 4, 7, and 10.
    1. Answer (CE): We will take extra board feedback into consideration. We’ll look into the bus breakdown you mentioned. We will investigate that if you give more details. We can only send buses if extras are available. As far as Sunday lineups, we will consider those ideas.