



MEETING: EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS COMMITTEE

DATE: TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 10, 2024

TIME: 4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

LOCATION: COTA WG PORTER BOARD ROOM | 33 N HIGH ST

MEETING MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Tolliver called the September 10, 2024, meeting of the External Stakeholder Committee to order at 3:01 PM.

2. ROLL CALL

Committee Members Present

Shannon Tolliver, Chair

Craig Treneff, Trustee (excused)

Heather Ulrey, Trustee

Trudy Bartley, Trustee

3. APPROVAL OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS COMMITTEE MINUTES

Chair Tolliver motioned to approve the May 7, 2024, External Stakeholder Relations Committee minutes. Trustee Ulrey seconded the motion. Motion carries.

4. NEW BUSINESS

Marketing and Media Relations Update

Sarah McQuaide, Director, Marketing & Engagement, and Jeff Pullin, Director, Public & Media Relations, started the committee with the Marketing and Media Relations Update.

Over the past year, COTA's marketing efforts focused on increasing brand affinity, hiring operators, driving digital payment adoption, boosting ridership, and building awareness for LinkUS. The marketing division has strategically introduced new paid media on platforms like TikTok and LinkedIn and optimized paid search campaigns. Through media campaigns, the support from the community has been seen for COTA's 50th anniversary, the launch of the Zoo Bus, and the McKinley Facility opening. These campaigns drove a significant lift in website traffic and a recent survey revealed an increasingly optimistic attitude toward public transit, with a focus on economy, sustainability, and equitable access to opportunities.



Jeff Pullin presented the Media Relations Update. Over the past year, COTA has been highlighted in our local and national media. Our overall potential reach over the past year was approximately 1.1 billion. The combined stories in the past year, which were more than 700, had the potential to be read more than a billion times. That is because our local news coverage is often shared on national platforms such as MSN or Yahoo News. Our coverage is also 86% neutral or positive, which aligns with our goal of 85% neutral and positive sentiments.

Our earned media coverage has been focused on the future of COTA, namely LinkUS and other improvement projects such as McKinley and Rickenbacker. Key Leadership changes also generated news coverage. Community-focused initiatives such as waiving fares for veterans and voters on election day, our summer programs such as zoo bus and summer student pass, and our partnership with Columbus City Schools and MagnusMode to help families of all backgrounds navigate our system have all driven news coverage. COTA also received national news recognition for awards that showcase our equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Jeff showed some features that provided COTA with significant coverage this year. The summer launch of Zoo Bus is a popular morning-long segment on Fox 28 and demonstrates COTA's amazing partnership with the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. In addition, working with Columbus Business First to feature our new president/CEO, our 50th Anniversary in the Columbus Dispatch, and COTA's successful partnership with Columbus City Schools was covered by TV stations such as 10TV.

Community Engagement Update

Aslyne Rodriguez, Sr. Director, Regional Strategic Partnerships presented the Community Engagement update. Aslyne began her presentation by introducing the COTA Community Relations Team. Her team has a significant role in keeping COTA visible in the community. This year, the External Relations sponsorship budget has grown 23% in just new sponsorships. 29% of all sponsorships were given to causes aimed at empowering minorities and progressing social justice. Beyond sponsorships dollars, COTA celebrates the community efforts with tabling and activations as well. With the physical presence spanning over 30 community events, this allows patrons to experience COTA by seeing a vehicle, participating in transportation-related activities, and conversing with COTA staff about services.

The Community Relations team is behind the Experience LinkUS: West Broad in Augmented Reality Tours. These tours allow guests to visualize the future of LinkUS, which includes design concepts for bus rapid transit (BRT) vehicles and stations, micro-mobility hubs, and development potential. As of August 31st, 32 tours have been conducted, 382 guests tallied, and 125 completed surveys (33% response rate).

Aslyne concluded her presentation with updates on our Travel Training and Educational Pass Program. Since adding a Travel Trainer to the Community Relations Team, COTA has seen a significant increase in the request for training. Most of the training requests have come from HS and K-12 students. The Educational Pass Program currently helps 15 Columbus City Schools;



85,000 students get to class, after-school activities, and more at no cost to their families. COTA's long-standing partnership with The Ohio State University allows OSU students unlimited access to all COTA lines using their valid BuckID when enrolled. In 2023, Columbus State and Columbus Promise separately committed to helping their students get to campus. Their ridership and enrollment continue to grow.

Government Affairs and Grant Pursuits

Casey Blazer, External Relations Manager, and Kelsey Ellingsen, Director, Local Government Affairs, presented the update on the Government Affairs and Grants Pursuits. COTA has been busy in the State, Local, and Federal Governments. State government affairs included planning for the two-year transportation budget with a March 31, 2025 signing day. COTA applied for the Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership Program back in July and currently awaiting on award announcements. The application included the restoration of the late-night (midnight) lineup, the Mobility Center at Rickenbacker, and transit shelter purchases. COTA is currently awaiting the FY 26 applications to open this fall for the Ohio Transit Partnership Program (OTP). For November's committee, we are working with internal and external stakeholders to develop the public policy agenda to present to the board in January.

In the Federal Government Update, Deputy Secretary Polly Trottenberg joined Congresswoman Joyce Beatty back in April for the NAE press conference and bus tour. Acting Administrator Veronica Vanterpool visited our new McKinley facility in July to award COTA with a \$22.8M Low No Grant. Congressman Mike Carey visited COTA as well for an introductory meeting with COTA CEO Monica Tellez-Fowler.

Casey updated the committee on the grant funding awards for 2024 (thus far). COTA has currently received \$83.5 million in grant awards and counting. From the FTA, COTA has received grant awards totaling \$65.9M (three separate grants) and \$3.86M (two separate grants) from ODOT. COTA has submitted four other grant applications totaling the requested amount of nearly \$8 million.

Kelsey Ellingsen presented the Local Government Affairs updates. The COTA Advisory Panel has upcoming meetings this month and in November to focus on growth and member leadership. For External Relations' LinkUS engagement, Kelsey has presented for numerous city councils, including Bexley, Columbus, Worthington, and Franklin County Commissioners. There has been corridor engagement with the Mayors at each East Main Street Corridor Open House as well as ongoing intensive technical engagement. Kelsey highlighted engagement events for August and September. Including area rotary, Area Chamber Luncheons, and more.

LinkUs Update



Patrick Harris, VP, of External Relations, closed out the External Stakeholder Relations committee with the LinkUS Update. The LinkUS snapshot showed that the campaign impressions tripled from June to July. As we get closer to November, the increase in the media spend will help increase the frequency to keep COTA at the top of minds. From the 12 public engagement event sessions held in July, LinkUS received almost 7,000 engagement touchpoints. Through the regional engagement, the community has actively seen the LinkUS team at events such as Bexley’s Meet Your Neighbor, Grandview Height’s National Night Out, and the Central Community House Dinner.

Next month, there will be videos released that feature planned sidewalk improvement projects in 12 municipalities. Additionally, each council member is in the process of recording their videos about sidewalk improvement in their respective districts. Town halls are also being heavily promoted. Boosting each on one social media and preparing toolkits for each event that include social posts and an email marketing template for all partners to share on their channels.

To conclude the update, Patrick informed the committee how September and October will be LinkUS’s busiest paid media months. The diverse media plan centers on digital, with increased investments in out-of-home, radio, and broadcast to amplify awareness and reach more individuals as November approaches, maximizing the return on investment. October will focus more on video to align with the upcoming election. Video will feature prominently across multiple channels, complemented by enhanced visuals in display, social, and Google.

5. **OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was presented.

6. **ADJOURNMENT**

Upon a motion given by Chair Tolliver and seconded by Trustee Treneff, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM. The next External Stakeholder Relations Committee meeting is Tuesday, November 6, 2024, at 3:00 PM

Adopted:

January 14, 2025

Signed:

DocuSigned by:

Shannon Tolliver

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Chair, External Stakeholder Relations Committee

Attest:

DocuSigned by:

Monica Selby-Lovler

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President/CEO