

**COTA**



# **2024 COMMUNITY RELATIONS *IMPACT REPORT***

# A MESSAGE FROM COTA PRESIDENT/CEO **MONICA TÉLLEZ-FOWLER**



## SALUDOS A TODOS,

As we look back on an incredible year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the unwavering commitment and hard work that has driven COTA's success. This report highlights the significant strides we've made in strengthening connections with our community, improving accessibility and ensuring that the voices of Central Ohioans continue to shape the future of transit.

Thanks to the dedication of our Community Relations team and all of COTA's partners, we've made meaningful progress in ensuring that our services support both the daily needs and the long-term growth of our region. From expanding educational pass programs to enhancing accessibility initiatives, we are fostering a transit system that is truly inclusive and forward-thinking.

As we look to 2025, we are energized by the progress we've made and the opportunities that lie ahead. The work we're doing now will lay the foundation for a brighter, more connected future for everyone in Central Ohio.

## HASTA PRONTO,

*Monica*  
**President/CEO**



# INTRODUCING COTA'S **COMMUNITY RELATIONS TEAM**

Our Community Relations team exemplifies COTA's deep commitment to uplifting the Central Ohio community. With a passion for service and a dedication to building lasting relationships, they connect with local neighborhoods, businesses and organizations to create a transportation network that reflects the needs and values of our diverse community.



## **ASLYNE C. RODRIGUEZ**

*Sr. Director of Regional Strategic Partnerships*

- Strategic Partnerships
- Community Engagement
- External Affairs



## **ROBBIE BANKS**

*Director of Community Impact*

- Stakeholder Relationships
- LinkUS Projects/Program Development and Management



## **KIMBERLY COLE**

*Community Relations Manager*

- Community Partnerships
- Event Sponsorships
- Bus Pass Programs



## **CORRINA HYDE**

*Social Services Program Manager*

- Travel Planning
- Mobility and Accessibility Services
- Community Outreach



## **CLAIRE JENNINGS**

*Regional Project Manager*

- Regional Collaborations
- Strategic Partnerships

# OUR IMPACT BETTERING OUR COMMUNITY

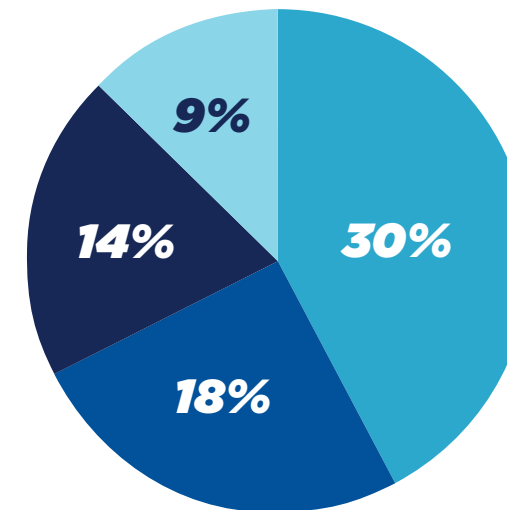
COTA is an essential thread in the fabric of Central Ohio, fostering connections that go beyond transportation. The work of our Community Relations team ensures that every voice is heard, every need is understood and every journey matters. By listening, supporting and adapting, we don't just move every life forward – we strengthen the communities we proudly serve.



# DRIVING IMPACT THROUGH SPONSORSHIPS

## SUPPORTING LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

In 2024, COTA's Community Relations team proudly expanded its sponsorship budget to \$125,000, representing an impressive 35% growth in new sponsorships. This growth reflects our unwavering commitment to supporting initiatives that create meaningful change and foster a more inclusive, equitable community.



### TOTAL SPONSORSHIPS:

- Dedicated to empowering minorities and advancing social justice.
- Supported youth- and education-focused projects, laying the foundation for brighter futures.
- Uplifted women through organizations and initiatives dedicated to their success.
- Provided resources and opportunities for immigrants, refugees and New Americans, helping them thrive in Central Ohio.

### COTA IS HONORED TO PARTNER WITH ORGANIZATIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE



# CONNECTING IN THE COMMUNITY

## ENGAGING WITH RESIDENTS THROUGH EVENTS AND OUTREACH

COTA's commitment to community extends far beyond sponsorship dollars and bus passes. By creating meaningful, in-person connections, we proudly celebrate the efforts of organizations and individuals shaping Central Ohio.

In 2024, COTA had a physical presence at more than 40 community events, including Columbus Recreation and Parks' Cap City Festivals, the City of Columbus' Rise Up CBUS and the YWCA's Racial Justice Roundtable. These tablings allowed us to meet people where they are, share valuable resources and support vital community initiatives. COTA also elevated community

engagement through seven enhanced tabling events — called activations — that offered dynamic, hands-on experiences for over 150,000 attendees. Customers explored COTA vehicles, participated in transportation-focused activities and engaged directly with staff to learn about our services, programs and initiatives.



**BY BEING PRESENT, ACCESSIBLE AND INTERACTIVE, COTA CONTINUES TO DEEPEN CONNECTIONS AND INSPIRE CONVERSATIONS THAT MOVE CENTRAL OHIO FORWARD.**

# EMPOWERING ACCESS FOR ALL

## EXPANDING REACH THROUGH NONPROFIT PARTNERSHIPS

Nonprofits are the heart of our community, tirelessly working to uplift and support those who need it most. At COTA, we are honored to partner with these organizations, providing the vital transportation access that helps make their impact possible.

In 2024, COTA proudly provided approximately 13,000 one-day promotional bus passes to nonprofits across Central Ohio. Nonprofits distributed these passes to help individuals and families access vital services, including healthcare, education and employment opportunities. Through these partnerships, COTA ensures that transportation is a bridge to the support and resources people need to thrive.

Through the Accessible Healthcare Initiative, COTA deepened its commitment to supporting nonprofits in their mission to serve. With the 2020 Ohio General Fund's Ohio Transportation Partnership Program grant funding, we distributed over 93,000 one-day and nearly 12,000 31-day bus passes to more than 100 healthcare providers and nonprofit organizations. Together, we connected residents to life-saving healthcare services and demonstrated the power of partnerships in transforming lives.

Every bus pass represents more than a ride — it's a step toward empowerment, equity and opportunity. By partnering with nonprofits, COTA is proud to ensure that the communities we serve have access to the resources they need to thrive. These collaborations reflect our shared commitment to building a stronger, more connected Central Ohio.



**“WE ARE GRATEFUL TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT CLIENTS WITH TRANSPORTATION NEEDS TO ACCESS HEALTHY FOOD AND HEALTHCARE SERVICES.”**

— Nancy DeRoberts-Moore, Executive Director at Bishop Griffin Resource Center

# CONNECTING COMMUNITIES, TRANSFORMING TRANSIT

## BUILDING SUPPORT FOR LINKUS ACROSS CENTRAL OHIO

The passage of LinkUS in November 2024 was a game-changing moment for Central Ohio, and COTA's Community Relations team played a pivotal role in making it possible. Through town halls, accessibility meetings, stakeholder engagements and innovative augmented reality tours of the West Broad Street Corridor, we brought the community along on this journey. Our dedication to educating and connecting with residents was a driving force behind LinkUS becoming a reality, ensuring a brighter, more connected future for all.



# BRINGING THE FUTURE TO LIFE THE LINKUS AUGMENTED REALITY EXPERIENCE

From April to October 2024, COTA unveiled the future of the West Broad Street Corridor in a truly innovative way, offering stakeholders an immersive augmented reality experience. Through this cutting-edge technology, participants could virtually visit three key COTA stops, witnessing firsthand the potential of station enhancements, economic development opportunities, protected bike lanes and more — right at their fingertips.



Altogether, we hosted 600 stakeholders and conducted 50 tours, fueling strong community engagement. An impressive 71% of participants reported feeling “very knowledgeable” about LinkUS after the tour, demonstrating the program’s effectiveness in building understanding and support. The response to the experience was overwhelmingly positive, with 178 post-tour surveys completed — reflecting a 30% response rate — and numerous requests for LinkUS listening sessions, underscoring the growing excitement and demand for continued involvement.

### EXPERIENCE THE FUTURE THROUGH AUGMENTED REALITY

Take a self-guided tour of the upcoming West Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit Corridor! **Scan the QR codes at each stop** to explore planned enhancements firsthand through augmented reality.



WEST BROAD STREET  
& WESTLAND MALL  
COLUMBUS, OH 43228



WEST BROAD STREET  
& SOUTH BELLE STREET  
COLUMBUS, OH 43215



# SHAPING THE FUTURE OF TRANSIT IN CENTRAL OHIO

## ENGAGING COMMUNITIES AND BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR LINKUS

COTA's community engagement efforts throughout the LinkUS initiative were transformative, showcasing a strong commitment to ensuring every voice in Central Ohio was heard and valued.



### COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

COTA's commitment to community involvement shone through in the January and April stakeholder meetings at the The Reeb Center and Linden Community Center. These meetings were more than just updates — they were critical conversations about how LinkUS will directly impact the future of Central Ohio. From housing and economic development to improved sidewalks and bikeways, the discussions brought stakeholders face to face with the exciting possibilities ahead. The opportunity to hear directly from the community, to gather ideas and feedback, ensured the plans for LinkUS were rooted in what matters most to the people it serves.



### TOWN HALL MEETINGS

The summer and fall LinkUS Town Hall Meetings were pivotal moments for community engagement, offering residents the chance to learn about the future of transit in Central Ohio and share their thoughts directly with key leaders. Hosted at West High School, IMPACT Community Action, Carriage Place Community Center, Northland Library and Reynoldsburg Library, these gatherings allowed participants to hear from COTA, MORPC, the City of Columbus and local officials about the LinkUS initiative and how it will impact the region. They also provided an opportunity for community members to ask questions, provide feedback and actively shape the future of transit in Central Ohio.



### ACCESSIBILITY TOWN HALLS

In October, COTA hosted three Accessibility Town Halls, focusing on creating a transit system that truly serves everyone. These sessions were centered on making Central Ohio's transit system accessible and inclusive for people of all abilities. They provided a platform for customers, advocates and community agencies to voice their needs, share experiences and help shape the future of accessible transit. The result was more than just feedback — it was a powerful reminder that an inclusive transportation system is crucial for fostering an equitable community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

# EMPOWERING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH TRAVEL TRAINING

## HELPING CENTRAL OHIOANS CONFIDENTLY NAVIGATE TRANSIT

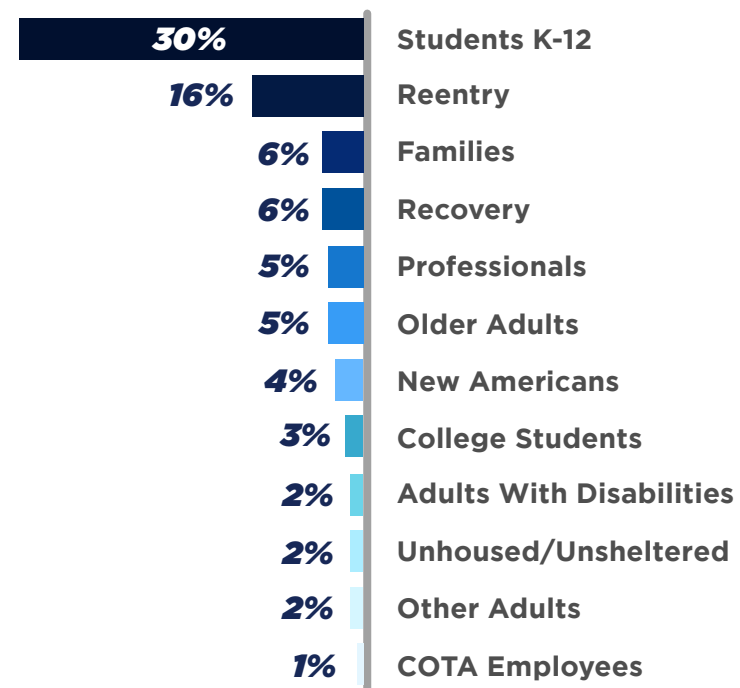
COTA's Travel Training program is a vital resource that empowers customers to ride independently and confidently, helping them navigate transit with ease. Through personalized, hands-on sessions, our dedicated Travel Trainers provide a supportive, safe environment for individuals and groups alike. Whether through virtual or in-person presentations, customers gain the knowledge and skills needed to use public transit confidently, with field training that includes both out-of-service vehicle practice and real-world experience in the community.



The program serves a diverse range of customers, including local schools, The Ohio State University, Franklin County Community-Based Correctional Facility, Basecamp, CRIS and the Age-Friendly Innovation Center. These collaborations ensure Travel Training reaches individuals of all ages and backgrounds throughout the community.

In 2024, the program had a remarkable impact, reaching 5,249 individuals through 143 sessions — an inspiring 34% increase from previous years. The program continues to make significant strides, empowering more individuals to experience the freedom and independence that comes with using public transit. This growth is a testament to COTA's ongoing commitment to serving the diverse needs of the community.

### 2024 TRAVEL TRAINING AUDIENCES



# EXPANDING ACCESS THROUGH PASS PROGRAMS

## PROVIDING AFFORDABLE TRANSIT OPTIONS FOR ALL

COTA's pass programs are transforming the way Central Ohio moves, creating opportunities for thousands in our community to reach their full potential. By removing transportation barriers, these initiatives empower students, workers and residents to access the education, employment and resources they need to succeed.

Whether it's getting to school, an internship or a job, these programs are the bridge that connects individuals to their goals. The partnerships with local schools, universities and employers illustrate COTA's commitment to building a more connected, inclusive and thriving community where everyone has the opportunity to advance.

These efforts are about improving lives, creating opportunities and fostering success. With COTA's pass programs, the path forward is clear, and the future is bright.

**321,480**

TRIPS BY 13,000+ Columbus City School students

**102,487**

TRIPS BY Columbus Promise scholars and students from Columbus State Community College, Columbus College of Art & Design (CCAD) and Capital University

**610,722**

TRIPS BY 50,000+ Ohio State University students through BuckID

**150,350** SHORT NORTH C-PASS TRIPS

**433,933** DOWNTOWN C-PASS TRIPS



As we reflect on the outstanding efforts of the Community Relations team in 2024, it's clear that dedication to connecting with and empowering our communities makes a lasting impact. Through meaningful collaborations, engaging events and a genuine commitment to listening, we've transformed the way Central Ohioans interact with public transit. Every meeting, every partnership, every conversation has played a vital role in building a stronger, more connected community.

Looking ahead to 2025, the Community Relations team will continue to lead the charge in deepening those connections, amplifying the voices of the communities we serve and ensuring that transit remains a powerful tool for opportunity and equity. The future is bright, and with our passion and commitment, we will continue to move lives forward, one conversation at a time.



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