



COTA



COTA

Strategic *Plan*

2026-2030



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The Central Ohio Transit Authority stands at a defining moment for our organization and our region. **The 2026-2030 Strategic Plan is both a roadmap and a commitment to our customers, our employees and our community.** It reflects the values that guide our work and the vision that drives us forward: providing safe, reliable and convenient connections for a growing Central Ohio.

This plan builds upon the foundation of ***Moving Every Life Forward***, a purpose that emerged directly from the voices of our employees and community partners. Through months of collaboration, candid dialogue and shared aspiration, we identified the measurable outcomes that will define success: **customer experience, employee engagement, community value and fiscal responsibility.** These outcomes are not just metrics; they are promises of accountability and transparency to those we serve.

The process of developing this plan was informed by our **most ambitious initiative yet: LinkUS, the region's vision for a modern, connected and accessible mobility network.** LinkUS reminded us that transportation is about more than buses and stops; it's about connecting people to opportunity. It inspired us to think bigger, plan smarter and align every investment with the needs of a rapidly growing region.

Together with our LinkUS partners—the City of Columbus, Franklin County Board of Commissioners, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission and the Columbus Partnership—we are preparing for the future by reimagining mobility and investing in the infrastructure that will move our region forward.

We are deeply grateful to our Board of Trustees for their participation and guidance, to our community partners for their insight and to every COTA employee whose dedication makes our mission possible every day. This plan belongs to all of us. **It is our shared commitment to a stronger, more connected and more prosperous Central Ohio, where mobility truly moves every life forward.**

Monica Téllez-Fowler
President/CEO
Central Ohio Transit Authority

Sean Mentel
Chair
COTA Board of Trustees



COTA's Why

It's about more than transportation; it's about connection, access and progress for every person and community we serve.



MISSION, VISION, VALUES

Every organization needs a clear sense of why — a shared purpose that inspires action and guides decisions. For COTA, that purpose came into focus through honest conversation.

In one-on-one interviews with 25 leaders and managers, a common theme echoed across every department: an unwavering commitment to moving every life forward.

That simple phrase — spoken by employees before it was ever written — captures the essence of COTA's role in Central Ohio. It's about more than transportation; it's about connection, access and progress for every person and community served.

Grounded in that shared understanding, COTA's leadership refined the agency's Mission, Vision and Values to align words with purpose — defining not only what we do, but why it matters.

MISSION

Moving Every Life
forward

VISION

Safe, reliable and convenient connections
for our growing community.

CORE VALUES



SAFETY

We prioritize safety in all decision making.



EMPOWERMENT

We believe everyone should be seen, heard, valued and empowered to succeed.



ACCOUNTABILITY

We take ownership of our actions.



TEAMWORK

We are better when we work together.



SERVICE

We are committed to a customer-first mindset.



LINKUS

Building a Connected Future

LinkUS is the natural extension of this Strategic Plan. This historic initiative is the bridge between our long-term vision and the daily experience of our customers. The priorities in our plan align directly with the goals of LinkUS, creating a regional mobility network that connects more people to more opportunities, more reliably.

Central Ohio is one of the fastest growing regions in the country, on track to reach 3.15 million residents by 2050. That’s nearly a million more people over the next 25 years. To address this growth, COTA is modernizing and expanding our transportation system through LinkUS. This transportation and growth plan — collaboratively created with the City of Columbus, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and the Columbus Partnership — will expand COTA transit service and make historic investments into sidewalks, bikeways and trails throughout the region to create more walkable, connected communities and increase opportunity for all.

LinkUS is Central Ohio’s vision for a modern, connected and accessible mobility network, one that ensures every resident and visitor can reach opportunity safely and efficiently. Led by COTA and its regional partners, LinkUS will deliver five Bus Rapid Transit corridors, improved local bus lines, up to eight new COTA//Plus micro-transit zones and more than 500 miles of sidewalks, bikeways and trails across the region by 2050.

Each investment, whether in faster travel times, upgraded stations, or real-time technology, is designed to make travel easier, more reliable and more comfortable for everyone. Accessibility, affordability and safety are built into every aspect of the plan. For our communities, LinkUS creates value far beyond mobility. It supports economic growth, spurs housing development, connects workers to jobs and strengthens neighborhoods through strategic design and public space improvements.

COTA is committed to delivering LinkUS with fiscal discipline and transparency. Every dollar will be invested strategically, with measurable outcomes and regular reporting to the public. Through LinkUS, COTA and its partners are not just expanding transit; we are shaping a region where mobility fuels opportunity, access and shared prosperity for all.

This Modernized Transit System Will Include:

- **45% more** COTA service by 2050
- **New and improved** sidewalks, bike lanes, trails and crosswalks
- Construction of COTA **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines**
- **Bus station improvements**, including microtransit options and amenities like platform-level boarding, heated platforms to melt snow and more



STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Beyond defining COTA’s Mission and Vision, the strategic planning process delivered a practical framework for action — anchored by measurable Success Outcomes, a tactical Work Plan and a Performance Scorecard to track progress.

Success Outcomes and Objectives

Informed by COTA’s Mission and Vision, the Success Outcomes define the overarching, measurable goals that the agency will strive to achieve over the next five years. These outcomes establish what success looks like for COTA and provide a unifying framework that aligns the Board, employees and community around shared priorities and measurable results.

Work Plan

The Work Plan translates the Success Outcomes into clear, actionable steps. It outlines the strategies and tactics that will advance each goal and identifies the owners and team members responsible for executing and overseeing every element of the plan.

This accountability-driven structure ensures progress is measurable, responsibilities are clear and every initiative directly supports COTA’s long-term success.

COTA 360 Performance Scorecard

To ensure accountability and transparency, COTA will begin tracking progress through its new Performance Scorecard: COTA 360.

The Scorecard measures results against each Success Outcomes and highlights achievements, challenges and areas for improvement.

Reported internally, to the Board of Trustees and to the community, the Scorecard provides a clear, consistent view of how well the agency is advancing toward its goals. The scorecard demonstrates COTA’s ongoing commitment to performance, progress and public trust.

THE PLANNING TIMELINE

APRIL 2025

A retreat with the COTA Board of Trustees and leadership team launched the strategic planning process, creating a space to align on what success looks like, identify challenges and clarify the Board’s role in shaping the plan. At the same time, one-on-one interviews with COTA leaders and managers captured candid insights into the agency’s strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for growth.

MAY-JUNE 2025

COTA’s leadership team participated in workshops to:

- Review and revise COTA’s Mission, Vision and Values
- Define and prioritize Success Outcomes
- Conduct a SWOT analysis tied to COTA’s Success Outcomes
- Begin developing the work plan and performance scorecard

JULY 2025

Meetings were held with various COTA divisions for a deeper understanding of the Strategic Plan and its alignment with work planning and COTA’s existing annual planning process. The most important themes from past COTA surveys and community conversations were highlighted for consideration as teams embarked upon planning projects, initiatives and tactics for the coming years.

JULY-OCTOBER 2025

The COTA leadership team continued the refinement of their organizational objectives and the work plan, identifying and prioritizing projects and initiatives in alignment with the COTA’s existing annual planning process and ensuring alignment with COTA’s identified success outcomes and organizational objectives.

NOVEMBER 2025

The Strategic Plan was completed and presented to committees of the COTA Board of Trustees.

DECEMBER 2025

The Strategic Plan was adopted by the COTA Board of Trustees.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Board & Stakeholder Engagement

A retreat of the Board of Trustees at the beginning of the strategic planning effort provided the opportunity to describe the Strategic Planning process and gather feedback from the Board about their vision for success. An update was provided to the Board’s Strategic & Operational Planning Committee in July.

In addition, four external stakeholder groups were held to gather feedback from the community, structured around the idea of **“Four Pillars of Transportation Access.”**

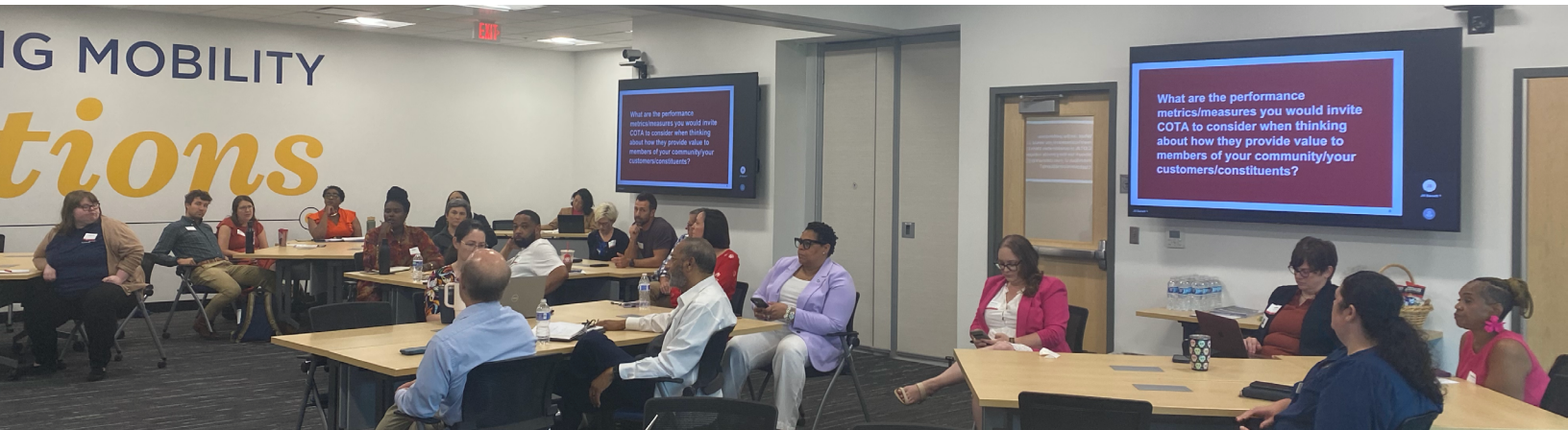
The groups brought together more than 40 external stakeholders, identified by COTA, from the areas of Housing, Healthcare, Education and Employment.

The groups were asked to consider what success looks like for the organization, what communities value most in the services provided by COTA and to provide their perspectives on the greatest challenges COTA will face over the next five years.

Key themes which emerged and helped to guide the strategic vision include:

- Delivering service excellence today through consistency, on-time performance, reliability and access
- An emphasis on safety and security
- Delivering the promise of LinkUS





Voices from the Board of Trustees and the community, captured as part of the Strategic Planning process, highlighted the following desired priorities:

What does success look like for COTA today?

- On-time service delivery
- Service consistency and reliability
- Adequate resources and staffing
- Measuring what matters (Key Performance Indicators)
- Fiduciary responsibility and success
- Delivering the promise (LinkUS)

What does the community value in the services COTA provides?

- Reliability of service
- Access to places and opportunities
- Safety and security
 - Onboard COTA vehicles
 - Infrastructure to reach COTA safely, like sidewalks and lighting
 - Operator security
 - Perceptions and first-time hesitancy

What is the greatest challenge COTA faces over the next 5 years?

- Funding uncertainties
- Delivering on LinkUS
- Regional growth and serving a growing region
- Customer preferences
- Potential ridership declines
- Technology disruptions to the service model and adapting to evolving opportunities

SUCCESS OUTCOMES

Success Outcomes are clearly defined, measurable and prioritized goals that guide COTA in achieving its vision of providing safe, reliable and convenient connections for a growing Central Ohio.

To ensure alignment across the organization, COTA's leadership identified four key categories that define what success will look like over the next five years, along with key objectives in each success area:

1

Customer Experience

Delivering an exceptional experience for customers.

Objectives:

- Build and strengthen customer trust by improving service reliability and on-time performance
- Expand access through more frequent and extended service
- Prioritize ease and convenience in the customer journey
- Ensure high standards of safety, cleanliness and comfort

2

Employee Engagement

Fostering a culture where employees are empowered and valued.

Objectives:

- Model COTA's Core Values: Safety, Empowerment, Accountability, Teamwork and Service
- Invest in employees' professional development and career growth
- Cultivate trust through communication, inclusion and appreciation

3

Community Value

Demonstrating the broader impact of transit on quality of life, access and regional growth.

Objectives:

- Deliver the promise of LinkUS to Central Ohio
- Enhance engagement, education and awareness through relationship management
- Collaborate with community and regional partners to close gaps in access for under-served communities

4

Fiscal Responsibility

Ensuring long-term sustainability through sound fiscal management and strategic investment of resources.

Objectives:

- Uphold fiscal responsibility and efficiency within COTA's funding framework
- Optimize resources to drive Success Outcomes
- Increase revenue streams

COTA 360 SCORECARD

SUCCESS OUTCOMES	POINTS PRIORITIZATION	SUCCESS KPI	SUPPORTING KPIs
Customer Experience	35	NPS (fixed route, COTA//Plus, Mainstream)	Net Promoter Score (fixed route) Net Promoter Score (COTA//Plus) Net Promoter Score (Mainstream) On-Time Performance (fixed route) Service Reliability (fixed route)
Employee Engagement	34	Employee Engagement Index	Employee Engagement Index Employee Trust Index
Community Value	21	Community Value Score	Community Value Score Service Expansion
Fiscal Responsibility	10	Cost per Hour (fixed route, COTA//Plus, Mainstream)	Cost per Hour (fixed route) Cost per Hour (COTA//Plus) Cost per Hour (Mainstream)



COTA Leadership Team

Monica Téllez-Fowler	President/CEO
Garth Weithman	Deputy CEO
Nikki Brandon	Chief Human Resources Officer
Patrick Harris	Chief External Relations Officer
Earl Jackson	Chief Financial Officer
Sophia Mohr	Chief Innovation and Technology Officer
Tanya Salyers	Chief of Staff
Alicia Walker	Chief Operating Officer
Christina Wendell	Chief Legal/General Counsel

COTA Board of Trustees

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MOVING EVERY LIFE
FORWARD

4COTA