



Strategic and Operational Planning Committee Minutes

Wednesday, November 5, 2025 at 10:00 AM

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

1. Call to Order

COTA Board of Trustees Chair Sean Mentel called the November 5, 2025 Strategic and Operational Planning Committee meeting to order at 10:02 am.

2. Roll Call

Board Members Present

Sean Mentel, Board Chair

Jay Deis, Trustee

Mallory Donaldson, Trustee

Stephen Sayre, Trustee

Board Member Excused

Trudy Bartley, Chair

Additional Board Members in attendance

Matt Starr, Trustee

3. Approval of Strategic and Operational Planning Committee Minutes

A. September 11, 2025 Strategic and Operational Planning Committee Minutes

Trustee Jay Deis moved to approve the September 11, 2025 Strategic and Operational Planning Committee meeting minutes, seconded by Trustee Mallory Donaldson. Motion carried.

4. New Business

A. Proposed Operating, Capital, and Transit Supportive Infrastructure Budgets - Earl Jackson, COTA Chief Financial Officer

Chief Financial Officer Earl Jackson presented the 2025 operating budget forecast, noting that expenses are projected to come in two percent below budget; the 2026 proposed operating budget, and, the 2026-2030 proposed Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Mr. Jackson shared the planning process, federal impact and economic indicators, noting that the economic outlook is strongly tied to the uncertainty of the execution of tariffs and other policies, and external shocks. Mr. Jackson reviewed the drivers behind the proposed 2026 budget's increase, which includes wages, new positions related to LinkUS, fuel, utilities, and operationalizing the Mobility Center at Rickenbacker (MCAR), and shared the projected operating revenue sources. Mr. Jackson went over the 2026 priorities

and focus areas, which includes how COTA will be advancing the LinkUS initiative; improving customer experience and system safety; activating the strategic plan; opening and operationalizing MCAR, and, carrying out collective bargaining negotiations. Mr. Jackson went over the proposed allocation of sales tax and farebox revenue, as well as the proposed 2026-2030 CIP and Transit Supportive Infrastructure Grant Program priorities. The goal is to have the final budget resolutions presented at the December 10, 2025 Board of Trustees meeting.

B. Vehicle Maintenance Assessment Update - Gerald Madore, EFESO Management Consultants

EFESO Management Consultants partner Gerald Madore presented a summary of activities and deliverables his company carried out, including 34 onsite interviews, field observations, a gap analysis, an improvement timeline and a comprehensive roadmap to address issues and allow COTA's vehicle maintenance to keep pace with the organization's expected growth. Recommendations included reducing technician overtime, boosting technician productivity, reducing the bus spare ration and spare parts usage, reducing the backlog and boosting bus reliability. Mr. Madore focused on eight major categories as opportunities for action, identifying activities that can be quickly implemented, as well as actions that need time to implement. He provided a timeline, cost and resources needed to move to implementation phase, which is proposed to last through June 2027. Mr. Madore said EFESO's estimated Return on Investment—1.5 (or \$3.6M)—is conservative.

C. LinkUS Update - Dorinda McCombs, COTA Chief LinkUS Program Officer

Chief LinkUS Program Officer Dorinda McCombs provided an update on the LinkUS Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) work, noting progress on traffic, stormwater retention, NEPA, schedule, and cost estimate work for the West Broad, East Main, and Northwest corridors. She said for the West Broad corridor, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is analyzing interchange operations studies and COTA received a Documented Categorical Exclusion (DCE) from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), indicating the project has no significant environmental impacts. Ms. McCombs shared schedules and risk review for the corridors.

D. Draft 2026-2030 Strategic Plan – Ehren Bingaman, TransPro Managing Principal

TransPro Managing Principal Ehren Bingaman presented the draft 2026-2030 Strategic Plan, noting the planning process, efforts to gather Board and stakeholder input, and timeline. Mr. Bingaman shared that the organization's mission statement, vision statement, and core values went through a refresh/reframing process. He discussed the proposed success outcomes in the

areas of customer experience; employee engagement; community value, and fiscal responsibility. An organizational scorecard with objectives and 2026 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each area was presented, which can be used to monitor progress. The goal is to have the strategic plan adopted at the December 10, 2025 Board of Trustees meeting.

5. Other Business

No other business was brought before the Committee.

6. Adjournment

Trustee Deis moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Trustee Donaldson. Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 am.

Adopted:

December 3, 2025

Signed:

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Chair, Strategic and Operational Planning Committee

Attest:

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President/CEO