



## OPTA Executive Committee Meeting Minutes May 14, 2024

### **OFFICERS**

Howard Stewart, SEAT	President
Andy Volenik, Delaware Co Transit	Vice President
Bob Ruzinsky, Dayton RTA	Secretary Treasurer
Mary Habig, NCAT	Vice President Small Urban/Rural Systems
Melissa Leckrone, Perry Co.	Vice President Mobility Manager Members
Blair Taseff, TESCO	Vice President Associate Members
Kevin Hardesty, GILLIG	Vice President Associate Members

### **Emeritus Representatives**

India Birdsong, Greater Cleveland RTA  
Kirt Conrad, Stark Area RTA  
Darryl Haley, Southwest Ohio RTA  
Patrick Harris, Central Ohio TA  
Laura Koprowski, Toledo Area RTA  
Claudia Amrhein, PARTA  
Dawn Distler, Akron METRO

### **OPTA Staff**

Matt Carle, Executive Director  
Elle Crader, Executive Administrator

### **Presenter Attendees**

Andy Bowers, Park Street Consulting

### **Howard Stewart, SEAT**

Mr. Howard Stewart called the meeting of the OPTA Executive Committee to order on May 14, 2024. He motioned to have the minutes from the February 2024 Executive Committee meeting accepted. Darryl Haley made the motion, which was seconded by Bob Ruzinsky. All attendees then voted in favor by saying "aye." He then turned the meeting over to Mr. Matt Carle.

### **Matt Carle, OPTA**

Mr. Matt Carle began by stating he would give an Executive Director update and then a Government Relations update.

Mr. Carle started his remarks by stating Ohio Needs Transit Conference & OPTA Expo 2024 will be held November 18-20, 2024 with several positive changes. The ticketing platform for the conference launched in April and members are encouraged to purchase their tickets soon. OPTA has made changes to the schedule to shorten the last day of the conference due to attendees wanting to get on the road earlier and accounting for the late night event at Howl at the Moon. Additionally, OPTA is refreshing the Expo to be a 70's themed party inside the expo hall with a live band, food and other games. Guests are encouraged to wear a 70's themed costume.

Next, the educational committee has been meeting to put together education sessions for the conference. Proposals will be accepted through June 7<sup>th</sup> and OPTA encourages their members to submit ideas and panel discussions of topics they would like to see this year.

Ohio Loves Transit Week 2025 is slated for February 9-15<sup>th</sup> with Ohio Loves Transit Day being February 11<sup>th</sup>. OPTA will once again host a lobby day in Columbus on the 11<sup>th</sup> ending with an evening legislative reception at the Statehouse. Legislative calendars have not been released for the week of February 11<sup>th</sup> but OPTA hopes the legislature will be in session.

Finally, survey results were in from the survey OPTA released to members gauging their interest in attending the annual OPTA conference outside of Columbus. Mr. Carle stated that a few years ago, OPTA hosted the conference in Akron and received widely negative feedback. Regarding the survey, respondents were open to attending the conference outside of Columbus, but they would not drive more than two hours to the conference. This poses a struggle for OPTA as that alienates 2/3 of the membership.

Mr. Carle then transitioned to his government affairs update. Mr. Carle stated that OPTA is not necessarily monitoring legislation at this time but monitoring situations as the infighting is at an all-time high. There is a group of individuals in the House that are still attempting to unseat the current Speaker and make it difficult for any legislation to be passed. Mr. Carle stated this situation is important to OPTA because Speaker Stephens has always been helpful and supportive of public transit. Mr. Carle then turned to Mr. Andy Bowers for additional insight.

#### **Andy Bowers, OPTA**

Mr. Bowers stated that he has received several questions as to why Speaker Stephens continues to remain in the fight if this is such a tumultuous term. He said it is because Speaker Stephens is concerned about his staff, knowing that if he were to step down, his staff would be replaced by a new Speaker. Regardless, it appears that Speaker Stephens time is limited and is not likely to remain Speaker after January 2025.

#### **Matt Carle, OPTA**

Mr. Carle added that Sen. Matt Huffman is seeking to become the new Speaker in the Ohio House. Sen. Huffman has traditionally been supportive of public transit, so his Speakership would seemingly be positive for OPTA. However, if elected, Sen. Huffman would be an eight-year Speaker which causes pause for some members. Additionally, Sen. Rob McColey is likely to become the next Senate President. Historically, Sen. McColey has not been a strong supporter of public transit because he is in an area that does not have a large public transit presence. This puts a larger emphasis on the need for OPTA members to cultivate relationships with Senators in their district.

Next, Mr. Carle stated OPTA is monitoring the state budget numbers, which are beginning to concern individuals. For the last three months, state revenue is down and has left the state with a \$600M budget shortfall. Mr. Carle believes that the budget was structurally imbalanced because tax cuts were passed without offsetting the tax cuts with spending cuts. OPTA is monitoring this situation because we do not want the legislature to cut transit funding due to the reduced income.

#### **Laura Koprowski, TARTA**

Ms. Koprowski stated she was grateful for the insight Matt gave on the upcoming budget. However, she asked that OPTA work to get all public transit advocates on board with the same messaging and asks for public transit so that their requests don't undermine the work that OPTA is doing. Mr. Carle agreed.

**Howard Stewart, SEAT**

Mr. Stewart thanked Mr. Carle and turned it over to Mr. Ruzinsky for the finance update.

**Bob Ruzinsky, Dayton RTA**

Mr. Ruzinsky stated the financials were in a great place with positive cash flow and adherence to OPTA's budget. He noted that membership invoices were being paid with just a few left to collect, which is great news for OPTA.

**Howard Stewart, SEAT**

Mr. Stewart thanked Mr. Ruzinsky and turned it over to committee chairs for reports from those present. There were no reports given.

**Howard Stewart, SEAT**

Mr. Stewart thanked everyone for attending and said he wanted to remind everyone about the OPTA Education Committee that had diligently been meeting to plan for the conference and urged agencies to send in their ideas for sessions if they had any. He stated he had received several questions from other rural agencies that would like guidance on ADA compliance and thought that would be a good topic to have at the conference. Mr. Stewart mentioned the next meeting will be June 11<sup>th</sup> at 10:30AM. Mr. Stewart adjourned the meeting.