



**MEETING: EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

**DATE: TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2021**

**TIME: 4:00 - 5:00 PM**

**LOCATION: VIA WEBEX**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Landino called the March 16, 2021 Meeting of the External Stakeholder Relations Committee to order at 4:03 PM.

**2. ROLL CALL**

**Committee Members Present**

Amy Landino, Chair  
Jennifer Gallagher  
Timothy Skinner

**Committee Members Absent**

Trudy Bartley

**3. APPROVAL OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

Trustee Skinner motioned to approve the January 12, 2021 External Stakeholder Relations Committee minutes. Trustee Gallagher seconded the motion. Motion carries.

**4. NEW BUSINESS**

Emille Williams, Deputy CEO, introduced Monica Jones, Chief Equity Officer to the committee. He noted that Monica brings over two decades of EDI experience to COTA. Monica introduced herself to the committee and told the group that she wants to take EDI from theory to practical application. She will accomplish this work by ensuring EDI is the driving force behind COTA in all areas.

Jeff Pullin, Public Relations Manager, presented on Traditional Media Metrics. COTA's earned media targets are local and state media, national/internal media and trade media. COTA enjoyed an 82% increase in news coverage from 2019-2020. He noted that COTA achieved this increase by increasing COTA's reach, making big announcements (i.e. APTA #1 Award and Waycare Partnership) and all the service changes related to the pandemic. He continued that COTA saw a 22% increase in coverage in the Columbus Dispatch from 2019-2020 and that COTA continues to see an increase of positive news coverage.



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Jeff noted that COTA received significant national media coverage in 2020, including TIME and AARP magazines. Each publication highlighted a COTA Operator and their experience during COVID as an essential frontline worker.

Elspeth Paige-Sack, COTA Marketing Consultant, presented on Earned and Paid Media Metrics for COTA. Elspeth noted that when she and her team started working with COTA and Dr. Alexis Yamokoski, they were looking for ways in which to drive engagement and transition the ways Central Ohio viewed COTA. The team leaned on the five-year strategic plan and how they could incorporate that into COTA's social media, especially as an innovator, and mobility solutions provider focusing on people.

In 2020, Elspeth noted her team wanted to use COTA social media channels as a communication with our customers. The Customer Information Center specialists were trained to support customers via social media and COTA moved from a 22-hour response time to less than 30-minute response time on Facebook. Customers now see COTA's social media as a place they can come to in order to get answers, learn and engage.

From 2019-2020, COTA saw the following increases in social media: 60% increase in rate of engagement per impressions on Facebook, 39% increase in engagements on Instagram, 115% increase in net audience growth on Twitter and 32% increase in content on LinkedIn. She noted that this increase was mainly organic and not paid.

Elspeth continued with a review of COTA//Plus impressions and engagement. She informed the Committee that the market strategy was to target people who were looking for mobility solutions, whether that be Uber, Lyft or other options. She reported a 900% increase in COTA//Plus app downloads from Q2 to Q4 of 2020.

Elspeth also discussed the Return to Fares Campaign that utilized top digital channels and networks from December 15 – January 31, 2021 to target audiences based on geographic, demographic, behavioral and interest-based data with image-based ads and clear messaging about the upcoming reinstatement of fares. The campaign resulted in over 4 million impressions and over 20,000 interactions resulting in a smooth transition back to fares for COTA and its customers.

Kim Sharp, Senior Director, Development presented on COTA's partnership with Columbus City Schools. She noted that COTA and CCS have been in conversation for some time discussing how CCS is handling transportation with social distancing measures and how COTA could potentially assist.

COTA completed data analysis to understand which lines, which schools and how it made sense to create a program that worked for everyone. Through August 25, 2021, 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders will have access to the COTA transit system as a supplement to the CCS transportation services. These passes are available for students seven days a week during COTA's standard operating hours.



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COTA was able to work with community partners to include the students in a C-Pass like program. The program is run through a QR code on their smart phone or a student issued ID that includes a magnetic strip they can use at fare boxes. Kim noted that travel training is ongoing with CCS staff and student ambassadors to ensure the students know how to ride COTA. COTA created both digital and physical maps for the students to use so they understand exactly where to get on and off the bus. Her team also created regional maps to help students understand how they can access after school resources.

Q1: Chair Landino: Since traditional school bus operators are classified as essential workers to receive their vaccines, has this affected our COTA Operators as well?

A1: Aslyne Rodriguez: The short answer is yes, that allowed us to qualify. I will say that our Operators now qualify for vaccines and we've been able to get 114 of those individuals that wanted to get vaccinated scheduled for the J&J shot. Our goal was to talk to Governor DeWine and say we are priority out of the gate.

Q2: Trustee Skinner: Do we have an estimate what our numbers are going to be as far as students utilizing COTA?

A2: Kim Sharp: We had a total number of 8,000 students who can use the system with their passes. We know that about 50% of students are in-person Monday/Tuesday and 50% on Thursday/Friday. We also know the utilization rate for yellow buses was 70%. We used all of this information as we built out the program.

Aslyne Rodriguez, Director of Government Affairs, gave a Government Affairs update. Aslyne started with the Columbus Regional Coalition virtual Congressional fly-in that occurred March 15-16. The conversation was focused on transportation infrastructure and the future of mobility in Ohio. Joanna M. Pinkerton presented both days on the topic, which really boils down to the question of what it means to provide equitable access to mobility for all.

Aslyne noted that the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan was signed by President Biden last week. This most recent stimulus includes \$30.5 billion for public transit funding. COTA currently does not know exactly how much Central Ohio will get, but hopes to have that information in the coming weeks. She noted that this stimulus will impact how COTA moves people and the team will be thinking critically as to how to responsibly use those dollars.

Aslyne continued with discussing COTA's success in grant applications and one in particular is the Low/No Grant that COTA will be working on together with the Transportation Research Center (TRC). The focus with these grants is how does COTA continue to be innovative in reducing carbon emissions through the use of alternatives like CNG vehicles.

She went on to discuss the status of the state transportation budget. She noted that COTA does not expect funding to be restored to the full \$70 million. She expressed that this transportation budget is not just about COTA, but also transit partners in rural and suburban settings and how



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they are getting their citizens to essential services. This is about humanity and how public transit continues to move people through innovation and equity.

By law, the state transportation budget must be passed by March 31, 2021. In addition to the state transportation budget, COTA also pursued Ohio Public Transit Partnership (OTP2) funding. In 2021, COTA submitted for \$5.8 million in OTP2 funding and awards will be announced this summer. Previously COTA has used OTP2 funding for COTA//Plus and the healthcare access initiative.

Aslyne went on to discuss a local government affairs update. She noted that in conjunction with Development, Aslyne has met with several municipalities to ensure engagement in the LinkUS corridor initiative.

COTA has been contacted to be supportive of a few different agencies in getting minority communities to the vaccine sites. She noted COTA has partnered with Columbus Stand Up to provide services. COTA has also partnered with the Ohio Department of Health on St. John's Arena pop-up site to provide transportation through the mobility services team.

She gave a brief update on cashless/contactless and noted that her goal is to be ready and prepped so that COTA's NPO partners and elected officials have a clear line of sight on how this will impact the community when the time comes.

Aslyne ended by discussing COTA's continuing engagement with the City of Columbus. COTA hosted a New American Roundtable to focus on New American communities in Columbus. COTA will host the first travel training with this community in partnership with the YMCA and other NPOs on April 10<sup>th</sup>.

Q1: Chair Landino: Is there anything in particular that you can point out that the Board can assist you with? Whether it's from the local, state or federal level?

A1: Aslyne Rodriguez: If there is any support you can send to Senator Kunze and the Senate Transportation Committee that will help with the state transportation budget. Your voice is the collective voice saying we would like to restore the funding back to \$70M.

Q2: Chair Landino: How are we getting the word out that we are helping people with vaccine access?

A2: Aslyne Rodriguez: Yes, COTA has put out a press release regarding our partnership with ODH on the St. John Arena site.

A2: Patrick Harris: The State reached out and provided resources to help us get people to St. John's for the pop-up site. Vaccines need to be equitably accessible. The information we're sharing with the public today will include how people can reach out directly to COTA to get to the pop-up vaccination site over the next few days. Partnerships are also being



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formed with COTA and NPOs to find direct point to point transportation for their communities.

Q3: Trustee Skinner: Since the State has asked COTA to transport people to their vaccination appointments, do we have an idea of what percentage of Operators that have been vaccinated?

A3: Patrick Harris: This is the conversation we had with the State and that has helped us get the first round of shots for our Operators. I do not have specific numbers on how many have been vaccinated, but we do know that 300+ wanted to be vaccinated. 117 have been registered in this round that was made available to us. We hope to have all 330+ registered by the end of next week.

Dr. Alexis Yamokoski presented on the 2020 COTA Brand Health Review. She noted that there was significant customer and community research conducted last year. Despite a tumultuous year, COTA's brand health remained strong across a variety of indicators. Positive sentiment regarding COTA's COVID-19 response increased 29 points. In May, 18% of fixed-route customers rated COTA's response to the coronavirus as "excellent." In December, 47% rated COTA's response as "excellent."

Alexis continued that in July of last year, COTA conducted the first Mainstream survey. She noted COTA Mainstream customers give the highest ratings of brand descriptors. 97% agree that COTA provides a critical community service and 95% agree that COTA is affordable.

Alexis also discussed COTA's Net Promoter Score, with measures the likelihood that a customer would refer someone else to use COTA. COTA scored well (+25), especially when one consider this score was gathered during the pandemic. She noted her team is looking at how COTA could potentially incentivize referrals through of a variety of promotions that reward loyalty.

She noted that her team engaged in customer focus groups with COTA's core customers and many of the themes the customers brought up, such as a desire for COTA to expand purchasing locations and two-way communication, directly align with COTA's 2021 key initiatives. With the new fare management system and improvements in COTA's use of social media channels, COTA will be meeting customers needs.

Alexis ended her presentation informing the Committee that there are a number of research projects planned for 2021, as her team looks to create a consistent cadence of research, especially regarding customer satisfaction. Marketing will be using a variety of methodologies for this research including in-person intercepts in the CEC and eventually on-board as well.

Q1: Chair Landino: Is there any discussion around usability when it helps to encourage people to familiarize themselves to the COTA brand?

A1: Dr. Alexis Yamokoski: Absolutely, yes. We created a "How to Ride" video series for college and high school students, and now for COTA//Plus customers. My team is continuing to



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leverage video assets as we saw that 40% of our community members were not sure if COTA was easy to use. If we can create awareness through a video, our potential customers may realize that it is easy to ride COTA.

**5. OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Landino adjourned the meeting at 4:59 PM.

**MAY 11, 2021**

Adopted: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: Amy M Landino  
Chair, External Stakeholder Relations Committee

Attest: Joanna M. Pinkerton  
President/CEO

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Joanna M. Pinkerton  
President/CEO