

COTA September 2022 Service Change Meeting
Tuesday, June 14 at noon

Meeting Purpose, Meeting Format, Introductions

Tanya Salyers, Manager, Community Relations

Hello and welcome to our public meeting. It is June 14th, 2022. My name is Tanya Salyers, COTA's Community Relations Manager and we are going to take public comment today on the Income Assistance Pilot Program and the proposed service changes that will take effect on September 5th, 2022. As a reminder, and as we will say frequently today, No final decisions have been made for the September 2022 service changes.

Alright, so we are recording this meeting. A recording will be posted on our website at COTA.com. If you're joining us by computer or phone, please know that we cannot see or hear you. Please be considerate of meeting attendees and COTA staff.

To communicate with us today if you're joining by computer, submit your comments and questions via the question-and-answer box on WebEx. If joining by phone, please direct all questions or comments to COTA Customer Care Center at 614-228-1776. If you're joining by Facebook Live, please submit your questions by commenting in the live stream.

To use the Q&A chat you want to click chat at the bottom right corner of your screen and then you will place your question in the chat box. And, please make sure to direct your questions to all panelists so that we see it.

Income Assistance Pilot Program

Tanya Salyers, Manager, Community Relations

Alright, so first we will be talking about our Income Assistance Pilot Program. As a reminder, there are no fare increases under consideration as part of this pilot program. The Income Assistance Pilot Program was approved by the Board of Trustees to be a six-month pilot that extends eligibility for 50% transit discounts to individuals who receive public income assistance. The pilot period began on March 1st and will last until August 31st. Proof of participation Accepted to enroll in the program includes SNAP Food Assistance, publicly funded childcare, Ohio Works First Cash Assistance (OWF), or Prevention, Retention and Contingency emergency assistance (PRC), Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Eligibility is extended for this discount to one year.

To apply, customers can come to the COTA Customer Experience Center at 33 N High St. Our hours of operation are 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday. Customers who qualify for COTA's Income Assistance Program will need to use one of our payment methods included in our new digital fare payment system to receive the discount.

You can also set up an account through the transit app or obtain a COTA a smart card at the Customer Experience Center. So today is the final day that we are receiving public comment on this program, so you can let us know today if you have any comments or concerns or questions.

Additionally, you can reach us at COTA.com/contact or call us at the Customer Experience/Customer Care Center. Final approval for this program will be at our COTA Board of Trustees meeting Wednesday, July 27th at 9:00 AM.

At this time, we will open up the floor for any questions or comments on the Income Assistance Pilot Program. If you're joining by Webex, please use the chat box. If you're joining by phone, please wait to unmute yourself until directed. If joining by Facebook live, please comment your questions in the live stream and of course you can visit COTA.com/contact to reach out to us, especially if you're viewing this recording at a later date.

So I'll open that up to the floor if anyone has any comments, we will have a separate comment time for the service changes and you can also ask questions at that time too. None from here any online. OK, so we'll move forward up next, we're going to discuss the proposed service changes, but first a reminder of our COVID-19 policy updates.

COVID Policy Updates & Hiring

Tanya Salyers, Manager, Community Relations

COTA will continue to provide the following measures to keep customers and employees safe, including cleaning and sanitization on all transit vehicles at high ridership stops. We've installed operator barriers on our fixed route fleet with proper ventilation and hand sanitizer available and our mask policy was lifted on April 19th.

Additionally, we'd like to share that, like most organizations, COTA is impacted by the nationwide worker shortage. We continue to recruit and hire new transit operators, but those new hires are not enough to offset retirements and other departures, so COTA will continue to adjust transit schedules due to unprecedented workforce challenges. The adjustments will be made to improve service reliability and help minimize adverse service impacts to our customers and staff and on that note, we are hiring.

COTA is actively recruiting, hiring and training new operators. Anyone interested in a rewarding career with COTA can learn more by applying at COTA.com/careers. Just some notes on our hiring our starting wage for operators in training has been increased to \$17.50 an hour upon completion of training, operators wages increased to \$21.10. Our operators can make more than \$33 an hour within five years, and COTA is in the top 5% among peer agencies for wages and benefits, so we will continue to document requests for service. And as we work to restore our workforce, we will continue to work to restore service hours. With that I'm going to kick it over to Amber to share about service changes. As a reminder, these are proposed to begin on Monday, September 5th, 2022. No final decisions have been made.

Proposed September 2022 Service Changes

Amber Boyd, Service Planner

Thank you, Tanya and good afternoon, everyone. My name is Amber Boyd and am a Service Planner with COTA's Development Division and I'm going to discuss some of the proposed service adjustments you'll see on COTA's fixed route service taking effect in September. Looking at those recommendations,

we are recommending frequency reductions on Lines 1-4, 8, 10, 11, 22, 23, 31, 34, 102, and CMAX. Routing changes on Lines 4, 6, and 11, and the end of seasonal Zoo Bus service and AirConnect. We initially announced recommendations for Rush Hour lines 41-46, 51, 52, 61, and 71-75. Those are no longer a part of the proposals for September service. Looking at the changes in detail...

We are proposing frequency reductions on all frequent lines that includes line 1 Kenny/Livingston, 2 E Main/N High, 8 Karl/S High/Parsons, 10 E Broad/W Broad, and the CMAX. Monday through Friday, all frequent lines would be reduced to operate every 30 minutes on their core service and every 60 minutes on the branches before 7:00 AM only. Again, that's Monday through Friday. On Sundays only, all frequent lines will be reduced to operate every 20 minutes on core service and every 40 minutes on the branches. Moving to the next slide.

COTA is proposing frequency reductions on the following standard lines 4 Indianola/Lockbourne, 23 James/Stelzer, 31 Hudson, 34 Morse, and 102 N High/Polaris Parkway are proposed to run our hourly seven days a week. Line 3 Northwest/Harrisburg proposed to be reduced Monday through Friday to 45 minutes. Currently, that line is operating at a 30-minute frequency. On Line 6, we are proposing to discontinue service on Cleveland Ave. And then, on Line 22 we are proposing a frequency reduction on Saturday and Sundays only. The line would run every 40 minutes, and it is currently operating every 30 minutes. Again, all of these changes are proposed.

For Line 4, COTA is proposing to remove this alignment from Venice Drive and Weirton Rd. Instead, the line would continue on Watkins Rd to Alum Creek Drive. This routing change would allow for a simple, more direct route to and from Alum Creek. Customers impacted by this change are encouraged to use the COTA//Plus South Side Zone. The zone operates from 5:30 AM to 8:00 PM seven days a week. Customers can request a ride using the COTA//Plus mobile app, and again I'd like to reiterate that the alignment that we're proposing to discontinue is fully encompassed within the COTA//Plus South Side zone.

Due to the ongoing operator shortage, COTA is proposing to remove Line 6 from Cleveland Ave. Instead, Line 6 would operate between downtown Columbus and Lincoln Village every 30 minutes. Customers who would be impacted by this change, who use Line 6 to travel north of downtown Columbus, are encouraged to use the CMAX, COTA's rapid transit line. CMAX operates along Cleveland Ave using the same alignment as the Line 6, every 15 minutes between downtown and Northland Transit Center. After 7:00 PM we are proposing that the CMAX would serve the existing line 6 stops to assist customers walking to the bus stop.

Looking at Line 11, due to the ongoing operator shortage, COTA is also proposing to end Line 11 Bryden/Maize's alignment in downtown Columbus. Instead, Line 11 would operate between Graceland Shopping Center all the way to downtown, every 60 minutes. Customers who typically use Line 11 to travel between downtown Columbus and Holtzman Ave –as you can see pictured to the right –are encouraged to use Line 2. Line 2 operates every 15 minutes between downtown Columbus and Holtzman Ave and the stops are about a 5-minute walk from Line 11's current stops. For passengers with mobility limitations, we recommend you consider using COTA's Mainstream Service. For customers who typically use Line 11 to travel beyond Holtzman Ave to Alum Creek Dr, we are encouraging you to use Line 1 to transfer into the COTA//Plus South Side zone. That alignment is fully encompassed within the COTA//Plus South Side zone and Line 1 operates every 15 minutes between downtown and the South Side zone.

In September we are also proposing to rename Line 24 that operates south of Eastland Mall. Currently, Line 24 is split into two operating patterns in between Eastland Mall and Rickenbacker. As you can see pictured to the left with the green dashed alignment. Line 4 operates as a weekday only circulator passengers who wish to travel South of Eastland Mall currently have to exit the bus at Eastland and reboard a coach with the destination header reading '24 to Rickenbacker'. We heard back from the public and to avoid some of that confusion, we're recommending to rename this service. We welcome all recommendations from the public, so feel free to give that during our comment period. And this recommendation has no impact on the alignment or frequency.

Zoo Bus service will end on Halloween! Currently, Zoo Bus is operating seven days a week and will continue until Labor Day, Monday, September 5. Starting Friday, September 9th, the Zoo Bus will operate on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays only until October 31, which is Halloween. For more information visit COTA.com/zoobus or call 614-228-1776. Looking at the next slide.

The AirConnect will end on August 30th! Currently this service operates on select dates –and you'll see more of that on the next slide –and that is to address the ridership demand that we typically see in the downtown area when there are major events throughout the summer. Air Connect operates between the airport and downtown Columbus, with trips every 30 minutes. And then on the next slide. Here are those details. The duration that the AirConnect will be running during the major events, and you can also visit COTA.com/airconnect to view this table.

And that concludes the service recommendations for September. Again, all of those recommendations are proposed at this time, and I'll pass it back to Tanya to discuss a little bit more about our programs and events.

New & Upcoming Programs and Events

Tanya Salyers, Manager, Community Relations

Thanks, Amber. Just wanted to share about our new Summer Student Pass Program. This is an easy and affordable Summer Pass Program for Central Ohio students from Kindergarten through 12th Grade and those at local universities. It gives eligible students ages 5 and older unlimited access to COTA. So for \$62.00 per student for the whole term you receive unlimited rides through September 15th. This also includes COTA//Plus and for those who are eligible Mainstream. You can learn more at COTA.com/ssp. You can come down to our Customer Experience Center at 33 N High Street to purchase.

Alright, and with that we will open it up to question and answer. Again, if you are joining by WebEx you can submit your comments in the chat box. If you are joining by WebEx you can submit your comments in the chat box. If you're joining by phone, please wait to unmute yourself until I direct you to. If you are joining by Facebook Live, please comment your questions in the livestream and we will address that here. You can always visit COTA.com/contact to suggest how we can improve service so I will get started with folks here in the room with us. If you have a comment or question, please approach the podium and whoever would like to go first.

