

**MOVING** EVERY **LIFE**  
**FORWARD**

STRATEGIC PLAN 2019 - 2024



# Introduction

## Current State of COTA

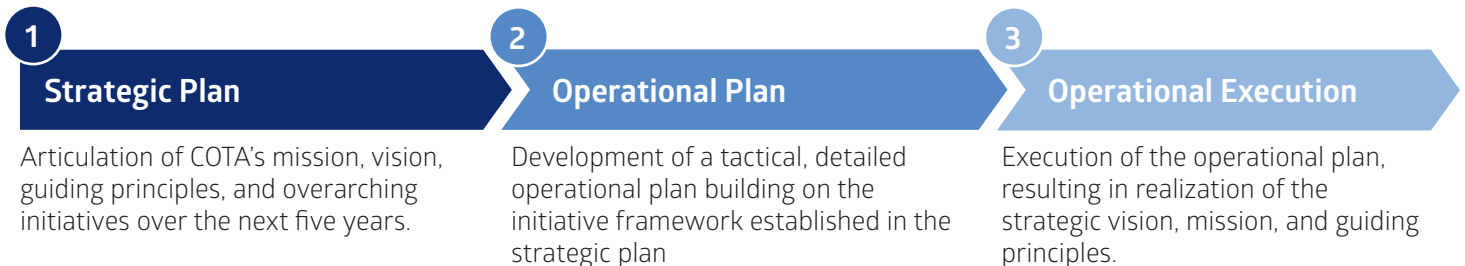
COTA's vision is **"To move every life forward"** and COTA's mission is **"We provide solutions that connect people to prosperity through innovation, dedication and teamwork."** As the regional public transit provider for greater Columbus and Central Ohio, COTA serves over 1.2 million residents with nearly 19 million passenger trips annually. Operationally, COTA has over 1,100 employees, 40+ bus routes, more than 300 buses, and operates out of four facilities in the Columbus area. COTA received the Outstanding Public Transportation System Achievement Award from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) in 2018. COTA acknowledges and understands advancements in mobility are disrupting the transportation sector and fundamentally changing the way people move.

Technological disruptions such as automated, connected, electric, and shared vehicles (ACES) will have a major influence on transportation services in the form of mobility, accessibility, safety, congestion, and planning. More important however, customer expectations of service are changing in our connected world. What holds true is an efficient, safe, and well-maintained transportation network is vital to the region's success. Success for COTA is defined as moving people where they want to go, enhancing the economic vitality and growth of the region, and closing social barriers for all communities. The combination of the external forces and the importance of COTA's role in the Columbus region is the backdrop for undertaking a strategic planning process.

## Purpose of the Strategic Plan

COTA's strategic plan defines and articulates the strategic direction for COTA for the next five (5) years. Through a collaborative strategic planning process, guiding principles were developed to focus the organization on those strategic areas that will enable COTA to achieve its mission and vision. The guiding principles are then underpinned with initiatives that are responsive to the changing expectations of customers and emerging technologies.

These initiatives have an eye on enhancing COTA's services for the citizens of Central Ohio. Nesting the initiatives under the guiding principles will align efforts and keep COTA moving towards its mission and vision. From this strategic plan a more detailed operational plan will be developed which establishes the details of each initiative for operational execution. The following diagram outlines the importance of each step:



To Move Every Life Forward

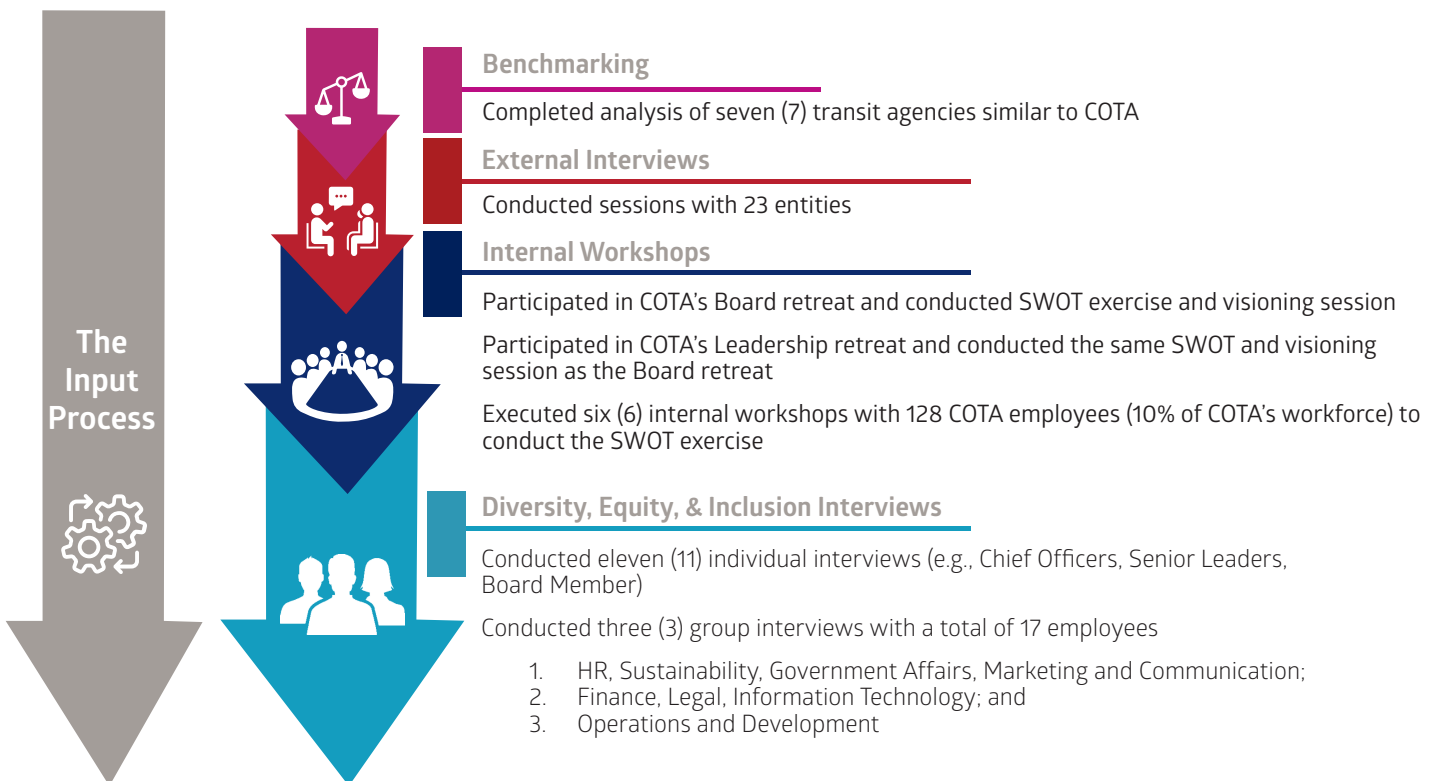
We Provide Solutions That Connect People To Prosperity  
Through Innovation, Dedication and Teamwork

# Approach for Building COTA's Strategic Plan



COTA is integral to the social and economic well-being of Central Ohio. A collaborative approach to building the strategic plan emphasized the importance of including a diverse set of opinions, both inside and outside the organization. The process incorporated a number of inputs from internal and external sources.

This approach ensured a comprehensive awareness of the dynamics surrounding COTA, including the changing mobility sector and community specific considerations, as well as incorporating internal viewpoints, capabilities, and underlying culture of the organization. The insights gained from this thought process were used to establish the building blocks of the strategic plan.





## Innovations to Consider from Other Transit Agencies

To help inform COTA's strategic plan, an external benchmarking exercise of other mobility and transit agencies was conducted. The focus was to identify and evaluate innovative strategic initiatives that COTA's peers have undertaken.

These benchmarks are from peers which are trying to address growth, manage congestion, ensure fiscal and environmental sustainability, and provide equitable access in unique ways and are enormously helpful to COTA's strategic approach.

### Initiative Overview



· Chicago CTA, Bike Sharing: Integrated bike sharing into the existing mobility app to solve last-mile connectivity issues



· LA Metro, Micro Transit System: On-demand first- & last-mile services accessed through mobile devices



· LA Metro, Workforce Development Program: Initiative focused on careers in the transportation industry



· Boston Bus Rapid Transit Pilots: Dedicated Bus Rapid Transit and dedicated bus/bike lanes for smoother service



· RTC of Southern Nevada, Self Driving Shuttle: Carries up to 12 passengers and provides free rides on 0.5 mile trips in the loop



· Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, VanShare Service requires minimum of 6 people sharing rides to in-county destinations



· Cincinnati Mobility Lab: Uber's data to conduct studies aimed at improving the commuting experience



· Jacksonville Transit Authority: Multi-modal responsibilities of JTA and how it has evolved from a toll authority to a transit agency

### Benefits

Aims to create an efficient and smooth multi-modal transit experience

Mobility on Demand for first- and last-mile solutions reaches more people to get them to the transit. Technology can replace former expensive approaches such as park and rides

Creates career pathways into the transportation industry

Integrates and modernizes transit system for commuters

The study will help to analyze consumer reactions to autonomous vehicles

Benefits those who do not live on RTA's fixed-route service

Provides ways for ride sharing to be incorporated into public transit

Allows a holistic approach in planning mobility service offerings

## External Interviews: Listening to the “Voice of Columbus”

A key input into the strategic plan was capturing the voice of the community in which COTA operates. This included conducting 23 different interviews throughout Central Ohio, with various economic leaders, community leaders, workforce development groups, The Ohio State University, and planning agencies. Listening to this broad set of stakeholder groups helped solidify COTA's relevance in

Central Ohio as well as how COTA should position itself within the next five (5) years. The external stakeholders also articulated how COTA assists in accomplishing the mission of their specific organizations. With this insight, the strategic plan aligns COTA's service delivery with the expectations of Central Ohio.



## Internal Workshops: Capturing COTA's Capabilities and Aspirations

Capturing the voice within COTA, from the vision of the Board, to the insights across the employee population, was also a critical element to the strategic plan. This effort involved workshops involving over 150 employees, COTA leadership, and Board members who participated and voiced their views on COTA's future direction. Given the fact the internal stakeholder group was so diverse and spanned

the full spectrum of the organization, it was critical to make sure the strategic message was aligned. Two key outputs from these sessions were: (1) the strategic themes that became the foundation for the strategic plan and (2) the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to guide COTA's five (5) year strategic plan and underlying initiatives.

STRENGTHS



WEAKNESSES



OPPORTUNITIES



THREATS



# The Importance of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at COTA

Through the collaborative strategic planning process, it was clear that equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are of core importance to COTA. To ensure EDI is infused through the strategic plan and incorporated as a part of COTA's cultural fabric, nearly 30 interviews were conducted. These interviews spanned the full spectrum of employees. COTA's employees and the community COTA serves are diverse and the organization must be intentional in serving both. COTA understands that a commitment to EDI is essential to the success of the organization.

In addition to driving creativity, innovation, and engagement, diverse and inclusive organizations reap the benefits of being more sustainable and agile. In pursuit of EDI excellence, COTA will develop a stronger and more effective workforce, resulting in increased comprehensive services that better meet the needs of COTA's consumers. COTA will be able to leverage the effects of EDI to support and maintain its recognition as being a leader in mobility for all.



## Equity

Providing fair access, opportunity, and advancement for all people is achieved by understanding and eliminating barriers that prevent full participation for disadvantaged groups. Employee motivation is critically contingent on the incorporation of equity.



## Diversity

By seeking to attract and retain individuals of demographic diversity, such as, but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, orientation, socio-economic background, physical ability, and religion, COTA will derive value from individuals' differences of experiences, perspectives, and thought processes. Diverse organizations are also more successful at attracting and retaining talent.



## Inclusion

Organizations succeed at maintaining diversity when they focus on inclusion. Employees feel valued, respected, and supported when inclusion is part of the organizational culture. In establishing a strong inclusive culture, COTA can expect job satisfaction to increase among employees, resulting in maximum productivity.

# Overview of COTA's Guiding Principles

*The collaborative approach employed to develop the strategic plan collected thousands of data points and input from internal and external stakeholders. Within the data, a number of strategic themes emerged. The strategic themes are an articulation of the expectations of COTA from the stakeholder's perspective. These strategic themes were then used as the basis to create COTA's guiding principles for its five-year strategic plan.*

## Strategic Themes from Stakeholder Engagement

- Make COTA the easy mobility option
- Intentionally commit COTA to an equitable, diverse, and inclusive culture
- Leverage partners to enhance service delivery
- Achieve organizational excellence
- Use data to make better decisions
- Drive enhanced mobility services to meet customer demands
- Actively engage in Central Ohio economic development
- Market COTA's services to educate and inform customers

## Guiding Principles

Based on an evaluation of these themes, four guiding principles were established for COTA's strategic plan with equity, diversity, and inclusion residing at the core. The guiding principles' primary goal is serving the Central Ohio region. The graphic below represents COTA's guiding principles:



# Introduction to Four Guiding Principles

*These guiding principles provide the foundation for the strategic plan, set the direction for the organization, and represent where COTA will focus during the coming years.*

## Overview of Each Principle



**Improve the Customer Experience: to serve current and future customers and deliver a customer experience that is easy to use, reliable, and convenient.**

We now live in a world where customers expect a highly-personalized, differentiated, and meaningful experience from businesses and organizations. This is particularly important to COTA because of its highly-diverse customer base. Affordability, ease, availability, and safety are critical factors in enhancing the customer experience and achieving dignity for disadvantaged individuals and communities.



**Achieve Organizational Excellence: to make COTA employees focused, collaborative, and innovative.**

In order to execute against COTA's five-year strategic plan, COTA will need to align its operating model and performance metrics with the services it offers. COTA will also need to ensure it is focused on developing and embracing its diverse workforce. A workforce encompassing diversity of demographics leads to diversity of thought, experiences, and perspectives, resulting in better decision-making and outcomes.



**Provide Mobility Options: to enhance service delivery to customers through partnerships with innovative organizations.**

It is imperative to consider additions and enhancements to COTA's traditional mass transit services including collaboration with the private sector to extend and implement services. Further community partnerships are vital to understanding and providing mobility options to all customers including individuals who are considered disadvantaged or low-income. COTA's collaboration with community leaders will provide unique insight towards understanding and prioritizing effective mobility options across its service population.



**Prioritize the Use of Data and Analytics: to make better decisions, enhance services and enhance safety**

The combination of big data trends and the emphasis on smart technologies offers COTA a wealth of data and analytics capabilities if embraced. As the world of mobility evolves, it is becoming more critical to leverage data into insights for COTA to improve and optimize its services.

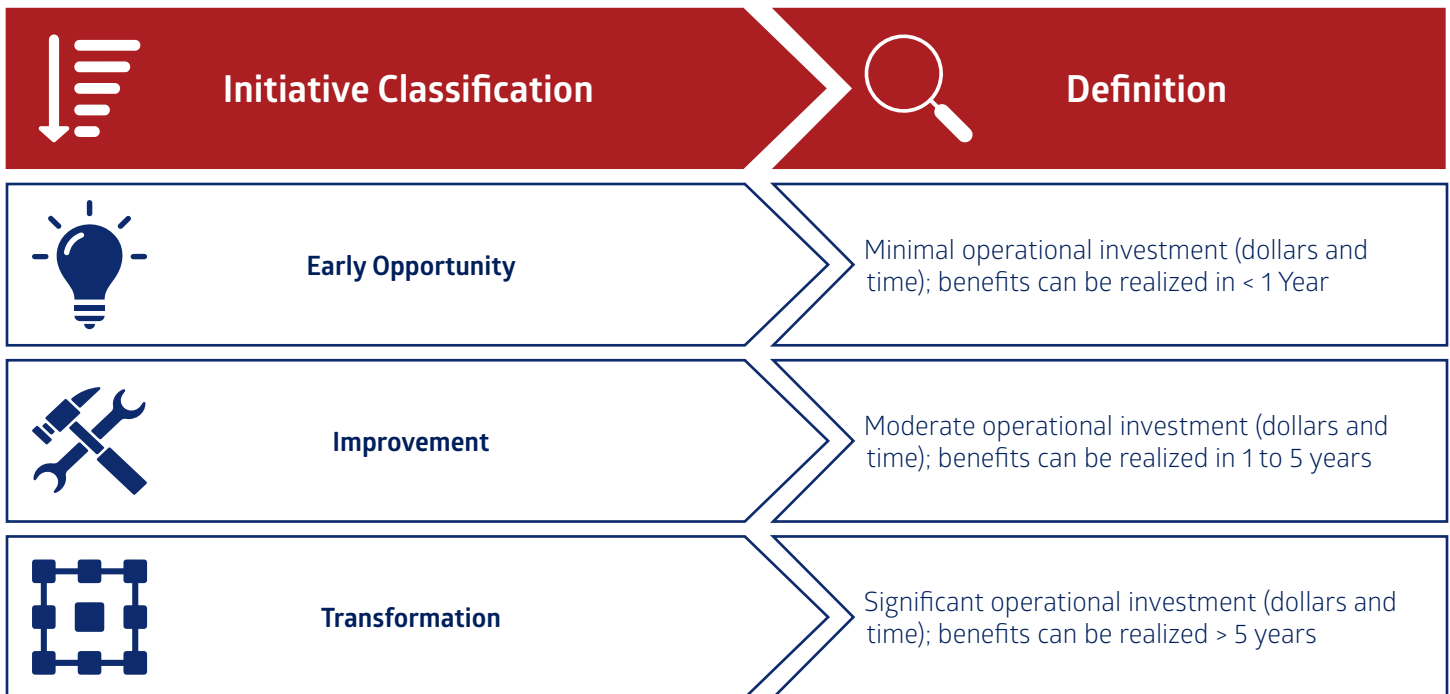


# Initiatives

COTA will pursue specific initiatives aligned to the guiding principals over the next five years. These initiatives were a product of the input sessions with the various internal and external stakeholder groups in the strategic plan development process. The initiatives were balanced between “Early Opportunities”, “Improvements”, or “Transformations.” These categories represent the importance of realizing the mission and vision of COTA by achieving momentum

quickly, improving key areas that need critical attention, and propelling the organization forward through transformations. Categorized this way, the initiatives align with COTA’s journey of meeting the needs of the new mobility ecosystem.

For each guiding principle, several initiatives have been identified and classified.





## Improve the Customer Experience

*Improve the Customer Experience* is a guiding principle which requires a combination of personalized offerings to meet customer preferences, ensuring those in need of COTA's services are served with dignity, making it easier to interact with COTA and aligning services to capture new customers.

Initiative		Early Opportunity	Improvement	Transformation
a.	Enhance the COTA fleet to adapt and provide responsive services			✓
b.	Add innovative service offerings that anticipate customer's future mobility needs		✓	
c.	Develop and implement a targeted marketing program to meet the distinct needs of COTA's customer segments	✓		
d.	Create a culture of customer service that dignifies mobility as a valid choice		✓	
e.	Align services with customer needs and preferences by adding amenities to meet customer demand		✓	



## Provide Access to Mobility Options

The guiding principle of *Provide Access to Mobility Options* includes the following initiatives: expanding COTA's current service, offering a menu of new services with the help of private sector partnerships, and ensuring transportation equity is achieved by providing access to all.

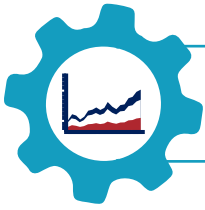
Initiative		Early Opportunity	Improvement	Transformation
f.	Leverage a mobility partner to pilot a first- & last-mile solution	✓		
g.	Implement a multi-modal trip planning and payment app with options that provide access to mobile users and the un-banked			✓
h.	Ensure transportation planning supports access to jobs, healthcare, and education for disadvantaged communities	✓		
i.	Commit COTA's resources to focus on upfront community planning		✓	
j.	Expand service network to include additional geographies in Central Ohio	✓		
k.	Increase and expand service to capture new customer segments, including disadvantaged riders		✓	



# Achieve Organizational Excellence

*Achieve Organizational Excellence* is a guiding principle which includes initiatives to retain and attract a strong, diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce, deploying tools to measure performance and leveraging resource capacity and a range of partnerships.

Initiative		Early Opportunity	Improvement	Transformation
l.	Implement programs to retain, train, and attract a diverse talent pool at all levels of the organization		✓	
m.	Establish and engage employee resource groups (e.g., Veterans, LGBTQ, African-American women, etc.) within the organization	✓		
n.	Incorporate targeted recruiting to increase diversity within departments		✓	
o.	Develop metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure organizational performance			✓
p.	Match resource capacity with operational needs (i.e., shift flexibility and cross training)		✓	
q.	Improve service and operations through innovative partnerships		✓	
r.	Promote the use of small, disadvantaged businesses through partners		✓	



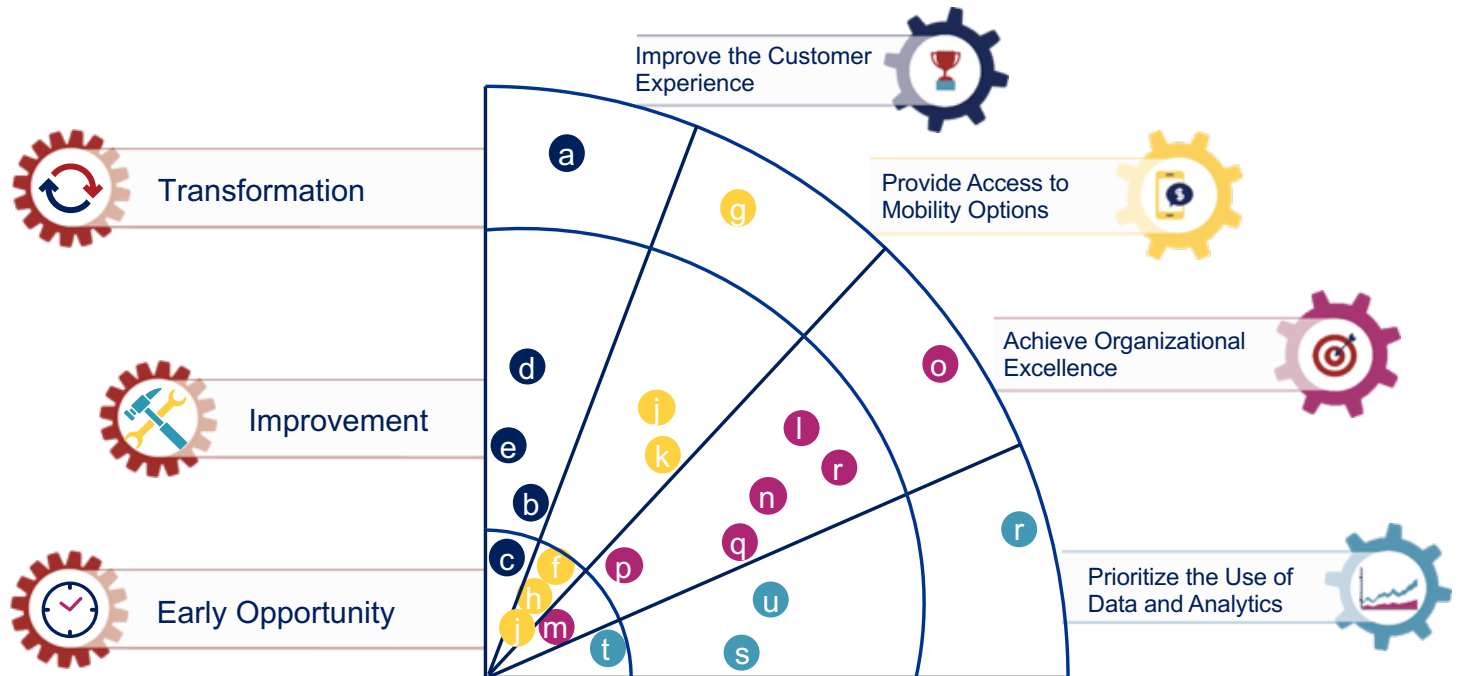
## Prioritize the Use of Data and Analytics

The guiding Principle *Prioritize the Use of Data and Analytics* includes leveraging data analytics to improve COTA's services and meet the needs of its current and future users, evaluating data and technology as a foundation to new business models, and leveraging analytics to improve EDI outcomes.

Initiative		Early		
		Opportunity	Improvement	Transformation
s.	Leverage existing operational data to promote transportation equity			✓
t.	Use D&A to evaluate mobility trends and new business models to assess their feasibility for COTA's service delivery operations		✓	
u.	Leverage D&A to implement, measure, and improve new pilot projects and scale across the COTA service delivery operations	✓		
v.	Implement D&A capabilities to improve business operations outside of service delivery operations (i.e., human resources, marketing, etc.)		✓	

# Transformation Plan

The initiatives have been developed through the strategic planning process and then identified and targeted an Early Opportunity, an Improvement, or a Transformational activity. COTA wants to ensure initiatives can be achieved for near-term impact, but also take on the transformational work to serve our growing community's mobility needs for decades to come. This graphical analysis summarizes where COTA can start now and where to focus in the long term.





## Conclusion

COTA's strategic plan is our organization's North Star to innovate mobility and share what the community can expect from COTA over the next five years. Based on extensive internal and external input, the plan includes action-oriented initiatives that are organized by COTA's new guiding principles. It is the inspiration for the future role COTA and our employees will play in the Central Ohio region to positively impact lives and realize economic opportunities.

# Acknowledgments

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*President & CEO  
Central Ohio Transit Authority*

## Board of Trustees

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## External Stakeholders and Community Leaders

- CelebrateOne
- Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging
- Columbus2020
- The Columbus Foundation
- The Columbus Partnership
- Columbus State Community College
- COSI
- Columbus Urban League
- DriveOhio
- Franklin County Job & Family Services
- Goodwill Columbus
- HandsOn Central Ohio
- Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
- Nationwide Foundation
- The Ohio State University
- Smart Columbus
- ULI Columbus
- Steiner & Associates
- United Way of Central Ohio
- The Workforce Development Board of Central Ohio
- YWCA Columbus
- City of Columbus - Mayor Andrew J. Ginther
- City of Columbus - City Council
- City of Columbus - Dept. of Neighborhoods
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- City of Columbus - Information Technologies
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