



External Stakeholder Relations Committee Minutes

Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at 3:30 PM

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

1. Call to Order

Chair Erika Clark Jones called the January 13, 2026 meeting of the External Stakeholder Committee to order at 3:30 pm.

2. Roll Call

Committee Members Present

Erika Clark Jones, Chair
Pete Bucher, Trustee
Matt Starr, Trustee
Heather Ulrey, Trustee

3. Approval of External Stakeholder Relations Committee Minutes

A. November 5, 2025 External Stakeholder Relations Committee Minutes

Trustee Pete Bucher moved to approve the November 5, 2025 External Stakeholder Relations Committee meeting minutes, seconded by Trustee Matt Starr. Motion carried.

4. New Business

A. 2026 Government Affairs Update/Priorities - Casey Blazer, COTA External Relations Manager

COTA External Relations Manager Casey Blazer presented an update on COTA's Government Affairs work and 2026 priorities. Key highlights included: Securing nearly \$170 million in state transit funding for 2025–2027; monitoring TRAC funding for the E. Main Street BRT corridor and, advocating for operator assault legislation. Ms. Blazer reported that at the federal level, COTA has engaged new lobbyists to strengthen ties with the current administration, prioritized increasing Small Starts project caps and federal share amounts, and tracked FY26 appropriations progress, including a \$2.5 million request submitted by Congresswoman Joyce Beatty. She noted successes in competitive grant funding, such as maintaining \$22.8 million for Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) bus purchases and winning a \$19.9 million Low/No Emissions Grant for facility

upgrades and articulated buses. Ms. Blazer highlighted the Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership Program, Ohio Transportation Partnership Program (OTP2) applications, monitoring the Surface Transportation Reauthorization process, and the ongoing RFP process for a new grants consultant as areas of focus.

COTA Chief External Relations Officer Patrick Harris discussed changes in his team: Kelsey Ellingsen moved from Government Affairs to the Capital Delivery division to support the LinkUS initiative; he is working to fill that role.

B. LinkUS Engagement Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) - Patrick Harris, COTA Chief External Relations Officer

COTA Chief External Relations Officer Patrick Harris presented Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for LinkUS public engagement and outreach efforts, which focus on metrics that track awareness, participation, and sentiment. He outlined strategies for measuring website traffic, social media engagement, email distribution performance, media mentions, event attendance, and stakeholder meetings. Additional KPIs include public feedback response rates, community awareness and support levels, and representation from priority communities. Mr. Harris highlighted future goals such as multilingual material availability, accessibility compliance, and geographic engagement coverage. He introduced the Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA) as a centralized platform for managing engagement activities and noted that a public-facing dashboard to enhance transparency and accountability is in development.

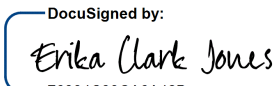
5. Other Business

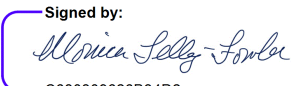
No other business was brought before the Committee.

6. Adjournment

Trustee Heather Ulrey moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Trustee Bucher. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 4:08 pm.

Adopted: March 3, 2026

Signed: 
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**Chair, External Stakeholder Relations
Committee**

Attest: 
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President/CEO