
Date: April 28, 2025
Time: 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.
RTA Board Room
175 W. Jackson Blvd,
Suite 1650
Chicago, IL 60604

RTA Citizens Advisory Board Meeting Minutes 4-28-2025

1) Call to Order

- a. Ryan Ruehle, RTACAB Chair, called to order the RTA Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) Meeting on 4/28/2025 at 10:05 a.m.

2) Membership Updates

- a. Michael VanDekreke shared RTACAB updates.
 - i. Jackie Forbes had to step down and is no longer the RTACAB Chair. She has transitioned into a new position as Deputy Chief of Planning at the Illinois Tollway. Heidi Files has replaced Jackie Forbes as the Chief of Planning at Kane County DOT and is the new Kane County representative.
 - ii. Ryan Ruehle was serving as the Vice-Chair and was asked to step into the Chair of the RTACAB and Jazmin Vega was asked to step into the RTACAB Vice-Chair position. They both accepted.

3) Roll Call

- a. Voting CAB Members Present In-Person:
 - i. Ryan Ruehle, Chair, Suburban Cook County
 - ii. Jazmin Vega, Vice-Chair, McHenry County
 - iii. Rob Hart, Metra CAB Chair
 - iv. Heidi Files, Kane County
 - v. Romina Castillo, City of Chicago
 - vi. Loren Gutierrez, The Network
- b. Non-voting CAB Members Present In-Person:
 - i. Terry Kappel, McHenry County Rider
 - ii. Douglas Fowler, Will County Rider
 - iii. Libia Bianibi, City of Chicago Rider

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c. Other Individuals Present In-Person:

- i. Kendra Johnson, RTA
- ii. Michael VanDekreke, RTA
- iii. Kyle Whitehead, RTA
- iv. Tina Smith, RTA
- v. Maulik Vaishnav, RTA
- vi. Peter Kersten, RTA
- vii. Sarah Fettig, RTA
- viii. Kate Peterson, RTA

d. Voting CAB Members Present Virtually:

- i. Joe Surdam, Lake County
- ii. John Loper, DuPage County
- iii. Adam Kerman, Pace CTA CAB

e. Non-Voting CAB Members Present Virtually:

- i. Xavier Potts, City of Chicago Rider
- ii. Parker Thompson, Kane County Rider
- iii. Ayesha Akhtar, Suburban Cook County Rider
- iv. Karl Gieseke, DuPage County Rider

f. Other Individuals Present Virtually:

- i. Steve Andrews, Pace
- ii. Jill Leary, RTA
- iii. Anthony Cefali, RTA
- iv. Tyler James, CTA
- v. Garland Armstrong
- vi. Heather Armstrong

4) Chair Updates

- a. Chair Ruehle suggested that members refresh themselves on the RTACAB bylaws. He shared the purpose of the RTACAB. The

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RTACAB acts as an advisory group to the RTA. The Chair reports on their discussions to the RTA Board.

- b. Members went around the room and online to provide introductions for new members and shared their favorite part about public transportation.

5) Approval of the January 27, 2025, Minutes

- a. Heidi Files made a motion to approve January 27, 2025, minutes, Douglas Fowler seconded the motion to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

6) Update on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault RTA Public Transportation Assistance Program

- a. Loren Gutierrez, Managing Attorney, Safety & Family Practice Group, Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services representing The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence on the RTACAB shared background about the Network. They worked with legislation for RTA to provide 25,000 cards with \$20 fare on them to the Network. The Network provides cards to providers who distribute them to survivors of domestic violence.
- b. From November 2023 to October 2024, 16,668 Ventra cards were distributed to 4,066 survivors. There are several provider stories throughout the report. These stories were anonymously shared during the survey process showing ways that transportation access shapes survivors' lives.
 - i. Card use data - Majority of the clients used the Ventra card (83%), client's child (14%), and 1% unknown. The primary uses were groceries/daily needs, work/job interviews, and school. CTA was the primary public transportation mode used.
 - ii. Client demographic data – gender, race, ethnicity, dependents, and income data was shared. Clients identified as female (86%), male (8%), unknown (3%), transgender (2%), or non-binary or genderqueer (1%). The client age varies from 0 to 65+, with the most in the 30 to 39 age range. The majority of the client race identity as Latino (7,118), Black/African American (6,179), and White (1,799). The total number of dependents for clients ranged from 0 to 13, majority having 0 dependents. 47% of

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clients shared that their monthly income was \$0. The densest zip code to receive the Ventra cards was 60629.

- c. The data allowed them to see that the majority of survivors who were served by this program were parenting women of color with little to no income and predominately living in Chicago. The cards facilitated transportation access to address survivors' everyday needs. The cards gave access to everyday needs and created opportunities for financial empowerment by connecting them to work and school. It also supported the wellbeing of these survivors' families.
- d. Some unmet needs with the cards – 35% to 60% of organizations had clients whose needs could not be met with a Ventra card. Some survivors needed a car to move from their house or access areas outside of the region. \$20 fare went fast for some survivors. The Network is recommending that weekly and monthly passes be issued if the program continues into the future since the card value could not be combined to purchase passes.
- e. Recommendations – to continue the program by establishing annual disbursements, provide 30-day Ventra passes, and expand the program to include funding for alternative models.
 - i. Terry Kappel asked if the cards can be used for the Rideshare Access Program. Michael stated that is for the Ventra permits can only be used on fixed route, unless the customer uploads the value of the card to a Ventra account, then the value could be applied to ADA paratransit trips. Terry also asked about the continuation of the program. Loren stated it was pilot.
 - ii. Chair Ruehle asked if there were any more cards. Loren stated that they are likely gone.

7) Service Board CAB Reports

- a. Rob Hart, Metra CAB Chair
 - i. Rob stated ridership, revenue, and expenses are favorable to budget for 2025. Ridership is trending ahead of 2024. They had a successful U Pass program. COVID-19 relief funding will be depleted in Q2 2026. Metra briefed CTA on the Regional Day Pass. The status of the Regional Day Pass has received a lot of attention. There is an ongoing process for renaming the rail lines

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and no decisions have been made at this point. Northend of Metra Electric will have disruption with their weekend and weekday service. North of 18th street will have no service and will be operating bus service due to this construction. Metra was in discussion with the ADA community.

- John Loper would like more information about the U Pass program.
- Douglas Fowler asked about the electric/battery trains on the Rock Island line. Rob stated that the Beverly Line seems to be the best option because of how close the stations are but will ask about Joliet to Chicago.
- Terry Kappel asked about the plan for the railyard.

b. Adam Kerman, Pace CAB Chair

- i. Adam shared at the last Pace meeting they discussed the fiscal cliff and focused on the ReVision plan. The discussion was how the network would be revised with a higher number of service hours and how frequent routes will operate. It sounds like Pace is suggesting a hybrid option for suburban coverage but would have higher frequency with routes that will be more productive.
- c. Katanya Raby, CTA CAB Chair was not present. RTA will reach out to CTA for a report.

8) Overview of information provided in response to RTA Board Resolution 2025-01

- a. Peter Kersten, Manager, Strategy & Policy stated at the March RTA Board meeting, with the Service Boards and RTA staff, outlined the fiscal cliff and what a big investment would look like for the region.
 - i. Up to a 40% service cut is necessary to achieve 20% shortfall in operating funds. It is a lot of service that would need to be cut or reduced. There has been decreases from State funding over the last 10 years. If we fail to fund the system, we will continue to be faced with a budget gap moving forward. If funding is not secure by May, we will need to start cuts in June/July.
 - ii. The RTA system is one of the most efficient in the country. There are limited opportunities to produce more efficiencies. 17% of operating budget comes from the State of Illinois.

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- iii. One ask is for the State to fully fund ADA Paratransit (\$10M State currently funds), Ride Free, and Reduced Fare (\$20.9M State currently funds).
- iv. 40% cut in service for CTA rail and bus – some examples: 4 of 8 rail lines see service suspended on all or a portion of line and 74 bus routes eliminated. Where service remains, you would see overcrowding.
- v. 40% cuts in service for Metra – portions of Metra Electric and Blue Island branch could be cut. Overall, 40% of service systemwide, meaning 1 train every hour or every 2 hours and extremely limited express trains. There would be elimination of trains before 6 AM and after 10 PM. There would be heavy traffic on the roads. If a route or service is cut, it takes a long time to bring back, particularly on Metra.
- vi. 40% cuts in service for Pace – all weekend fixed route and On Demand could be eliminated. Early morning, late nights, and frequency of 30 to 60 minutes per bus. ADA paratransit service area would be effected by this since it mimics fixed route service.
- vii. What can we achieve through investment?
 - Expanded funding can help the Service Boards deliver more frequent and reliable service.
 - (a) CTA – expanded rail service and 6-minute or better headways. Expand across 87 routes with 15-minute headway. Capital investment can further unlock upgrades and fully achieve an accessible regional transit network.
 - (b) Metra - Regional Rail 1.0 is working towards 50%+ increase in service. Regional Rail 2.0 is the Systemwide Network Plan which would create runs through Chicago connecting lines, frequent all-day Inner Zone service paired with all-day express trains to Outer Zone, and improved service to O'Hare Airport.
 - (c) Pace – Pulse Expansion, most routes run more frequent, and more job access. With additional capital investments, Pace would continue to modernize their

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fleet and facilities, expand Pulse network, and increase bus speeds via additional Transit Signal Priority corridors.

- Systemwide cuts would harm all riders and residents – 3,000 transit employees, 80+ CTA and Pace bus routes, weekend bus service, Metra early morning and late evening service could be eliminated. ADA paratransit service could shrink by two-thirds on weekends.
- This is going to impact everyone, not just riders. There will be a need to add 26 lanes to the highway and 12 Willis Towers of parking if service is cut. The investment is in faster and reliable service.
- We face two very different futures for transit and the larger economy for our region. Falling off the fiscal cliff will kick off a chain reaction, hurting the economy with job and wage losses making Chicago and the suburbs less competitive. The perception of savings from not funding transit will show up as new expenses in other parts of our lives. On the contrary, if a \$1.5B investment in the system is realized, we will see significant gains in GDP, jobs, and income returned into our economy. This is why a funding solution is so important.
 - (a) Libia Bianibi asked if the legislation provides the funds, will fare increases still be considered? Peter stated that the fare, system, and services cut is meant to show what can happen, but everything is on the table.
 - (b) Adam Kerman asked what is the budget number that would make up for the loss of COVID dollars that would get us through 2026 with the same level of service. Peter said that the fiscal cliff is \$770M, but he is not sure about the final number due to when COVID dollars are exhausted. Adam asked about the rest of the funding for the red line extension and what CTA needs. Peter said we can see what CTA produced but the presentation was for immediate impacts.
 - (c) John Lopper asked about what data source they used for the overnight service and where they are going. Peter

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stated that this is information provided by the Service Boards and RTA does not have a data source behind this. It is anecdotal evidence.

- (d) Rob Hart commented on COVID funding and Metra is estimating that the funding is going to run out in Q2 2026. Metra is concerned about sales tax due to inflation, tariffs, etc. It is being considered that the COVID funding can be used up before then.
- (e) Chair Ruehle asked about other systems who are facing fiscal cliffs. Peter stated there is an [RTA blog](#) highlighting this. In Philadelphia, there is a similar situation with SEPTA. A lot of systems are facing this across the US. Chair Ruehle commented about the ramping up of Pace and CTA workforce and how that would be hard to come back to if the funding is cut. He stated he liked the visual about the cuts being stacked and recommends having a positive version of it with the added service.

9) [Transforming Transit](#) Summit Recap and Legislative Advocacy

- a. Kyle Whitehead, Principal, Government Affairs spoke about Transforming Transit Summit. The summit was a successful event that gathered a diverse audience of about 200 people, including state legislators, transportation and transit agency leaders, peer agencies, local officials, riders, and more. Attendees heard from Senate Transportation Chair Ram Villivalam, and RTA Executive Director Leanne Redden spoke with WTTW's Nick Blumberg about the future of the system if we are successful in securing \$1.5 billion in new operating funding. Later, Leanne moderated a panel with each of the Service Boards on how their services could improve with sustainable funding. Randy Clarke, the CEO of WMATA in Washington, D.C., and Andrew Fremier, the head of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in the Bay Area, spoke about how their regions are facing similar challenges and what we can learn from one another. This event featured a call to action for participants to urge their legislators to support sustainable transit funding.
- i. Recording of the summit:
<https://www.rtachicago.org/blog/2025/04/24/riders-and-regional->

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[officials-call-for-sustainable-funding-and-reform-to-improve-service-at-rtas-transforming-transit-summit](#)

- b. United We Move and MMA act were introduced this year. The RTA is developing legislative language with key lawmakers to implement the reforms laid out in Transforming Transit. This includes:
 - i. Empowering the RTA to set service standards for each of the Service Boards, attuned to the needs of riders in each part of the region.
 - ii. Establishing the RTA as a customer service hub for riders and centralizing fare policy.
 - iii. Prioritizing capital investment in a regionally minded way under an empowered RTA.
- c. RTA is hopeful that there will be action before the end of this session by speaking out and standing up for transit.
 - i. Key dates:
 - May 9: Committee Deadline
 - May 23: 3rd Reading Deadline
 - May 31: Session Adjournment
- d. Tina Smith, Director, Communications provided a brief overview of the SaveTransitNow campaign. Early research showed that many people are unaware of the fiscal cliff. The campaign is being promoted on broadcast stations – TV and radio, and 8 billboards. The campaigns will be in papers, at bus shelters, and on public transportation. This week, they are focusing on the disability community and how lack of funding could effect ADA Paratransit service. Over 4,000 letters have been set to legislators.
 - i. Terry Kappel asked about nontraditional social media being used. Tina said they have paid advertisements on social media, even reddit and Next Door to reach riders and nonriders.
 - ii. Adam Kerman asked about meeting with the Chicago Tribune Editorial Board and the damage they did yesterday. Tina said Chairman Dillard will likely respond by letter. Adam asked about the Regional Pass and Tina said the testing is on going and hope to release it as soon as possible.

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- iii. Romina Castillo asked about sharing the SaveTransitNow QR code.
- iv. Vice-Chair Vega advocated for the messaging to reach McHenry County and the collar counties.
- v. Chair Ruehle asked about the legislative language being developed. Kyle mentioned that the language will not be proposed as a stand-alone bill. We are doing clearer outreach about the language and are planning a coalition meeting soon. Chair Ruehle asked about the media and data. Tina said they can track through their survey and will see how much this has helped with the next batch of surveys.

10) Public Comment

- a. Garland Armstrong is concerned for the ADA Paratransit community and the potential service cuts.
- b. Heather Armstrong is concerned about the service in McHenry County because of the potential service cuts cutting all the service in the area. She mentioned looking into the fuel tax to fund service.

11) Other Business

- a. No other business

12) Adjourn

- a. Romina Castillo made a motion to adjourn, Douglas Fowler seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:57 AM.
- b. Next meeting is Monday, July 28, 2025, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.