

Thursday, March 14, 2002

Testimony before Congress by Joe Calabrese

NOTE: At 10:15 a.m. today, Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones, of Ohio's 11th District, and Joseph Calabrese, CEO & General Manager of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) testified before the Subcommittee On Transportation, Committee On Appropriations, U.S. House Of Representatives. **The testimony concerns continued funding of the Euclid Corridor Transportation Project.** The testimony of Calabrese is below. For a copy of the Congresswoman's testimony, call Sheila Harvey, 202-226-6708, Sheila.Harvey@mail.house.gov.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to present the following update on a project that is vital to the Greater Cleveland area. The Euclid Corridor Transportation Project is a public transportation improvement that enjoys strong support from both the public and private sectors.

I am proud to be here today with Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones, from Ohio's 11th District.

The Euclid Corridor Transportation Project consists of a 6.7-mile Bus Rapid Transit system operating from Public Square in downtown Cleveland to the Stokes/Windermere Red Line Rapid Transit station in East Cleveland. It includes transit improvements along the parallel arterials of St. Clair and Superior avenues in downtown Cleveland. Using an exclusive center median busway, the Bus Rapid Transit line will connect Cleveland's two largest employment centers -- the Central Business District and University Circle, which includes major cultural, medical and educational institutions.

From there, the transit vehicles will transition to the curb and continue into neighboring East Cleveland to serve one of our most highly used rail facilities, the Louis Stokes Rapid Transit Station at Windermere. The Project will include related transit and roadway improvements along Euclid Avenue.

The past 12 months have been significant for this effort.

The Project has completed the 30 percent Preliminary Engineering phase of design, and the FTA has concluded the environmental process by issuing a Finding of No Significant Impact, or FONSI, for the Project. All paperwork has been completed. This month, we expect to receive formal approval from the FTA to enter into the Final Design phase of engineering.

Fortunately, because of technological advances spurred by EPA regulations, the vehicle concept has been changed from an electric trolley bus to an environmentally friendly 60-foot articulated hybrid electric vehicle that is no longer constrained by overhead catenary wires.

This change enables RTA to respond to concerns about the potential visual impact of overhead catenary wires near historic structures along Euclid Avenue. The change in vehicles also represents a substantial cost savings to the Project.

Next month, RTA will introduce interim vehicles on the Euclid Corridor as they return to Cleveland from a successful tour of duty at the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

We have received a \$6 million New Starts funding earmark in FFY 2002, out of a requested \$10 million, to continue the project design. For FFY 2003, we are requesting a \$20 million New Starts funding earmark to be used to complete final design, and begin land acquisition and construction management services. Construction should begin in late 2003, with completion in late 2006.

This Project continues to enjoy strong local political and financial support.

Our request for New Starts funding represents about 61 percent of the total \$220 million project cost, with the remaining 39 percent coming from the State of Ohio, the City of Cleveland and the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority.

In the private sector, the Transportation Advocacy Committee of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association -- our Chamber of Commerce -- cites the Euclid Corridor Transportation Project as its number one transportation priority. Cleveland Tomorrow, a private-sector economic development group led by the CEOs of Cleveland's 50 largest companies, identifies the Project as one of the top transit needs in its plan, *Civic Vision 2000 and Beyond*.

In anticipation of the benefits arising from this Project, local development corporations along the Euclid Corridor are seeing a rise in investment in the area. There has already been more than \$400 million invested in projects currently completed or under construction in the downtown section of Euclid Avenue.

Most importantly, this Project will not only encourage more individuals to use public transportation, but will serve the many persons who rely exclusively on public transportation better than ever before.

The New Starts Financial Plan acknowledges that all local commitments are in place. Local dollars from the City of Cleveland, the Ohio Department of Transportation and the GCRTA are already being expended on continuing design activities.

In order to allow complementary redevelopment to continue, local funders must have confidence that their advance contributions are providing the base for full funding. It is critical that the Greater Cleveland community receive early confirmation that the Full Funding Grant Agreement will be approved.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, to stay on our current schedule for the Euclid Corridor Transportation Project, we need, and are requesting, \$20 million in FFY 2003 New Starts funds.

We believe this Project will transform the way people use public transportation in Cleveland.

Equally as important, this Project will become a model for other cities throughout the country to follow.

It will provide a catalyst for continuing economic development, access to jobs, and housing opportunities for residents throughout Cuyahoga County and beyond.

The transportation improvements, including exclusive transit lanes and traffic signal prioritization, will enable suburban transit riders to arrive at their downtown destinations more efficiently than is currently possible.

I ask for your continued support of this project with a \$20 million earmark in this FFY 2003 cycle.

I thank the Chairman and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify.

I hope you will continue to support Greater Cleveland's Euclid Corridor Transportation Project.

In addition to Congresswoman Tubbs Jones, I would also like to thank three other members of the Ohio delegation -- Ralph Regula, Steve LaTourette and Marcy Kaptur -- for their continued support.

Their regional approach to solving transportation issues is greatly appreciated.

For more information on the Euclid Corridor Transportation Project, call Project Officer Danielle Willis, 216-771-4144, or send e-mail to dwillis@gcrta.org.

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