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President's budget includes \$25 million for Euclid Corridor

CLEVELAND -- The President's Budget, released Monday for Federal Fiscal Year 2005, includes \$25 million to cover a Full Funding Grant Agreement for the long-awaited Euclid Corridor Transportation Project.

This means that Cleveland will have the first fully integrated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project in the nation, as well as the first to be recommended for a Full Funding Grant Agreement.

"This is phenomenal news," says Joe Calabrese, CEO and General Manager of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA), and Chair of a special BRT Task Force for the American Public Transportation Association.

Federal Fiscal Year 2005 begins Oct. 1, 2004. The budget proposed by President Bush must be approved by Congress before it becomes effective.

Calabrese says RTA and other funding partners are working on the Project daily, and he is confident the process will continue to move forward.

"This news from Washington should assure Clevelanders that the Project is a reality," Calabrese says. "We plan to break ground in October."

Calabrese and the RTA Board of Trustees saluted the efforts of President Bush and the Cleveland Congressional delegation, especially Senators George V. Voinovich and Mike DeWine, to keep the Project on track.

"Both Senators have been a joy to work with," Calabrese says. "As a lifelong Cleveland resident, Senator Voinovich is especially aware of the importance of this unique project."

"The Euclid Corridor transit project is vital to Cleveland's continued renewal," Voinovich says. "That is why I fought so hard for it. The President understands that also, and I am very pleased he recommended such strong funding for the Euclid Project."

Calabrese says that RTA staffers are now working to:

- Finalize details on purchasing the 21 unique vehicles that will be used in the Project.
- Starting land acquisition efforts for the right-of-way.
- Finalize design details.

RTA plans to formally apply for the Full Funding Grant Agreement this spring, with an October groundbreaking and Project completion by 2007.

Funding partners in the \$168.4 million project are:

- \$82.2 million, Federal Transit Administration
- \$50 million, Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT)

- \$18.2 million, RTA
- \$10 million, Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency
- \$8 million, City of Cleveland

In addition, ODOT is funding \$20 million of related improvements.

Calabrese says project benefits include:

- Increasing ridership.
- A 20 percent reduction in travel time from Public Square to University Circle for riders, and a 20 percent increase in efficiency for RTA.
- Boosting the local economy with 13,000 new jobs and more than \$700 million in construction proposed adjacent to the Project.
- Encouraging others to continue the re-development of Euclid Avenue.
- Work with the City of Cleveland to upgrade and replace aging infrastructure.
- Quiet and environmental vehicles operating with a five-minute frequency.

In a national conference call to the media today, federal officials saluted RTA for making "a lot of progress" in the past year, and finding "tremendous cost reductions." They noted that, "transportation is the engine of economic growth," and said that projects like Cleveland's offer "tremendous added value to commuters."

The Project enjoys widespread support from the public and private sectors.

"The recommendation for \$25 million in the President's budget for the Euclid Corridor Project is a huge win for the City," says Cleveland Mayor Jane L. Campbell. "This money allows us to complete the design phase and start construction, so that our vision for connecting downtown to University Circle is no longer a plan, but a plan in action."

Lee F. Hill, President and CEO of the Downtown Cleveland Partnership, agrees.

"The Euclid Corridor is one of the most important infrastructure projects for the region, speedily connecting our two largest centers of employment - downtown and University Circle. Downtown Cleveland Partnership is thrilled that the Project is moving forward, since it is tremendous catalyst for helping us continue rebuilding downtown as a thriving neighborhood. We are truly grateful to the efforts of Senators Voinovich and DeWine in advocating for the Project."