



July 16, 2010

our view

Let's get transit moving into 21st century

Type name here

The recent decision by IndyGo leadership and Mayor Greg Ballard to maintain the underfunded IndyGo of today offers much-needed relief to the thousands of riders who rely on transit to get to work, school, medical visits and shopping. Unfortunately, this relief will be temporary.

It's true: Because this decision does little more than extend the status quo for a system that lacks the resources and opportunity to meet the needs of a growing community, we'll likely be in this same situation a year from now. Once again, we'll be scrambling to make ends meet, focused on maintaining an underfunded and insufficient transit system and standing no closer to the system our community requires.

Bus service is the backbone of the developing plan for Central Indiana's regional mass transit system, and a major component of IndyConnect, an initiative striving to define and facilitate the transit our region deserves. That's why the current situation is so frustrating: Central Indiana needs a 21st-century mass transit system to remain economically competitive, but we're struggling to get up to 20th-century standards.

For those of us involved with efforts to improve transit, it's frustrating that a few pivotal facts aren't getting the attention they deserve:

IndyGo's problem is not about expenses. IndyGo runs a bare-bones operation and continually seeks ways to reduce costs because adequate, dedicated funding for transit has never been a priority.

This is a revenue problem. We're simply not providing IndyGo with the funding it needs. Consider that bus operations in peer cities Charlotte, N.C., and Columbus, Ohio, receive about 75 percent of their budgets from local funds, compared to IndyGo's 29 percent. With a population that's two-thirds the size of Indy's, Charlotte has more than double the budget for transit. Columbus, about the same size as Indianapolis, has 30 percent more revenue to work with than IndyGo. Both cities get more from local funding alone than IndyGo gets from all revenue sources. This revenue scenario is partly due to the impact of property tax caps. As a result, a new revenue source for transit must be found.

Residents want improved transit -- and they'll pay for it. While residents have traditionally been ambivalent about transit, 87 percent of surveyed Central Indiana folks said in 2008 that more transportation options are needed, and more than 70 percent said they would support dedicated public transit funding.

Like everything else, this is about jobs. Most people who rely on IndyGo are trying to get to work. Most employers consider workers' access to the workplace to be a key factor in deciding where to locate. We can't be strong as a region if citizens don't have access to jobs that are dispersed over our entire region. Investment in our transit system will increase workforce mobility throughout all of Central Indiana.

IndyGo's problems show that it's time to act on public opinion and create dedicated funding mechanisms to support and develop mass transit.

We applaud Ballard for taking steps to help IndyGo, but this solution is a short-term fix, not the long-term vision we need to make mass transit work. Let your leaders know that you want a long-term solution, and share your feelings by contacting your legislators and local leaders about your support for dedicated funding for transit.

Additional Facts

This letter was signed by the Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority board:

Christine Altman, CIRT president; Chuck Fewell, vice president; Jerry Bridges, secretary; Bill Kirchoff, treasurer; Mike Hale, David George, Larry Hesson, Gilbert Holmes, Ron Deer, Linda Sanders, Don Adams, Bob Sterrett, Sue Ritz, Robin Thoman, Marta Moody.
