

Full speed ahead with mass transit efforts

The future of mass transit for all in Central Indiana moved closer to reality in 2008, and 2009 promises even bigger strides forward.

In the context of cutbacks in bus service and rising IndyGo fares, that might sound like an odd statement. But last year's progress moved us forward.

Now with Central Indiana's business community and Central Indiana Corporate Partnership backing studies and research that support a regional transportation vision, the team supporting our effort is complete. The Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority will continue its leadership with growing support from all its partners to bring mobility options to our neighbors and visitors – improving and connecting all forms of public transportation to give area residents better access to jobs, cultural amenities and community services.

Thanks to a lot of hard work from a number of people – as well as considerable input from citizens – the region is about to embark on environmental studies for its first light rail line. A line would connect the people and places from Noblesville to Downtown Indianapolis with service and access for the neighbors in between. This first path is chosen because of the steadily increasing population, congestion and economic development in northeast Marion County and southern Hamilton County, and it makes use of the existing Nickel Plate rail line, in partnership with the Hoosier Heritage Port Authority.

That line could be ready as soon as 2012, while we continue work in connecting all nine regional counties by rail and bus service. Our goal is to provide all



Altman

Christine Altman

MY VIEW

Central Indiana residents with greater mobility, increased economic opportunities, reduced energy consumption, transportation options and better air quality.

Getting to this point has been a long process. As president of the Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority, I've been impressed by the tireless work and visionary leadership provided by my fellow board members, as well as the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Indianapolis Regional Transportation Council.

At the same time, we've seen enthusiasm for mass transit grow in other circles. An independent poll conducted by the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of Realtors found more than 87 percent of Central Indiana residents think additional transportation options are needed. Business leaders identified mass transit as second only to health-care costs in terms of importance to the local economy. Commuters boarded new bus services. Legislators presented bills aimed at increasing funding for mass transit to the Indiana General Assembly. We look forward to more support from other business leaders and organizations forming committees and task forces to investigate the impact, opportunities and value that a comprehensive, regional transit system will offer Central Indiana.

We continue to serve as your primary contact for Central Indiana's mass transit future, and are working with IndyGo and the rural transit providers to build the best solutions for today's transit challenges.

Visit www.cirta.us or call (317) 327-7585. Together, we can, if you'll pardon the expression, keep our progress on track.

★ Altman is president of the Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority.