



STARK AREA REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

1600 Gateway Blvd SE • Canton, Ohio 44707

Come Ride With Us!

Phone: (330) 454-6132 • 1-800-379-3661
Fax: (330) 454-5476 • www.SARTAonline.com

Contact: Kirt Conrad @ ext. 522 (330-488-5293 cell) or James Warner @ ext. 513

Canton, Ohio – December 18, 2009

*** For Immediate Release ***

**SARTA TO CONDUCT A FULL PERFORMANCE AND EFFICIENCY STUDY
OF ALL SERVICES CURRENTLY PROVIDED AND COMMUNITY NEEDS**

2010 Review Will Shape the Future of Public Transportation in Stark County

Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) has contracted with Parsons Brinckerhoff, Inc. (PB), an international transportation engineering and planning firm with offices in Cleveland, to evaluate all of their current services, financial status, community transportation needs, and company operations. At their December 16th meeting, SARTA's Board approved PB to do a five-year Operating and Capital Plan. This type of study is required and paid for by the Federal Transit Administration. This comprehensive effort will examine all of SARTA's fixed routes, Proline service, and Community Coach shopping routes, and compare them to regional and national benchmarks. Areas that are not productive could be modified, changed, or terminated. Areas that are in need of service could be added. This evaluation will serve as a base for all future public transportation services in Stark County over the next several years.

Public transportation provides access to job opportunities for Stark County citizens as well as a transportation option to get to work, go to school, visit friends, or go to a doctor's office. SARTA provides over 2.6 million rides per year and every day transports about 2,500 people to work, 450 students to school, and 400 riders to medical services. According to the American Public Transportation Association, 83% of older Americans say that public transit provides easy access to the things they need in everyday life.

SARTA will seek input from current riders, stakeholders, and the general public on what areas need improvement. Three separate rounds of public forums will be conducted as well as individual focus groups, including interviews of local employers, medical providers, social service agencies, and educational institutions. In addition, a direct mail survey will be conducted of a sample of Stark County residents.

"We invite the community to help us to shape the future of public transportation here in Stark County," said Kirt Conrad SARTA's CEO. "This will be one of the most important community engagement efforts SARTA has ever carried out. We want to work with as many people, groups, and employers as possible to ensure SARTA understands and is able to meet the transportation needs of Stark County citizens."

This process will happen over a six-month period with the first round of public meetings taking place in February. A review of all services will be conducted demographically, geographically, and on individual buses with recommendations from PB on how to improve efficiency. "This will ensure that tax funds are being used as effectively as possible. This is especially necessary as we go into 2010 with declining local sales tax revenues," continued Conrad. The audit will also assess the impacts of the 12% service reduction and 25% fare increase effective last September. This cut impacted 525 local jobs and riders' access to work, schools, and medical services. "Hopefully, we will not have to make further service cuts in 2010," said Conrad.

See the SARTA website (www.SARTAonline.com) for updates or other details about this project in 2010.

###

Media outlets can find photos to use for articles at www.SARTAonline.com/press.