



President's Remarks – May 11, 2011
Richard L. Rodriguez

Thank you Chairman Peterson,

As I end my tenure at the CTA, I want to let the Board know how much I've enjoyed working with you over the past two years. You have been strong advocates for transit and supportive of my ideas and projects to improve the way that we provide service.

When I joined the CTA, Mayor Daley stressed to me the importance of the simple, yet substantial goals, of providing on-time, clean, safe, courteous and efficient service. To this end, I made it my utmost priority to ride the system frequently, and had the opportunity to meet and speak with many riders and employees.

Despite the financial constraints, together we have accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time.

I would like to take a few minutes to run through the highlights.

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To enhance the customer experience, even in times of service reductions, we completed the rollout of Bus Tracker to all routes -- making bus arrival information available on our website or through customized email alerts.

Last year, Bus Tracker functionality was improved by adding two-way texting so that even more of our customers can use this great tool.

In January, we launched a similar program for our rail service, called Train Tracker; and today, we have come before the Board with a proposal to install electronic signs at select bus shelters that will feature bus arrival information. Soon, CTA will also feature Bus and Train Tracker on its digital advertising screens across its system.

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Technology is also transforming the way in which we secure our system.

All CTA stations now have at least one camera, and a current project underway will increase coverage through the installation of additional cameras.

We are also testing the use of cameras on rail cars. The new 5000 series will already come equipped with cameras, and we are testing the best way to retrofit the remainder of our fleet.

Where funding has been made available, we have made enhancements to our infrastructure.

In 2009, we secured \$241 million dollars in capital funding through the federal stimulus bill. We used this money to improve travel conditions for our customers through the elimination of slow zones along the Blue Line; the rehabilitation of existing bus and rail cars; and the purchase of 58 new hybrid articulated buses.

Stimulus funds also allowed us to make renovations to the Cermak/Chinatown Red Line station, including features that make the station accessible to customers with disabilities.

On the North Side, we finished the Brown Line Capacity Expansion project. And we were able to refurbish the Red Line station at North and Clybourn, through a partnership with Apple Inc.

We are also working with the City of Chicago and the Village of Skokie to break ground on two new stations – at Morgan Street on the Green Line and a new Yellow Line stop in Skokie.

Looking to the future, we began taking a holistic approach to plan much-needed improvements on the Red Line, from end-to-end. The alternatives analysis was completed for the extension on the south end of the Red Line, as was also done for the proposed Orange and Yellow Line extensions.

This accomplishment puts the CTA one step further in the planning process under the New Starts Program.

For the north end of the Red Line, where the infrastructure is in dire need of not only renovation, but also modernization, we conducted a Vision Study. We were happy to see the engagement of thousands of people in this process who shared their input through their participation in community meetings or through written comments. And we will soon be proceeding with an environmental impact study to further the process.

Extension and modernization projects are large undertakings that take years to be realized, but we have made great progress and continue to forge ahead.

Our infrastructure investments were not all directed at the rail side of the business.

In addition to the hybrid buses we purchased, both the CTA and the City of Chicago were successful at receiving federal grants to pilot a bus rapid transit route, which is currently being developed in partnership with CDOT.

Another one of my priorities was improving efficiencies.

As an environmentally conscious organization, we created a Green Team and a section on our web site for the ongoing development of green initiatives to achieve energy and cost savings.

Given our financial constraints, I also challenged my management staff to reduce costs, increase revenues, and still provide the best value for our customers. I appreciate and commend their notable efforts to hold down costs, while still getting the job done.

As you know, due to the economic downturn, I had the challenging task of balancing two of CTA's worst budget shortfall in years. In 2010, we had to make the difficult decision to reduce service. Nonetheless, we made every effort to minimize the impact to all riders, ensure a strong awareness campaign to prepare riders for the changes, and promote the use of Bus Tracker.

This approach to service reductions helped us maintain our ridership. In fact, our ridership levels for 2010 remained within one percentage point of the prior year. I want to thank our riders for their loyal use of our system, and for their understanding as CTA weathered the recession.

To raise non-farebox revenues, we significantly increased the number of ATM machines on CTA property, brought in new concessions, tested specialty vending machines, and leased office and commercial space in this building.

We also began a process to pursue public-private partnerships for revenue and/or cost-saving opportunities. The CTA is moving forward with a plan to value its assets and pursue naming rights and corporate sponsorships. Responses to an RFP are currently being evaluated and a recommendation will soon come before the Board.

Likewise, we started the process of planning an open fare initiative that will give riders greater convenience when paying their fares, while providing cost-savings to CTA.

There were many smaller initiatives designed to make us a more responsive, transparent, and efficient organization.

In the interest of safety, for example, the CTA was one of the first transit agencies in the country to adopt a zero tolerance policy for cell phone use. And with the purpose of being more transparent, we added a vendor database to our website to provide access to contract information. Our DBE program was also revamped to increase competition and provide greater opportunities to small businesses.

Along the way, CTA has been the proud recipient of numerous awards for a variety of initiatives.

All in all, it has been quite a ride. From the blizzard of 2011, to the Blackhawks rally and July 4th fireworks; these events posed operational challenges that required round the clock work and extraordinary coordination. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the employees, from top to bottom, who made it possible for the CTA to successfully provide service during these events.

Transit is one of the most effective economic engines for the region, but unfortunately the CTA still faces financial hurdles and the pressure of aging systems.

I wish the best of luck to my successor, Forrest Claypool, as he works to build upon our accomplishments and address ongoing challenges. If I can ever be of assistance, I'll just be a phone call away.

The CTA is essential to the lives of so many people. It has been an honor and privilege to lead it. I thank the Board and Mayor Daley for the opportunity to serve.

Thank you.