



For Immediate Release
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NEORide and SARTA receive \$1.25 million in federal funding for innovative EZConnect project, centralized one-call, one-click mobility center will increase access to public transit across Ohio

The drive to move EZConnect, a proposed one-call, one-click public transit mobility center from concept to reality gained momentum this week thanks to a \$1.25 million federal grant awarded to the Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) and NEORide, the 23-member council of governments that is developing and deploying innovative transportation solutions for transit systems in Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Arkansas. U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown secured the funding which was included in the 2023 Omnibus Appropriations bill which was signed by President Biden on December 29, 2022.

NEORide Director Katherine Conrad, said the EZConnect call center will provide centralized reservation, ride scheduling, dispatch, and customer relations services to SARTA, the Western Reserve Transit Authority (WRTA), Wayne-Medina Community Action, CAA of Columbiana County, Trumbull County Transit, the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority, and the Butler County Regional Transit Authority. Via, one of the world's leading providers of transit technology, is developing the software and systems for EZConnect which is expected to be fully operational in 2026.

“By ending the duplication of services and employing state of the art technology, EZConnect will enable each of the participating systems to vastly improve mobility management, enhance customer service, coordinate the acquisition and use of drivers, vehicles, and other resources, improve operational efficiency, and generate substantial cost savings that will be used to expand access to and the use of public transit across Ohio,” Ms. Conrad said.

“Increasing access is a primary focus of the project because a significant number of the 2.2 million people who reside in the communities our systems serve depend on public transit,” Ms. Conrad explained. “More than 12% are persons with disabilities, 17% have household incomes below the poverty line, and 17% are older adults. Our systems currently provide 10 million rides per year and demand is growing. We are confident EZConnect will play a key role in helping our systems meet that demand by enabling them to deliver an additional one million rides annually.”

The prospect of increased ridership has made Kirt Conrad, CEO of SARTA the Canton, Ohio-based transit system that operates the largest fleet of zero-emission hydrogen fuel cell powered buses in the Western Hemisphere, an enthusiastic supporter of the EZConnect project. “The expanded use of public transportation eliminates tons of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, lessens America’s reliance of foreign oil, and reduces traffic congestion,” he said. “By making it

easier and more convenient to use public transit EZConnect will improve our environment and enhance the quality of life in our communities. We are pleased and proud to be a member of the this impressive team.”

For more information please contact NEORide Director Katherine Conrad at 330-334-6877.

About NEORide

NEORide is a Council of Governments comprised of 23 public transit agencies in 5 states including Ohio, Arkansas, Kentucky, Michigan and West Virginia that are committed to breaking down artificial boundaries, streamlining opportunities and making it easier for people to utilize public transportation. For more information please visit www.neoride.org

About SARTA

The Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) was established in 1997 to meet the public transportation needs of Stark County, Ohio residents. SARTA provides more than 2.5 million rides annually to commuters, seniors, individuals with disabilities, students, and veterans through the system's fixed routes, Proline, MedLine, veterans, and campus bus services.

Along with providing safe, reliable, affordable transportation to destinations in Stark and beyond, SARTA is a nationally recognized leader in the use of transit technology. The system has received numerous awards for its clean energy initiatives which include the acquisition and deployment of one of the world's largest fleets of hydrogen fuel powered-buses. To learn more please visit sartaonline.com