



Tom Dodge / Dispatch

Ray Miller, right, COTA's assistant general manager, responds to questions about the agency's long-range trans- it plans, including the regional rail corridors shown on the map being held in the foreground.

# Only 4 people show up to react to COTA's long-term transit plan

By Phil Porter  
Dispatch Staff Reporter

The general public's first reaction to COTA's plan for commuter rail and expanded bus service was generally positive but sparse.

"I think this is perfect. If anything, it doesn't go far enough," said Mark Hylton of Columbus.

He was one of four people who last night attended the first of eight community meetings that the Central Ohio Transit Authority plans during the next two months to seek input and support for its long-term strategic plan. The meeting was held at Otterbein College in Westerville.

Hylton, a Downtown resident and biker, would like to see the four commuter rail lines that COTA is considering between Downtown and the North and East sides expanded to outlying cities, such as Xenia, Lancaster, Marion and Newark.

But COTA'S preliminary plan,

which is not expected to be finalized until February, is headed in the right direction, Hylton said.

"For 20 years, this was a do-nothing transit system. I feel like I'm talking to the new COTA."

All of those attending liked the concept of COTA becoming more than a bus system by 2020. COTA has proposed a Downtown rail route and the use of "intelligent" technology to control traffic lights for buses.

Allen Prindle, an economics professor at Otterbein, said COTA needs to improve service to college students there.

Karl Gebhardt of Westerville said existing bus service should be marketed better so Westerville students and residents can use the system for short trips, bypassing State Street congestion.

COTA officials acknowledged it was difficult to persuade many Westerville residents to take advantage of the first suburban circulator serv-

ice, launched in Westerville in June. That service serves only about 400 passengers a week, but ridership has increased steadily.

Another concern voiced at the meeting was the preference suburban development often shows to automobile transportation over mass transit. Prindle said more sidewalks are needed to provide better access to park-and-ride sites.

Brian Higgins with the South Linden Area Commission said he likes the commuter rail options but would like to see better cross-town access than is planned among such areas as Tuttle Mall, Port Columbus and Rickenbacker Airport.

Ray Miller, COTA's assistant general manager, said comments from the meetings will be compiled for the COTA board. The next meeting is at 7 p.m. Dec. 3 at the Whitehall Community Park building, Room 3.