



DANIEL J. CRONIN
COUNTY BOARD CHAIRMAN

DuPage County

(630) 407-6060

December 20, 2013

Mr. Tony Paulauski, Executive Director of the Arc of Chicago
Northeastern Illinois Public Transit Task Force
2300 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62764

Dear Mr. Paulauski,

Based on our dialogue at the most recent Northeastern Illinois Public Transit Task Force meeting, I want to share further information with you regarding my recommendations for reforms at the Regional Transportation Authority.

You mentioned at the December 12 meeting that some experts, particularly former RTA Executive Director Steve Schlickman, believe that the RTA does not need additional authority. Instead, the RTA needs to focus on implementing underutilized statutory powers already granted, which I believe refers to such items as the responsibility to audit the three Service Boards, or the development of a system-wide coordinated marketing plan.

As I stated in my testimony, I agree that the RTA can and should do more to exercise their current authority. Regular audits of the Service Boards would allow the RTA to assess vulnerabilities that could be addressed. Additionally, the development of a system-wide coordinated marketing plan could promote collaboration across all four agencies, but even that is not guaranteed in the present parochial system.

While we should encourage the RTA leadership to exercise their current underutilized authorities and hold them accountable to do so, we must take steps to further guarantee that the RTA performs as effectively and efficiently as a true oversight authority. I do not believe the current powers granted under the RTA Act are sufficient to ensure that the RTA can properly practice its authority over our regional public transit system. We need to strengthen the RTA by granting the agency additional authorities.

Along with the other County executives, I call for the RTA to have line-item veto authority. This simple tool would give the RTA the flexibility to address specific concerns that arise during budgeting without bringing the entire process to a complete standstill. Additionally, we should require the Service Boards to submit detailed and uniform budgets to the RTA as part of the budgeting process, and submit to a uniform bonding strategy that emanates from the RTA.

I also believe the RTA should have the authority to review any compensation or severance package offered by the Service Boards before it can be finalized. This additional safeguard speaks directly to the oversight responsibilities of the RTA and serves as another layer of protection in the public's best interest. As we saw this past year, the current powers given to the RTA could not prevent a controversial severance package from being offered by Metra to their former executive director.

Furthermore, the RTA should create and oversee a uniform ethics program for themselves and the Service Boards. The program should set the highest ethical standards based on best practices, and should specifically include employee training regarding merit based hiring and procurement. These are just a few examples of additional powers that illustrate the need for a stronger and better equipped oversight agency. While the RTA does need to more forcefully apply current powers, some of these powers cannot be implemented proactively, but rather after an issue or problem has already arisen.

Therefore, additional authority must be given to the RTA. These powers will not only help the RTA carry out its responsibility of oversight more effectively, but they will enhance and complement the current powers, such as the audit authority and the development of a coordinated marketing plan. For example, the review and rejection of an ill-advised severance package would immediately protect public funds and would lead to an audit of that agency. Service Boards would have greater accountability to the RTA, while the RTA increases their accountability to the tax and fare paying public.

A stronger RTA with greater authority is my recommendation under the current public transit structure. However, I support another solution of one regional transit agency, governed by a single board of directors, and led by one chief executive officer. The Service Boards would become operating divisions within the newly created agency. Ultimately, a one-agency structure would improve accountability, promote consolidation, and increase transparency throughout the entire system.

In summary, the only way public transit can succeed under the current structure is to equip the RTA with greater authority to carry out their statutory responsibilities of effective oversight. If we believe it possible to restructure the system, however, I recommend a fully integrated single transit agency responsible for the operations of transit services throughout the region. Both scenarios argue for the need of a stronger agency to coordinate, operate, and implement public transit in our region.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to share further information on my recommendations on how we can make our region into a world-class public transit system. I am grateful for the opportunity to assist the Task Force. I appreciate your thoughtfulness on these matters and look forward to the Task Force's final assessment in January.

Sincerely,



Daniel J. Cronin
DuPage County Board Chairman

CC: Members of the Northeastern Illinois Public Transit Task Force
County Executives