



**Business, Community, Rural, and
Emerging Leaders Advisory Councils**

Meeting Minutes
June 27, 2025
NOACA Offices

Present: Attached to these meeting minutes is the attendance record.

Ms. Valarie McCall, Chair of BAC, convened the joint BAC, CAC, RAC, and ELAC meeting at 11:30 a.m.

ELAC Meeting Minutes

Mr. Andrew Vitaliti made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 28, 2025. Ms. Elena Stachew seconded the motion. The motion passed by voice vote.

Ms. Bishara Addison, Chair of CAC, took over and led the meeting from this point forward.

CAC Meeting Minutes

Loh made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 28, 2025. Mr. Morgan McIntyre seconded the motion. The motion passed by voice vote.

BAC Meeting Minutes

The BAC did not have a quorum, so the meeting minutes listed below were not approved:

- March 28, 2025, Combined Councils
- December 6, 2024, Combined Councils
- September 27, 2024, Combined Councils
- June 21, 2024, Combined Councils
- March 22, 2024, Combined Councils
- December 8, 2023, Combined Councils
- September 22, 2023, Combined Councils

RAC Meeting Minutes

The RAC did not have a quorum, so the meeting minutes listed below were not approved:

- March 28, 2025, Combined Councils
- December 6, 2024, Combined Councils
- September 27, 2024, Combined Councils
- June 21, 2024, Combined Councils
- March 22, 2024, Combined Councils
- December 8, 2023, Combined Councils
- September 22, 2023, Combined Councils
- June 23, 2023, Combined Councils
- March 31, 2023, Combined Councils

- December 2, 2022
- September 23, 2022
- June 24, 2022
- March 25, 2022

Public Comment

No public comment was made at this meeting.

Executive Director's Report

Director Grace Gallucci announced that NOACA has new sound equipment in the boardroom.

Action Items

No action items were presented at this meeting.

Presentation / Discussion Items

SFY 2025 Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program Applications

Ms. Sarah White explained that the CMAQ program is a federal initiative to support transportation projects that help meet national air quality standards.

Ms. White presented information on the following:

- Purpose of CMAQ Program
- Program Goals
 - Improve Air Quality
 - Relieve Congestion
- CMAQ Program Funding Cycles: NOACA Region (2015-2025)
 - CMAQ operates on a two-year cycle, NOACA has about \$40 million available to fund projects this cycle
- Eligible Applicants
- Phases of Development Eligible for Funding
- Eligible Project Types, Including Project Type Score
- Project Evaluation Criteria (up to 100 Points)
- Program Timeline
- 2025 CMAQ Project Requests

Ms. White stated that staff would complete the project evaluation and scoring process, incorporating feedback from the Councils and Transportation Subcommittee, and would present the projects to the Planning and Programming Committee. She noted that the recommended projects would then be brought to the Board of Directors for approval at its September 12 meeting. Following Board approval, staff would submit the applications to the Ohio Statewide Urban Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) Committee (OSUCC) for comparison with other statewide projects in Autumn 2025. It was expected that OSUCC would then forward their project recommendations to the OARC Executive Directors for final approval at their November 2025 meeting.

Mr. Vitaliti noted that the total available funding for projects was approximately \$40 million, while the total amount requested was \$57 million. He pointed out that GCRTA was requesting over half of the available funds—\$24 million. He asked that NOACA staff and the Board consider the return on investment (ROI), particularly how many people would benefit from each project, which he believed was not fully captured by the emissions target. He expressed concern that awarding \$24 million to GCRTA could limit funding opportunities for other projects. He emphasized the

importance of comparing GCRTA's ridership to the projected usage of other proposals and acknowledged that the project evaluation rubric appeared to be very rigorous.

Mr. Vitaliti asked about a project in the City of Lorain involving a traffic detection system. He inquired whether the system currently helped reduce congestion or if it was simply a detection system the city was seeking.

Ms. White stated that the City of Lorain's project had two components. One part involved traffic detection, which would be integrated with the city's traditional traffic lights. This would allow the city to monitor traffic conditions and adjust signal timing as needed in certain situations. It would also help collect valuable data on wait times, congestion, and related issues. The second component focused on the bridge. This included implementing signage and information systems to notify drivers when the bridge needed to rise for vessel traffic. The goal was to help vehicles find alternate routes and avoid long delays.

Mr. Vitaliti said he appreciated Ms. White's explanation about the detection system, noting that even though it was just a detection tool, it could still prompt someone to adjust the traffic lights in response to congestion. He also noted that the system could also be used in the future for analysis and specific recommendations.

Ms. Stachew commented on the significant funding allocated to the GCRTA project, noting that, according to the details, GCRTA planned to replace 58 CNG buses with newer models. She wondered if, in previous project cycles, NOACA had ever adjusted applications to fund more projects overall; for example, by approving the replacement of 38 buses instead of 58. This approach would still allow for the replacement of heavily used transit buses while maintaining essential service but could free up funds to support additional projects.

Ms. White stated that NOACA did consider partial awards based on the availability of funds and the application score. She added that part of the scoring criteria included cost-effectiveness, projected emissions reductions, the anticipated users, and the number of vehicles expected to be removed from the road.

Ms. Stachew noted that many heavier-duty vehicles, such as buses and transit vans, were still diesel- or gas-powered. She suggested that, given these projects were scheduled for 2030 and the growing availability of electric vehicles and transit options, it might be reasonable to recommend one or two transit lines as pilot projects for using electric vehicles instead of replacing a large portion of a fleet with more efficient fuel-based vehicles. Generally, her question was whether NOACA or the state offered guidance or support for piloting electric vehicle infrastructure and transit deployment in these types of projects.

Ms. White explained that electric vehicles were eligible under the CMAQ program, and one of the current applicants had included electric vehicles as part of their request. She added that, in terms of trends, she expected more applicants to request electric vehicles in the future. Although this round did not see many such requests, she noted that Laketran already operated some electric buses. Additionally, there were alternative fuel vehicles in use, including propane and compressed natural gas (CNG) buses. She suggested that a wide range of fuel types could be seen in future applications.

Ms. McCall clarified that she was not speaking on behalf of GCRTA but wanted to acknowledge that the transit agency had done a good job regularly replacing its most heavily used vehicles. She noted that most people were aware of GCRTA's ongoing train replacement initiative and emphasized that the same approach applied to buses, vehicles that frequently cycled through

and needed retirement were appropriately phased out of the fleet. She noted that she had recently attended the Legislative Meeting for the American Public Transportation Association where she and others met with both Senator Husted and Senator Moreno. During the meeting, Senator Moreno expressed his lack of support for electric vehicles.

Ms. McCall highlighted this as an important issue, noting that such views could significantly influence policy since Senator Moreno held influential positions on the Banking and Commerce Committees. She urged NOACA to pay close attention to this stance and suggested that it might be worthwhile for NOACA to consider a follow-up to better understand the reasoning behind such strong opposition to electric buses.

Loh acknowledged the concern about funding distribution and that GCRTA was receiving most of the funding. She explained that, from the community's perspective, GCRTA had broader needs, noting public health concerns related to public transportation following the COVID-19 pandemic. Loh explained that GCRTA's need to replace buses went beyond vehicle age and suggested that the current fleet no longer met modern standards of public safety and hygiene. She gave an example of replacing cloth seats with plastic ones to help address cleanliness concerns but stressed that minor updates were not sufficient—a full interior redesign was needed to meet today's expectations. According to Loh, GCRTA was actively working to purchase buses that were both mechanically sound and better designed for the public's evolving needs. She expressed hope that other counties would take similar steps if their residents were experiencing the same concerns. While she acknowledged that funding was limited, she was assured that the goal was to manage resources so that all counties would eventually receive their fair share for vehicle replacements.

Ms. Schmitt noted that, based on her understanding, it was typical for GCRTA to receive a large share of this type of funding. She acknowledged GCRTA's important role in promoting sustainable transportation within the region and recognized the concerns raised by others. While she admitted she was not familiar with all the specific projects under discussion, she believed this funding pattern might reflect the agency's long-standing role and responsibilities.

Ms. Addison referenced a slide presented by Ms. White on eligible project types and noted that two categories stood out: employer-based programs and travel demand management. She also pointed out that modal subsidies and vouchers were included, indicating that the funding could support a wide range of initiatives. However, Ms. Addison observed that, among the list of submitted projects there did not appear to be any related to employer-based programs or travel demand management. She expressed curiosity about how organizations could become aware of these funding opportunities, particularly since Ms. White had mentioned that this funding was available every two years. Ms. Addison's asked whether this funding would still be available in the next cycle, given potential changes at the federal level, and for clarification on how one learns about the opportunity and the process for applying.

Ms. White explained that when the funding process begins every two years, NOACA makes an effort to announce it widely—reaching out to advisory councils, subcommittees, committees, and the Board. She added that staff are always happy to collect the names of anyone interested in receiving updates and strive to maintain a current contact list, which includes community staff and other stakeholders. To support applicants, NOACA holds a virtual webinar during each application round. Ms. White noted that the information could sometimes be complex, particularly regarding emissions requirements or traffic studies. The webinars are open to anyone who signs up and are intended to help participants better understand the eligible projects and the overall program.

Ms. Addison said Ms. White's response was helpful.

Ms. Addison said she was not entirely sure how NOACA's advisory councils were activated for specific roles. Although she served on the Community Advisory Council, she was also connected to several manufacturing industry associations. She said she wished she had known about the funding opportunity earlier so she could have shared it with her networks. She suggested having a future discussion on better activating council members to help share important information. Even something as simple as an email highlighting the opportunity and asking council members to distribute it. Ms. Addison acknowledged that NOACA sent many emails and emphasized the need to help council members prioritize key messages. She added that reinforcing the council's outreach role would be especially helpful as the 2027 funding cycle approaches.

Director Gallucci clarified that only government organizations are eligible to apply for the funding, which is a key point. Because of this, NOACA's outreach was primarily directed at elected officials within the five-county region, including mayors, county commissioners, and regional transit authorities. She noted that NOACA did not typically contact stakeholders or the public about these opportunities, since they are not eligible applicants.

Ms. Addison asked how NOACA prioritizes projects when multiple applications receive high scores, but available funding is limited; for example, when \$40 million is available, but project requests total \$57 million. She inquired how decisions are made on which projects to fully fund, partially fund, or not fund at all when the scores are comparable.

Ms. White responded that, beyond the scoring rubric, prioritization also considered emissions reductions and cost-effectiveness. She said it was important to assess how much more could be reduced based on the funding awarded. NOACA staff also review a wide range of scores and examines all aspects of each project to help make informed decisions.

Ms. Addison said Ms. White's response was helpful.

Ms. Addison asked where the funding for this work originated—state or federal—and whether comparable funding levels were anticipated in the next round in 2027. She suggested this might be addressed in the upcoming Government Affairs Report.

Director Gallucci stated that the current authorization for federal transportation funding will expire in 2026, and in the coming year it should become clear what will replace the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). She explained that although the exact details are not yet known, funding for core programs has historically remained consistent regardless of administration and while there was no immediate need for concern about funding for core programs, there was always a possibility that Congress could eliminate the program entirely. She stated that NOACA was closely monitoring the situation, participating in industry discussions, and actively advocating for its priorities in the transportation law reauthorization.

Ms. Addison said that Director Gallucci's response was helpful.

Director Gallucci then asked for feedback from the councils on some of projects that were not typical, specifically vehicle electrification for heavy-duty fleet vehicles like garbage trucks—not transit vehicles, which was a new type of eligible request. She explained that the project proposal had scored well, but that there was initial concern because the request included multiple fleet types, such as fire trucks, which did not score well because they were not on the road enough to have a significant environmental impact. Garbage trucks, however, operated frequently at slow speeds with many stops, providing a clear environmental benefit. Director Gallucci sought input

on whether projects like this could reduce opportunities for other projects such as bicycle and pedestrian facilities or trails, which were also eligible and typically scored well.

Ms. Addison said she was interested in knowing whether the City of Cleveland's application included an estimate of how much the current garbage trucks were polluting or impacting the environment as well as what reduction in emissions the city expected from the replacement vehicles.

Director Gallucci stated that NOACA conducted this type of analysis for every project. She explained that when staff indicated a project scored well, it was based on various criteria, including emissions reductions. Staff also evaluated cost-effectiveness by comparing the project's costs to its positive impact on air quality. She noted, however, that this was a new type of project for NOACA and she hoped to hear from the councils.

Ms. Mary Samide requested clarification about how garbage pickup was funded in Cleveland. She wondered whether it was included in residents' taxes or if people paid a separate annual fee, as was common in some rural areas. She noted that this distinction was important, especially if the service was fully funded.

Director Gallucci clarified that Section 5310 funding was designated for city or county vehicles—not the private sector. For example, in Geauga County and other areas, garbage pickup was managed by private companies, and residents paid for the service through subscriptions.

Ms. Samide asked again how the service was funded.

Ms. McCall stated that most city vehicles were funded through municipal bonds. The City of Cleveland typically issued bonds each year, depending on its capacity and the number of vehicles needed, and generally, vehicle funding had been handled this way in the past.

Ms. Samide asked if it was tax-based.

Ms. McCall said yes.

Mr. Sleasman said he did not think the councils should be concerned just because something was new as anything innovative would be new. He asked if the concern was about funding this project versus other potentially preferable items and wondered where the scoring criteria came from. If a project scored well, then it scored well. If NOACA felt other criteria should be included and controlled those criteria, it could consider adjusting them. But if the scoring was based on the current criteria, then a project that scored well should be prioritized over others. He wondered if there were fundamental concerns with how projects were scored then it might be necessary to reassess the criteria and the application. He asked where the scoring originated.

Director Gallucci explained that the scoring criteria were established by the Statewide CMAQ Committee, so NOACA did not have sole control over it. While NOACA participated in the Statewide CMAQ Committee and contributed to the development of the criteria, making changes was challenging. The current criteria had been in place since approximately 2014.

Ms. Addison said she was curious about the underlying point of Mr. Sleasman's question. She wondered if several projects scored well and met the CMAQ criteria but total funding requested exceeded available funds, could NOACA apply additional criteria to help prioritize and select among those projects? Since NOACA was a public body, any such criteria would need to be

transparent and publicly shared. She then asked Mr. Sleasman if that was the issue he was raising.

In response to Ms. Addison's comment, Mr. Sleasman noted that was another way to get to the same endpoint. He said that if the concern was that this project diverted funding from preferable projects, it was important to define what made those projects preferable. If this project scored higher based on the criteria, it should be considered preferable. However, if there were concerns about funding direction, reshuffling priorities could be explored. He emphasized that new projects should not be rejected simply because they were new or might lead to similar future projects. If a project scored well, it indicated quality proposals were being received. If the issue lay with the criteria themselves, that was a separate discussion.

Ms. Angie Schmitt agreed with many points made during the discussion but was especially enthusiastic about the vehicle electrification effort due to its strong potential to reduce emissions, which explained its high score in the analysis. She noted that air quality—central to the program—had received little discussion, despite some lower-income Cleveland neighborhoods facing serious air pollution problems. She shared personal concerns, mentioning her son's respiratory issues and the common use of nebulizers among children at his daycare. Ms. Schmitt expressed hope that NOACA could have a positive impact on these vulnerable communities. While she acknowledged that vehicle electrification involved a steep learning curve and upfront subsidies, she believed it would become more cost-effective over time and could save cities and taxpayers money. She found it exciting that the City of Cleveland had considered this initiative.

Loh acknowledged that while the discussion focused on air quality, it was connected to broader issues. She emphasized the importance of considering all vehicles, including city-owned or funded ones like fire trucks and garbage trucks, in efforts to improve air quality. She noted that uncollected garbage, especially during high temperatures, could worsen air quality and negatively affect communities. While supporting the inclusion of garbage trucks, she expressed concerns about initiatives like e-bike rebates and dockless scooters. She supported e-bike rebates for personal, long-term use due to their sustainability benefits but highlighted safety issues with rental e-bikes and scooters, such as reckless use on sidewalks and abandoned vehicles. Loh recommended that any such programs be carefully evaluated to ensure they support both air quality goals and public safety.

Mr. Vitaliti asked for clarification regarding when Director Gallucci and Ms. McCall mentioned this could "open the flood gates" or raise future concerns. He took it to mean that if NOACA approved this request now, it might lead to much larger requests in the future.

Director Gallucci explained that she meant that the councils should consider what the future might look like. She explained that this program had traditionally focused on transportation projects, but there was a possibility it could shift toward more of a fleet replacement program. While these uses were eligible, the emphasis would be different. She noted that what she seemed to be hearing from the councils—which she viewed as very positive—was that there was less concern about that shift and more focus on the actual impact of the projects on air quality, which was the core purpose of the program. She added that she would continue to consider the broader implications, but overall, the feedback seemed more positive than negative.

Ms. McCall expressed concern that such a program was fundamentally a municipal project, not a transportation project. She noted that Cleveland residents already paid fees for trash pickup, so taxpayers were already funding these services. Although she was glad the city pursued the funding, she cautioned that allowing this funding might lead to many similar requests from other municipalities, potentially overwhelming the program. She noted that what started with garbage

trucks could extend to other municipal vehicles like fire trucks, EMS, and police cars. Ms. McCall encouraged reviewing Cleveland's budget book to see vehicle spending and noted that, while the funding discussed was small compared to those amounts, it could lead to a greater concern.

Director Gallucci said that was a good point. At the Transportation Subcommittee meeting the previous week, one of the members raised a similar question. They were not familiar with this use and wondered if everyone had been made aware of it, since the City of Cleveland was the only applicant at that time. Once this is opened, there is a good chance the program could shift from what it had traditionally been. That was not necessarily a bad thing if it still served the purpose of the program, but she wanted to hear everyone's thoughts. Sometimes new ideas were good, even if they were a little hard to understand or accept at first but that is often how progress is made.

Ms. Addison said she had a few points she hoped NOACA would consider. She noted that she was agnostic about whether the agency decided to support city vehicle electrification—specifically, the replacement of municipal vehicles—but if it did, there were several considerations to keep in mind. First, building on the point Ms. Call had raised about existing funding sources for this type of activity, she suggested treating the effort as a pilot program or attaching some form of evaluation to it. She acknowledged, from her experience as a grant maker, how frustrating it could be when too many conditions were placed on funding. However, in this case, she believed it could be worthwhile to demonstrate that under normal circumstances municipalities experience specific community benefits to help make a stronger case for leveraging alternative funding. Without framing the initiative as a pilot or demonstration, she was concerned that the agency might open the floodgates without gaining any additional insight.

Second, Ms. Addison pointed out that current federal funding—whether in the formula dollars allocated to the state or other sources—that there was no interest in the current federal administration to support alternative fuels or environmentally beneficial projects. With federal transportation legislation needing reauthorization after 2026, there was uncertainty around future funding availability. She asked the group to consider what projects would not receive funding in a 2027 funding round. She warned that funding criteria shifted or new restrictions were implemented, this potentially could be the only window for a project like vehicle electrification to secure funding under such conditions.

Finally, Ms. Addison acknowledged that while she was not an expert in this area, when she thought about energy use, she also considered its fragility. She noted that many people had experienced power outages that week, where electricity and air conditioning had shut off. She also mentioned the rapid expansion of data centers in Ohio, which were known to consume massive amounts of energy. From a broader perspective, she urged the group to consider the impact of electrification on the power grid. While vehicle electrification could benefit public health and the environment, it might also produce unintended consequences elsewhere. She clarified that this did not mean such projects should not move forward, but rather that decisions should be made with full awareness of the potential tradeoffs. It was possible, she said, to solve one problem while creating another—but if done thoughtfully, it could still be the right problem to solve.

Loh said NOACA must find a new balance and draw the line.

Ms. Addison said it was not so much about balance, but rather a philosophical decision. She emphasized the importance of understanding the consequences—both positive and negative—of every decision and moving forward with eyes wide open.

Loh agreed but added that if the councils moved in that direction, the logical next step would be to seek balance to ensure that all aspects were addressed.

Ms. Addison responded that this was Loh's opinion, but it was not the direction she intended. She reiterated that it was a philosophical point of view and recommended the Board establish a clear stance.

Mr. Vitaliti stated that Ms. Addison made excellent points and that the clarification she provided had been very helpful. He also echoed Ms. McCall's caution for two main reasons. The first was concern over scope creep. He explained that although his professional role centered on innovation and he strongly supported trying new ideas, the key question was whether the program was moving away from its core objectives. If that were the case, he said, then those objectives might need to be redefined, which would be acceptable if done intentionally. He expressed concern about setting a precedent that could lead to ongoing or expanded funding requests. For example, if the current initiative proved successful, Cleveland might return in the future seeking funding to replace its entire fleet—possibly requesting millions—which could essentially amount to ongoing subsidies. He added that this could crowd out funding for future innovations if existing funds were tied up.

Mr. Vitaliti likened the situation to the discussions involving GCRTA, where large funding requests required difficult decisions and prioritization. He urged caution about letting the program's scope expand beyond its intended boundaries. He reiterated that the concept was still a good one and suggested it might be best approached as a pilot project. Under that framework, NOACA could fund it while clearly stating that it fell outside normal funding parameters and should not be seen as setting a precedent. He emphasized that applicants would need to explore other funding sources in the future. Ultimately, he said, NOACA must remain committed to its mission. In conclusion, Mr. Vitaliti stated that the proposal was a great idea, and he was glad it had been submitted.

Mr. Marvin Ranaldson said that it had been a great discussion. He emphasized returning to the core of the CMAQ program, which was improving air quality. Trash trucks were among the highest fuel-consuming vehicles due to their stop-and-go operation, which led to very low fuel economy. Electrifying them could significantly reduce air pollution. While there might be concerns about future misuse, that should not overshadow the measurable air quality benefits.

Ms. Stachew emphasized the significant air quality benefits of electrifying heavy-duty vehicles—such as fire trucks, ambulances, police cars, and garbage trucks—that often idled for long periods. Unlike gas-powered vehicles, electric versions produced no tailpipe emissions while idling, leading to meaningful reductions in acute air pollutants in local communities. She explained that regular idling by these vehicles contributed substantially to emissions and that electrifying high-use heavy-duty vehicles would show greater emissions reductions and score better under NOACA's evaluation criteria. In contrast, electrifying lower-usage vehicles, like building inspector cars, would have minimal impact and likely rank lower in project evaluations. She noted that growing interest in heavy-duty fleet electrification could expose a broader funding gap, giving NOACA an opportunity to advocate for increased state and federal funding to support these projects. While alternatives like anti-idling ordinances existed, they were often impractical given how these vehicles operated. Overall, Ms. Stachew saw electrifying heavy-duty fleets as a strong policy opportunity and an important advocacy role for NOACA to improve air quality.

Ms. McCall said that she liked the e-bike rebate program. She appreciated that it directly helped residents by reducing the cost of e-bikes for the average person and thought it would be interesting to watch, though she was unsure about the criteria or participant selection. She also spoke about GCRTA, noting that while it was the largest transit agency in Ohio and needed to replace its fleet, it had done an excellent job mitigating air quality impacts by replacing

compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles with newer CNG models, which she considered an important step.

Ms. McCall praised the City of Cleveland for its ongoing efforts toward electric vehicles, including installing EV charging stations, replacing its fleet, enforcing a no-idling policy, and following through on green initiatives. She clarified that she was not opposed to the program and believed it was a positive step and a strong process to pursue despite potential issues.

Ms. Addison stated that Ms. Stachew made a strong case for NOACA to consider funding Cleveland's vehicle electrification project. She stressed the importance of supporting compelling stories with credible evidence and proposed a follow-up with the city before any funding decision. Ms. Addison wanted to ensure the city could demonstrate how electrifying garbage trucks would measurably improve air quality and track those outcomes. She said this would be key to her support, cautioning that without measurable results, funding approval could set an unhelpful precedent. If the city showed clear, trackable benefits, the project could serve as a valuable pilot to help NOACA advocate for more state and federal funding.

Ms. Samide stated that in her community, she rarely sees garbage or fire trucks but frequently observes construction trucks, oil haulers, and numerous cars. She described the large trucks as intimidating and emphasized that their presence far outweighs that of emergency vehicles. While cities may have more garbage and fire trucks, she said that's not the case where she lives. Given the small number of emergency vehicles compared to heavy-duty trucks and cars, she felt that electrifying a few fire or garbage trucks would have little impact on overall pollution.

Ms. Addison reiterated that it was important to fully understand whether the impact could be assessed before proceeding. If it could be measured, that would be positive. However, if it could not, she believed the investment might be better directed elsewhere or toward a different type of project or even mean deciding not to use the funding for this purpose at all. She concluded by stating that additional information gathering would be needed, which could help inform staff recommendations for September.

Director Gallucci stated that the evaluation criteria include points for different project types. Projects that remove cars from the road, thereby reducing congestion and improving air quality—receive higher scores than fleet vehicle projects. She noted that this distinction was already built into the scoring system.

SFY 2025 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) Program Applications

Ms. Leah Telepak explained that the Section 5310 program offers capital grants to support transportation providers that serve specialized populations. Eligible recipients include public transit agencies, municipalities, private non-profit organizations, and for-profit companies.

Ms. Telepak stated that for federal fiscal years (FFY) 2024 and 2025, the Section 5310 apportionment totals approximately \$5,256,033. Of this, \$525,603 (10%) is allocated for NOACA administrative costs, and approximately \$150,000 is carried over from previous years, leaving \$4,880,430 to be programmed for SFY 2025 projects. Applications were open from February 14 to April 11, 2025, resulting in 21 funding requests: 2 from transit agencies seeking a total of \$3,843,200, and 19 competitive applications totaling \$3,111,293.

Ms. Telepak reviewed the following:

- Program Timeline
- SFY 2025 Section 5310 Transit Agency Requests

- SFY 2025 Section 5310 Competitive Application Requests
- Financial Impacts

Ms. Telepak stated that staff will complete the evaluation and scoring of projects, incorporating input from the Councils and Transportation Subcommittee, and then present recommendations to the Planning and Programming Committee. The recommended projects will then be brought to the Board of Directors for approval at their September 12th meeting.

Ms. Addison asked Ms. Telepak to review the total amount of funding available. She noted that it sounded like the total amount requested was less than the available funding, which might mean there would be carryover funds or an opportunity to allocate additional resources. She asked for clarification on whether her understanding was correct.

Ms. Telepak stated that the total amount available for this round was \$5.25 million. After deducting the administrative fee, NOACA had \$4.8 million remaining, approximately \$3.8 million allocated to transit and \$3.1 million allocated to competitive projects, totaling about \$8 million.

Ms. Addison noted that the \$8 million available was to be distributed in very specific ways, but the funding requests received did not appear to total that amount. She asked whether NOACA planned to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP). She also asked how any remaining funds would be allocated.

Ms. Telepak explained that in cases where more funds are available than requested, the excess would be carried over to the following year.

Director Gallucci stated that NOACA typically holds funding rounds annually, which is the standard practice, and if there are remaining funds available, they are added to the next round.

Ms. Telepak later clarified that for this round, the total funding requested was \$6.95 million, while NOACA only had \$5.25 million available to distribute.

Director Gallucci stated that staff had discussed the possibility of reducing the 10% administrative overhead to free up additional funds and support more projects.

Ms. Telepak confirmed that NOACA did not have more funding than what had been requested in response to the earlier question.

Ms. Addison asked how for-profit entities, such as Ace Taxi, were delivering services to seniors or individuals with mobility challenges. She wondered whether these companies were contracted by municipalities or if residents worked with them directly. She noted that the request seemed unusual, as it appeared the company was seeking targeted funding to provide a specific service. She expressed interest in understanding what a typical funding request from a for-profit provider looked like in this context.

Ms. White responded that Ace Taxi had a contract with Medina County Public Transit. This was one example of the partnerships they had established, and they often coordinated with other agencies to provide transportation services for their clients. She explained that these providers aimed to be more on-demand and nimble than some public agencies could be. While NOACA recognized that they were helping to meet transportation needs, they represented only one part of the overall system.

Director Gallucci stated that NOACA had previously provided funding to Ace Taxi through the Section 5310 program and confirmed that the company had fulfilled the requirements of its obligations.

Ms. Addison said that Director Gallucci's response was helpful.

Mr. Vitaliti stated that the presentation was informative and asked whether transit agencies receive priority over competitive projects.

Ms. Telepak confirmed that they did.

Mr. Vitaliti then asked what the term "competitive" meant in this context.

Ms. Telepak explained that "competitive" referred to funding available to nonprofits, for-profit entities, and municipalities. She noted that the Section 5310 program requires a 45-55 split—45% of the funding is allocated to transit agencies, while 55% is directed to competitive projects.

Mr. Vitaliti stated that, based on this 45-55 requirement, roughly \$5 million in available funding would be divided accordingly between transit agencies and competitive projects.

Ms. Telepak confirmed that this was correct.

Mr. Vitaliti said that this distribution was essentially what he had meant by "priority" and thanked Ms. Telepak for the clarification, noting it was helpful.

Mr. Ranaldson asked whether NOACA required all vehicles purchased through Section 5310 funding to be accessible.

Ms. Telepak responded that while NOACA does not require every vehicle to be wheelchair accessible, they must be used to serve seniors or individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Ranaldson noted that, based on studies of other regions, vehicles provided to nonprofit organizations were often used less frequently than those operated by transit agencies. He emphasized that the law prioritizes vehicle usage, meaning that vehicles should serve as many individuals as possible, which is why funding for transit agencies is often prioritized.

Loh asked why NOACA allows the contract to include purchase of vehicles that are not accessible, given that all the applications submitted to the agency were intended to provide vehicles that serve seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Ms. Telepak replied that not all users are in wheelchairs.

Loh emphasized that accessibility goes beyond wheelchair use and should address a broad range of needs. She highlighted the importance of accommodating individuals using walkers, crutches, oxygen machines, and those with visual, hearing, or developmental disabilities. She noted that seniors and others with health conditions may face barriers from design features like high steps or lack of support, especially without caregiver assistance. Loh urged the group to adopt a broader, more inclusive view of accessibility when evaluating vehicles.

Ms. White stated that most vehicles funded by NOACA were accessible. While full accessibility was not required, applicants are expected to have at least 50% of their fleet accessible. She added that NOACA monitors and ensures this balance is maintained as needed. She explained

that some applicants requested non-accessible vehicles because they are easier for certain clients to use, particularly older adults who may have felt uncomfortable riding in larger, fully accessible vehicles. However, she emphasized that the majority of vehicles funded are accessible for wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

Loh stated that this was an opportunity for NOACA to advocate for a broader understanding of accessibility among providers. She emphasized that accessibility is not limited to wheelchair use and encouraged providers to design part of their fleets to serve a wider range of needs. For example, beyond vehicles for wheelchair users, agencies should consider options for individuals with other disabilities, older adults, and those in caregiving roles, such as seniors traveling with children. Loh noted that such situations are increasingly common and urged providers to adopt a more inclusive approach to accessibility.

Ms. Stachew stated that she had reviewed the March meeting materials and recalled that a Regional Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Plan had been presented. She noted that the plan, which is updated every four or five years, identified many gaps in mobility options for seniors and individuals with disabilities. She assumed that the Coordinated Plan plays a role in evaluating applications and serves as part of the criteria used for funding decisions.

Director Gallucci confirmed that the Coordinated Plan is a prerequisite for NOACA to open the application round. She explained that the plan helps determine which projects to fund and was supported by outreach efforts in communities to identify program needs.

Ms. Stachew added that the Coordinated Plan helped her to make the connection between planning and funding.

Director Gallucci agreed with Ms. Stachew stated that her point was an important observation.

Regional Metroparks Trail Connectivity Study (RMTCS) Final Report

Mr. Rob Uhlhorn stated that the report was currently available in the public comment section of the NOACA website. Once NOACA's consultant provided the final version, staff would move it to the main site. He also indicated that there were plans to include interactive maps on the website, allowing users to explore detailed information about specific projects. He emphasized that, although many localized trail studies had been conducted throughout the region, this was the first region-wide trail study. The primary goal of the study was to unify disparate local plans into a coordinated, comprehensive regional trail network, establishing a more strategic and integrated approach to regional mobility and connectivity.

Mr. Uhlhorn presented information on the following:

- Project Team & Stakeholders
- Goals
- Timeline
- Project Process
 - Process
 - Existing Conditions Analysis
 - Existing Conditions Engagement
 - Network Development – Criteria
 - Composite Trip Potential
 - Network Development Engagement
 - Scoring Analyses
 - Figure 4-1: NOACA-Region-Wide Scoring
 - Figure 4-2: County-Specific Scoring

- Recommendations and Implementation
 - Implementation Plan
 - Figure 4-12: Cuyahoga County Implementation Plan
 - Figure 4-13: Geauga County Implementation Plan
 - Figure 4-14: Lake County Implementation Plan
 - Figure 4-15: Lorain County Implementation Plan
 - Figure 4-16: Medina County Implementation Plan
 - Facility Types
 - Cost Estimates Based on Facility Types
 - Maintenance Considerations
 - Communication Strategies

Mr. Uhlhorn stated that the financial impact of the study budget was \$249,965 and that NOACA staff would continue to track implementation of recommended projects and make possible updates based on changing needs and priorities.

Mr. Vitaliti asked whether the plan emphasized bike paths, walking paths, or a combination of both.

Mr. Uhlhorn explained that the trails are referred to as "all-purpose" and designed for various users, with a slight emphasis on biking since cyclists often travel longer distances, shaping how connections are planned. He said while the focus leans toward biking, the trails are still intended for walking, especially over shorter distances.

Mr. Vitaliti agreed with Mr. Uhlhorn's explanation, noting that most people don't walk long distances. He mentioned that he usually sees walkers in parks, but they typically stay close to one area. Cyclists, he noted, may be less visible because they move through trails more quickly. He supported the idea of all-purpose trails for both cyclists and long-distance runners and thanked Mr. Uhlhorn for the clarification.

Loh emphasized that while promoting physical activity is important, practical infrastructure—like restrooms, emergency stations, and access to first aid—must be included along trails. She noted that conditions can change quickly, and breakdowns can occur, so users need safe places to rest or get help. If trails are meant to connect all five counties, she said a plan and funding are needed for highway-style rest areas and asked whether the study identified good locations for them.

Mr. Uhlhorn stated that the responsibility for amenities like rest areas would likely fall to Metroparks partners, as they manage much of the surrounding land. He noted that restrooms were not a major focus of the study, but agreed they are an important consideration. He added that the study primarily concentrated on transportation logistics, which was more within its intended scope.

Loh reiterated the importance of addressing users' practical needs and emphasized that, beyond physical activity and quality of life, the trail network should be planned with long-distance use in mind. She encouraged NOACA to promote these infrastructure elements, such as rest areas and emergency access, in coordination with Metroparks and park planners. She also urged a broader, multimodal approach that includes equestrian trails to enhance both functionality and tourism potential.

Government Affairs Report

Ms. Bev Burtzloff presented information on the following

- Federal Updates

- Federal Budget Reconciliation
- Surface Transportation Reauthorization
- NOACA Reauthorization Priorities
- Funding Advocacy/IIJA
- Other Advocacy
- State Updates
 - Ohio 2026-27 Biennial Operating Budget
 - Speed Limit Initiative
 - Draft Speed Limit Proposals
 - State Initiatives for Action

Ms. Burtzloff asked members to think about what might be missing from the state initiatives and share their ideas at the next meeting.

Mr. Andrew Lipian raised concerns about inconsistent speed limits, calling them “Swiss cheese” zones, and warned of possible bad-faith speed traps. Drawing from his experience driving on the German autobahn, he recommended U.S. adoption of practices like dashboard alerts for upcoming speed limit changes and advance warning signs. He emphasized that any proposed system should be flexible, aiming to improve transparency and reduce perceptions of unfair enforcement, not to impose uniform standards on all communities.

Ms. Burtzloff agreed with Mr. Lipian’s suggestion and noted that her and Ms. Schmitt had worked together to shape these ideas into potential legislative proposals. She acknowledged that advancing technology had made such solutions more feasible and shared her own experience driving on the autobahn. She also pointed out that navigation apps like Waze already notify users about changing speed limits and could support similar efforts at the local level.

Mr. Vitaliti asked who the intended primary sponsors were for the safe speeds initiative.

Ms. Burtzloff responded that sponsorship was still being finalized but that there was already interest from several legislators. She invited Ms. Schmitt to provide additional details.

Ms. Schmitt stated that Representative Tristan Rader from Lakewood had been especially helpful, and Representative Joe Miller from Lorain County had also expressed support. They were working to schedule a meeting with Senator Patton, who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee and represents the region. In addition, they were in discussions with Senator Michelle Reynolds from the Columbus area and were hopeful she would also support the initiative.

Ms. Burtzloff stressed the importance of securing bipartisan sponsorship. She noted that everyone involved wanted the proposal to be bipartisan—or even nonpartisan—because safety is a universal concern that affects everyone, regardless of political affiliation.

Ms. Schmitt added that an extensive policy paper was available for anyone seeking more information on the issue in their community. She welcomed feedback, especially from those facing similar challenges in their own communities and noted that the proposal was still in development.

Mr. Sleasman commended NOACA staff for successfully repealing the interchange item, recognizing that it had been a longstanding challenge. He congratulated all involved on the outcome.

Ms. Burtzloff acknowledged NOACA’s role in the effort but emphasized that it was a collective achievement involving many partners. She noted that the core of NOACA’s argument centered

on preserving the authority of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to make major transportation decisions within its own region. She concluded by stating that a study was now underway, and the hope was that it would lead to a strong, thoughtful resolution.

Reports / Updates

No reports/updates were presented at this meeting.

Old Business

No old business was presented at this meeting.

New Business

No new business was discussed at this meeting.

Adjournment

Loh made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:43 p.m. Mr. Lipian seconded the motion. The motion passed by voice vote.

The next joint council meeting will be held at the NOACA offices on Friday, September 26, 2025, 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Note: Additional information on the agenda items can be found on [NOACA's website](#) and [YouTube channel](#).



NOACA

Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency

2025 Business Advisory Council Attendance Record

MEETING DATES	3/28/25	6/27/25	9/26/25	12/5/25
CARABALLO , Millie (Adam Artman, Alternate)				
DENTLER , Bethany (Jake Altman, Alternate)				
DOLAN , Matt (Christine Nelson, Alternate)				
DUNCAN , Rob (Alternate not Designated)	X	X		
HOFSTETTER , Gina (Alternate not Designated)				
HUTSON , Lisa (Reka Barbas, Alternate)	X	X		
KELLY , Nate (Alternate not Designated)				
McCALL , Valarie (Alternate not Designated)	X	X		
MCNAIR , Tom (Joevrose Bourdeau Small, Alternate)				
RIOS , Pat (Peter Volas, Alternate)				
SAMIDE , Mary (Alternate not Designated)	X	X		
SCHMOTZER , Kevin S. (David Lukas, Alternate on 3/28/25)	A	A		
SHAH , Baiju (David Ebersole, Alternate)	A			
TUREK , Sondra (Amber Barchus, Alternate)				
Lake County – TBD				
Non-Voting Participants				
GALLO , Tony (Alternate not Designated)	X	X		

X = Member A = Alternate



2025 Community Advisory Council Attendance Record

MEETING DATES	3/28/25	6/27/25	9/26/25	12/5/25
ADDISON , Bishara (Alternate not Designated)	X	X		
ARONEY , Ryan (Liz Choi, Alternate)	A	A		
BEVERAGE III , Morris W. (Morgan McIntosh, Alternate)	A	A		
DOERSHUK , David (Alternate not Determined)				
HOFSTETTER , Gina (Alternate not Determined)				
KOOMAR , Paul (José C. Feliciano, Jr., Alternate)	A			
LOH (Alternate not Determined)	X	X		
NOLAN , Dorivette (Alternate not Determined)	X			
SLEASMAN , Jeff (Alternate not Determined)	X	X		
TBD – Cuyahoga County				
TBD – Lorain County				
TBD – Medina County				
TBD – At-Large				
TBD – At-Large				
TBD – At-Large				

X = Member

A = Alternate



2025 Rural Advisory Council Attendance Record

MEETING DATES	3/28/25	6/27/25	9/26/25	12/5/25
BACA , Jacki (Thomas Becker, Alternate)	X			
DUNCAN , Rob (Alternate not Designated)	X	X		
GAMBOSI-MCCOY , Leslie (Cindy Naftzger, Alternate)	X			
HANGE , Eric (Alternate not Designated)	X	X		
HOFSTETTER , Gina (Alternate not Designated)				
JEROME , Jeffrey M. (Tom Cole, Alternate)				
MEILANDER , Bob (Alternate not Designated)				
NEOLA, JR. , Gary (Alternate not Designated)				
OCKUNZZI , Scott (Neil Shop, Alternate)	X	X		
SNYDER , Tim (Alternate not Designated)				
TESTA , Denise (Alternate not Designated)	X	X		
VARADY , Ken (Alternate not Designated)				
YELENOSKY , Gary (Tom Cole, Alternate)				
TBD – Lake County				
TBD – Medina County				
TBD – At Large				

X = Member A = Alternate



2025 Emerging Leaders Advisory Council Attendance Record

MEETING DATES	3/28/25	6/27/25	9/26/25	12/5/25
CRAWFORD , Drew	X	X		
HOFSTETTER , Gina				
KIDD , Phil				
LIPIAN , Andrew		X		
MACK , Eric C.	X	X		
TBD - Former Member: Matt Moss				
NOYOLA , Samuel				
RANALDSON , Marvin L.	X	X		
SCHAEFER , Max	X	X		
SCHMITT , Angie	X	X		
STACHEW , Elena	X	X		
STOCKHAUSEN , Ed				
TESTA , Denise	X	X		
VITALITI , Andrew	X	X		
TBD – Lake County				

X = Member A = Alternate