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Shuttle project proposed

RTA sets plan to replace Circulators

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Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority officials are proposing a pilot project to help those affected by the upcoming elimination of the Community Circulators on Sept. 20. The project would begin in January, pooling funds from RTA and any or all of the 12 affected communities.

The proposed shuttle would operate six hours daily, running from major residential complexes and high-density areas to shopping and medical facilities. RTA plans to work with local residents and elected officials to determine funding sources, routes and hours of operation.

"Once we have money, we'll see SHUTTLE, A7

SHUTTLE

From A1

do a public hearing in that area to see what residents want," said RTA spokesman Jerry Masek, adding that the service could be "tweaked" as the project moves forward. "It's very much participatory because we have a funding partner, so we would sit down with them and see if it's working for them. We're starting without any preconceived ideas."

RTA recently announced that it will eliminate all 12 Circulators in an effort to

close a \$5.2 million budget gap caused by falling tax revenues. The authority hopes to offer this service in response to the public outcry that came following the announcement.

According to a statement released by RTA on Friday, the authority plans to provide vehicles and \$180,000, half of all operating costs, if sponsors can be found to fund the balance. RTA estimates the annual cost for each community will be \$15,000. A fare would also be collected to help offset vehicle maintenance and fuel costs.

"If only three of the 12 communities have funding resources, we'd be happy to work with just three," Masek

said. "We're happy to talk to anybody about this once the mayor or the local development council contacts us and says 'Let's talk.'"

Mayor Ed FitzGerald of Lakewood, which led the most vocal opposition to the elimination, is open to discussing the option with RTA.

"I think it's not what we're looking for but it's better than nothing," he said. "I think the volume of people interested in Lakewood justifies seven-day-a-week service and we're going to keep pushing to get back to that but we don't want to reject it out of hand."

FitzGerald stated he is unsure if he would use city

money for the project but plans to look into funding from private businesses like local grocery stores.

Lakewood recently filed legal action regarding a public records request made to RTA July 31 in hopes of discovering why the Lakewood Community Circulator will not remain in operation due to its relatively high ridership. Although the authority sent more than 2,500 pages of records within 30 days, the city claimed it did not receive internal e-mails and memos it was specifically looking for.

FitzGerald now says, "it looks like we're getting almost all of what we asked for" but the city may develop another records request in the future.