Thank you, Scot.

Having served as a transportation official at the local or federal level for nearly my entire career, I have seen first-hand how important it is for transit agencies, large and small, to be keenly focused on the needs and wants of their customers, as well as invest in the communities in which they live and work.

I’m fortunate to work with a board of directors that share these values, as well as Chicago’s intensely transit-focused Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who has been a leader in transit investment and supportive of our efforts.

As a result, the more than $8 billion in investments we’ve announced or completed since 2011 haven’t stopped at maintenance of our buses, trains and infrastructure, they have extended into the communities we serve.
Our firmly held view in Chicago is that each major investment in our transit system must be approached as an opportunity to invest in our communities and our people.
The CTA is the second-busiest transit system in the U.S.

On an average weekday, CTA moves the equivalent of the population of the City of Philadelphia—nearly 1.6 million rides on our bus and rail systems.

We are an integral part of the Chicago region, serving the City of Chicago and 35 suburbs and providing more than 80 percent of the region’s transit ridership.

With an annual budget of $1.5 billion dollars and a five-year capital program of $3.5 billion, CTA has the notable ability to create hundreds—and sometimes thousands—of jobs with a single project, which makes our agency a powerful force for doing good in our communities.
When we think of how transit agencies can invest in the community, we often think of capital investments. A capital investment, however, is more than just brick and mortar.

A great example of this is the 2013 Red Line South Reconstruction project, a $425 million project to rebuild the southern portion of the Red Line --our busiest rail line that also operates 24/7. For 5 months, this portion of the line on Chicago’s South Side was shut down to allow crews to rebuild 10.2 miles of track and improve eight rail stations, three of which had new elevators installed to make the entire branch wheelchair accessible.

The benefits of this project extended well beyond a faster, smoother and more reliable commute for our riders. It created a model that would set the benchmark for all of our major capital investments moving forward. In addition to creating a new job skills training program, it also generated nearly 800 construction jobs and more than 400 part-time bus operator positions for Chicagoans, the latter of which continues to benefit our
communities today.

This is just one of the innovative measures we’ve taken at CTA in recent years to extend the benefits of transit investments to those we serve. Today, I will be sharing with you details of two other CTA initiatives that are benefiting Chicago’s communities well beyond just the capital investment.
We have made an unprecedented effort to modernize our bus and rail fleets. A major component to this extensive undertaking is the recently awarded $1 billion contract to build our next generation 7000-series rail cars.

This new procurement, which will provide CTA with more than 800 new rail cars, is historic for two reasons: It is CTA’s largest rail car order in agency history, and it is also our first use of the United States Employment Plan in a procurement – an innovative approach that uses public transportation funds to create good-paying jobs in the U.S.

This initiative is also something that is very important to me on a personal level.

I was heavily involved with the development of the U.S. Employment Plan during my days at FTA. I’m very proud we were able to include it as part of this important procurement.
This spring CTA joined the manufacturer of these new cars, CRRC Sifang America, in breaking ground on their new $100 million facility on the Far South Side of the city.

This development will bring rail car manufacturing back to Chicago after a 30 year absence. And it’s located not far from the historic Pullman District, which put Chicago on the railcar manufacturing map more than a century ago.

The new facility will create more than 300 skilled factory and new construction jobs for Chicagoans.

It is a source of personal pride for me that we were able to work with this manufacturer to not only build a plant in an area that over decades saw tremendous disinvestment, but also convince them to create good-paying jobs for Chicagoans.

This, however, is not the only way we are serving communities that are in need of opportunities.
Our innovative and nationally renowned Second Chance Program is another example of how we are creating new opportunities for Chicagoans.

One of the largest programs of its kind in the country, CTA’s Second Chance program provides opportunities for non-violent ex-offenders, victims of domestic abuse and others facing barriers to employment.

To date, nearly 800 non-violent ex-offenders who have entered this invaluable program, which so far has led to more than 225 participants securing permanent employment at CTA and many more securing permanent employment elsewhere.

More than just a part-time cleaning job, CTA’s Second Chance program is holistic and intended to help keep participants on the path of success. To help achieve this, we’ve partnered with city community colleges to provide Second Chance participants with a wide array of in-class education, hands-on training, and networking opportunities to further develop their foundation of skill sets to better prepare them for their future careers, whether at CTA or elsewhere.

Among the many success stories of the Second Chance program is that of Alton Mills, whose incredible story of perseverance and positivity was made into a special installment of MSNBC’s “Bending Towards Justice” series.
They did a great job of capturing his story.
Alton is still with us at CTA. In fact, he recently began pursuing his CDL certification, training that’s paid for as part of the Second Chance program.

As CTA celebrates its 70th anniversary this year, we are reminded of just how intricately we are linked to the city’s economic success as well as generations of Chicagoans – providing convenient, safe and affordable transportation to work, school and more.

And the same holds true for all other transit agencies both big and small. As such, we all must remember that an investment in transit is an investment in local communities. Whether it’s a large-scale capital project or a workforce initiative, what we as transit agencies bring to the table can be an economic boon for people hired to work directly on these projects, as well as for the communities we serve.

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