

# Chamber urges COTA to put light rail plans on hold

By Richard E. Bloom

Dispatch COTA Reporter

The Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce opposes COTA's spending more than \$40 million on a light rail system for Franklin County until more studies support its feasibility.

Attorney Sam Porter said the chamber's board adopted such a resolution today after receiving recommendations from its Central Ohio Transit Authority Review Committee.

"What we're saying is that while we believe COTA has done an excellent job for the commu-

nity, COTA should spend the excess money on operating expenses until more information is available on light rail," Porter said.

After COTA announced in December the \$51 million surplus it expected to accumulate by 1986, bus officials proposed using \$40 million to build the first leg of a countywide light rail system.

COTA General Manager James E. Reading called the resolution "marvelous," saying it supports COTA's role in the community and the work of its

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trustees. He said COTA is withholding a definitive decision on light rail until the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission completes a feasibility study in April 1985.

But Porter said that study is only one factor in the chamber's final decision.

"We cannot support light rail

until that study is done and until we have more information on the possibility of a regional transportation authority," Porter said.

He said that proposed authority would include air as well as bus transportation.

Porter, who led the committee, said the 10 members have

been meeting since May on the light rail issue.

In a related action Wednesday, COTA trustees voted to spend \$50,000 for a six-month option to buy 63.7 acres in northeastern Columbus that COTA may never use.

The land, all railroad right of way and owned by Conrail, was being prepared for sale before the Central Ohio Transit Authority stepped in.

"If they start tearing up the track and selling the land to people to build over the right of way, it's gone for us and we can

never get it back," said Assistant General Manager Tom Jones. "This way, at least they've agreed to stop for now."

Jones said the land parallels Conrail tracks between 17th and Cleveland Aves. east of I-71 and extends northeast to Westerville.

Jones said the right of way could be developed using the existing rails or COTA could develop it as an exclusive bus way.

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