Conference Call With Mayor Frank Jackson

February 18, 2017

NOTES

Why is the City of Cleveland denying RTA bus access to Public Square?

Five years ago, RTA and a consulting group was invited to redesign public spaces downtown. Among other projects, was a bridge connecting Mall C to the Lakefront. RTA was also invited to weigh in on the design of public square and it hired a consultant to study the design. It said if the Square stayed open, it would be easier for buses to go up superior. When it was finished last year, it was agreed that it would stay closed until after the Republican Convention due to protests. Before the convention got started, the Mayor’s Office received many calls from constituents who wanted the Square closed permanently. The Mayor informed them that that was not part of the agreement. He asked Joe Calabrese to come up with options that would keep the square closed. Mr. Calabrese informed Mayor Jackson that keeping the square closed would impose financial hardship on RTA because it costs more money to go around it, rather than through it. Mayor Jackson wanted proof of financial hardship. From that point on, other municipal factions and commercial establishments responded:

\* The Police Department: The City of Cleveland Police Department got involved and informed the Mayor that the square is being used as a water park and that’s a problem, because the kids were unaware that they were going into street traffic. So the police advised the mayor to keep that in mind before opening up the square due to public safety.

\* Homeland Security: In terms of security, terrorist activities can happen anywhere, and closing the Square won’t solve the problem. A sniper can shoot from anywhere; a bomb can be carried anywhere; as well as a knife. However, his “intelligence people” are telling him that keeping the Square closed can minimize the incidence of a terrorist using a vehicle to barrel through a crowd to inflict harm.

* Businesses: Businesses want the Square to reopen as doing so, would allow business to grow and prosper due to increased pedestrian and vehicle activity.

Mayor Jackson never said he wanted the square to be kept closed. What he said was that he wanted proof of hardship from RTA. His staff is going over the financial operations and addressing public safety. Additionally, this Monday, February 20th, he, along with traffic engineers, will conduct a test to determine whether buses can navigate safely through the Square without injuring pedestrians

During the call, I asked the Mayor about the inconvenience that going around the Square would pose to pedestrians when transferring to another bus or train. he said I should address the routing issue with the RTA. Furthermore, he pointed out that there are many obstacles in the square with walls, hills, and benches, and he also advised the NFB to get involved with RTA to correct any physical barriers or pedestrian safety concerns. I pointed out that moving bus shelters around the Square would cost RTA about $1 million, a prohibitive cost to an agency who is strapped for funding, too. He stated that this is misinformation.

In terms of Paratransit Service, the Mayor didn’t see a problem with the vehicles going around the Square because most venues of interest, such as the Casino, the Renaissance Hotel and Tower City, lie outside it, and the passenger can be reach his or her destination without difficulty.

Will the Mayor reopen the Square? Mayor Jackson has until March 7th to provide the City of Cleveland with an answer. This is the second extension he requested from the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA), who funded part of the project. If the response is no, the City stands in violation of the FTA agreement and at least $12 million will potentially need to be repaid.