



Candidate Name: Michael D. Polensek

Office Seeking: Ward 8

Q1. Bicycling/walking and bike/pedestrian infrastructure enhances quality of life and addresses issues such as affordability, equity, access, health, and the safety of our streets. What can the City of Cleveland and you as an elected official do to actively encourage more people to bike and walk?

A1. First of all, we need a real holistic plan. At present, we have a major problem throughout the city with the condition of sidewalks. Many of them are lifted, broken and a safety hazard. I have called upon the Admin. on several occasions to put together a meaningful sidewalk replacement program and one that is fair and equitable. As it pertains to cycling, I believe, more would bike if they feel that the bikeways are safe and maintained. At present, the city does a poor job of painting/stripping the lines, patching potholes and/or just sweeping and keeping the streets clean. If we want individuals to walk and bike then the infrastructure must be maintained and policed.

Q2. People bike and walk when it's safe, comfortable, and connects to the places they need to go. Cleveland's bike infrastructure is still disjointed. In your opinion, where are the most urgent gaps in our bike network and what steps do we need to take to close these gaps?

A2. Disjointed is an understatement. We have far too often, individuals designing bikeways who don't cycle and/or fail to understand traffic patterns in various neighborhoods. In my opinion, we all need to sit down and figure out where the installation of bikeways make sense and where they don't. I am committed to doing just that. I have bikeways at present - ie East 152 Street - where very few cyclists utilize on the weekdays for the problems I have alluded to above.

Q3. Cities across the country are installing protected bike lanes, bike lanes with physical separation between bike and automobile traffic, to encourage more people to ride and make roadways safer for all users. Do you support the installation of protected bike lanes on Cleveland's streets? Please explain why.

A3. I do support the installation of protected bike lanes. The question has always been the cost and where do the funds come from. I am hoping that when the new Admin. is seated in January, that this will become a part of their agenda. This is important, for there are far too many motorists in this city who disregard the bike lanes and paths and either park or speed through them with no fear of traffic enforcement. I witness this almost daily. We have to collectively do a better job in protecting pedestrians and cyclists alike.

Q4. People take public transit when it's frequent, fast, reliable, safe, clean, and comfortable. The NextGen bus system redesign goes a long way to improving on this, but there is still much to be done. In your opinion, what steps do we need to take to close these gaps?

A4. First of all, I am no expert on the bus system redesign. However, as we all know, we have struggled with the GCRTA on cutting back service, schedules and routes. We clearly need quality transit especially for our residents who lack other means of mobility. I am assuming that the NextGen bus system redesign will lean towards electric or more fuel efficient vehicles. I still remember the fact that we had electric buses at one time in the city and they were eliminated by intense lobbying by the manufacturers of diesel and gas powered busses; the main culprit being General Motors. Its time to get with clean, quiet and fuel efficient vehicles that service our commuters.

Q5. Public transportation riders want a safe and comfortable place to wait for their bus or train and easy access to get there. Yet, often a bus stop is little more than a sign and pole stuck in the middle of a treelawn. How would you work to improve bus shelters and train stations and the sidewalks and pathways to get there?

A5. You hit it on the head. Unfortunately, GCRTA, at present has not been proactive with working with neighborhood groups and elected officials. I find bus stops moved without any notification to my office, bus signs and poles, as you indicated, stuck in, too often, muddy tree lawns without any regard for the riders. That needs to be changed. Wherever there is a bus stop, it should be on a hard surface with a waste container and preferably a shelter where someone could sit. What we need here is a common sense approach for the ridership.

Q6. About 25 percent of Cleveland households have no access to an automobile, and are dependent on public transportation/biking/walking. Peer cities are advancing multimodal transportation to improve safety, access to jobs, community health, the environment, and attract population. Have you ever been transit-dependent or car-free? What's your vision for public transportation and increased active transportation in Cleveland, how will you advance it, and how will you keep it functional year around?

A6. Having lived in Cleveland all my life, I certainly was transit dependent and car-free at one time as my children, getting to school and back. My vision has always been for the GCRTA system to be expanded to at least the edges of the county with a light rail system. In the day, there was a great lack of leadership, unlike other areas of the country. Atlanta is a good example, in my opinion. In addition, there needs to be a REAL regional approach to public transportation in the County. It is 2021, and as usual Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland, are behind the curve. It is time for a real vision and a holistic approach to the regional transit movement. Other regions have proven it can be done.

Q7. Fare revenue makes up about 10% of all funding for GCRTA while the agency spends \$1.8 million on police fare enforcement. Meanwhile, agencies like LA Metro and Kansas City are exploring free

fares and other systems such as in Pittsburgh have introduced low-income fare discount programs. How much would you personally pay to ride public transit to work? How fast would you expect the trip to be door-to-door?

A7. I am open to looking at what other cities or metropolitan areas are doing across the country. However, as you know, City Council does not control GCRTA's fare structure and you have to ask yourselves why is GCRTA spending the \$1.8 million on police fare enforcement; after all, there are issues with riders who don't want to pay or see how they can avoid it. I think once you get over \$5.00 a day to ride - you are going to force many riders to look into alternate modes of transportation. That is my read based on my interaction with residents. With regard to how fast it should take to go from door-to-door, it all depends on the distance but it should be reasonable and efficient. In my experience, going from East 185th Street to Downtown for me it should be under a half hour in good weather and traffic.

Q8. Vision Zero is the principle that transportation should focus on safety of all road users (cyclists, pedestrians, transit users, and motorists) as a foundation, and that the only acceptable number of deaths on the road is zero. The City of Cleveland is in the process of creating a Vision Zero Action Plan and committing to eliminating all serious injury and fatal crashes in the City. Do you see Vision Zero as a priority and how will you advance it?

A8. I see Vision Zero as a priority because I have never witnessed as many accidents and individuals speeding and disregarding traffic signs and signals as I have in the past year and a half. Just look at the number of hit and runs in the city; it is outrageous. That, coupled with the decline in traffic enforcement, has led to serious safety concerns in our neighborhoods and beyond. I want to see more traffic enforcement and I will be advocating that with the new Admin. come January. Cyclists and pedestrians must be kept safe if we are to see more participation.

Q9. The HealthLine, as originally planned and operated, used what's called a "proof-of-payment" fare collection system, which GCRTA enforced with armed police until the practice was declared unconstitutional in 2017. In response, CPT has called for the creation of a transit ambassador program consisting of unarmed, non-deputized civilians to conduct fare enforcement but also to serve as another set of eyes on the ground and a smiling face to help guide riders, similar to the Downtown Cleveland Alliance Ambassadors. Do you support the creation of a transit ambassador program as CPT has proposed?

A9. Yes

Q10. Fare evasion is currently a 4th degree criminal misdemeanor, punishable up to 30 days in jail and up to \$250 fine while parking tickets are treated as civil offenses, not criminal offenses, with a small fee and no jail time. Do you support decriminalizing fare evasion?

A10. Yes

Q11. There was a racial reckoning in 2020. How do you envision working toward safe streets for biking, walking and public transportation users while also reducing the dependence on armed officers to enforce traffic laws?

A11. First of all, I would urge you to take a look at the police brevity reports, like I see weekly, or talk to Officers in the Ohio Highway Patrol. You would not believe the number of guns, drugs and felony warrants that they find as a result of traffic enforcement. If you are speeding and breaking the law, I don't care what race, religion et cetera, you are, the fact remains that you are violating the law. I would be very hesitant to place unarmed officers in traffic enforcement cars. Writing tickets for parking violations as we presently do with unarmed individuals is fine. However, moving violations are another story. If you can show me another city where unarmed officers are doing traffic enforcement, I would gladly consider that.

Q12. Do you oppose or support a property tax levy in Cuyahoga County to raise additional funding for GCRTA?

A12. Oppose

Q13. Do you oppose or support a sales tax levy in Cuyahoga County to raise additional funding for GCRTA?

A13. Oppose

Q14. What should GCRTA's top priority be with any additional funding secured?

A14. First of all, we need to get a real understanding with regard to their overall operation and their budget. Once again, City Council does not administer the transit system rather it is administered by an independent board. Yet, on a local level, I, for one, receive the complaints with regard to service concerns and/or cut backs. I cannot tell you if GCRTA has really prioritized its own ridership and/or customer service especially in light of issues I have seen, heard and experienced firsthand. Far too often in this county, the burden for funding and taxation has fallen on homeowners and/or low-income families. If we are going to adequately fund transportation then every end-user and business needs to be a part of the equation.

Q15. Suburban sprawl has been a major theme in greater Cleveland's decades of decline, and as the population spreads out, maintaining transit service becomes less efficient. How will you proactively integrate land use policies into your transportation agenda?

A15. The recent actions by NOACCA have been very encouraging. Finally, they are collectively coming to the understanding that urban sprawl has not benefitted any of us. It has added to infrastructure costs and maintenance and ultimately has hurt our tax base. So, I totally believe we collectively need to refocus on an urban and inner-ring suburban agenda. If we wish to make the urban core livable and not

adversely affect the older suburbs then this is what must happen. Demolition of abandoned and derelict properties must be a priority on the City's part so as to create new housing opportunities, economic development and job creation which in turn supports businesses and creates transportation opportunities.

Q16. The current GCRTA board president and city of Cleveland appointee, Rev. Charles Lucas, is a regular paratransit rider and the newest member of the board and Cuyahoga County appointee, Roberta Duarte, is a regular bus rider. CPT believes it is important that these voices are represented on the board of trustees and would like to see more riders appointed to the board. The city of Cleveland has the largest share (4) of appointments to the 10-member board. Will you commit to appointing more riders to the GCRTA board?

A16. By all means. In addition, there should be individuals who understand the connection between transit, jobs, education and neighborhood stability. There should also be an effort to reach across the entire city and county with regard to the appointees.

Q17. People care about street safety and bicycling, transit and walking issues. Why should these voters vote for you?

A17. My record in public office speaks for itself. I have supported the installation of bike lanes and bike ways with neighborhood consensus, ie. Lakeshore Boulevard; for, I don't believe it is my role to impose my personal opinions upon my community residents. I always seek community input as we did with East 185 Street since the beginning of the TLCI Survey to the current plans and how it will affect public transit and other transportation modes. I am working with MetroParks and the County on expanding lakefront access for walkers and cyclists. I have worked on creating better cycling and pedestrian access over I-90 and throughout the area. Finally, I will put my attendance, legislative and voting record in Cleveland City Council against anyone who has ever served in the Body. I am a full time councilman and I represent my constituents to the best of my ability. This is how I was re-elected for this term with 87% of the vote.