For Immediate Release Media Contact: Julia Schick

September 29, 2021 jschick@laketran.com @Laketran

 440-283-9888 (cell/text)

**Laketran ridership recovery among top in nation**

Passenger safety, service enhancements, and dedicated workforce keeps Laketran on road to recovery

Lake County, OH – Laketran ranked 32nd in a recent [Federal Transit Administration report](https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2021-08/Transit-Ridership-Renewal-Best-Practices-Final-Report-08-26-2021.pdf) comparing the ridership recovery of 3,000 transit systems nationwide. The report compared ridership data from June 2019 to June 2021, showing a 67% ridership recovery for the agency.

Laketran attributes safety, service improvements, and its reliable workforce as to reasons why Laketran’s ridership has recovered quicker than national averages.

In a recent survey of passengers, 98 percent of customers felt safe riding transit, which is a similar result Laketran received surveying its customers in October 2020.

“For many of our customers, we are their only way to get to doctor’s appointments, shopping or to work and it is important to us that they have felt safe riding the bus at every stage of this pandemic,” explained Laketran Board President Brian Falkowski. “We’ve invested in contactless fare collection, added service to help social distancing, and continue to sanitize daily.”

Laketran CEO Ben Capelle shared that agency’s ridership recovery is now at about 73 percent and continues to grow week by week, but it varies significantly by the mode of service.

“We operate three very unique services and the pandemic has impacted each one differently,” explained Capelle. “Our Local Routes have recovered to nearly 90% and have been recovering since last summer. Those who rely on us to get to work and shopping have been riding throughout the pandemic, and now we are seeing students going back to campus and seniors who are more comfortable riding since they are vaccinated.”

Launching new service and programs has helped Local Route ridership return to pre-pandemic numbers. Last summer, Laketran added two fixed routes providing service to new neighborhoods and business districts including Mentor Headlands, Mentor-on-the-Lake, Tyler Boulevard and Diamond Centre. Earlier this year, Laketran launched Transit GO, a new transit benefit program for Lake County employers that allows employees to take Laketran to and from work free. There are 135 business and 250 participants enrolled in the program.

Laketran also started new partnerships with Mentor and Wickliffe high schools to offer student transit benefits allowing students to ride Routes 1-9 for free to improve access to after school jobs, college courses at Lakeland Community College, and extracurricular activities. Laketran has enrolled nearly 100 students since the launch last month.

Laketran’s door-to-door Dial-a-Ride service, that primarily serves seniors and people with disabilities, has seen 76% ridership recovery.

“The ridership recovery for Dial-a-Ride has been steady, but we have seen a larger uptick since the vaccine became available this spring,” explained Capelle. “Now that seniors are vaccinated, they are no longer stuck at home and want to be able to get out. We are taking more trips to senior centers, they are visiting friends and family again, and many seniors are getting elective surgeries that may have been postponed so we’re providing more medical trips.”

Laketran’s commuter Park-n-Ride service to Cleveland has been the slowest to recover.

“Park-n-Ride has not quite hit a 40% recovery rate and we’ve seen the majority of that increase in the last month,” explained Capelle. “Our commuters primarily work in business offices with options to work remotely or enjoy a hybrid work schedule. This directly affects ridership. Now that schools have fully opened, we do see more parents onboard returning to transit, as well as students commuting to Cleveland State University.”

“We continue to monitor this service. There is a chance we’ll need to make changes to this service as a result of the pandemic, but it is still too early to tell.”

A dependable workforce has also contributed to Laketran’s ridership recovery.

“I would be remiss to not mention our workforce,” said Capelle. “There’s a driver shortage across the country and many transit systems are reducing service because they simply don’t have enough drivers. We have seen more turnover and hiring challenges, but not to the extent many of our transit peers. Our employees have an unwavering commitment to the people we serve, and show up whenever we need them.”

###