

# Former RTA executive returns to head NOACA

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A woman steeped in public transit is the new head of transportation planning in the Cleveland area.

Grace Gallucci, 47, the top finance officer for the Chicago area's transportation authority, will take over as the \$160,000-a-year head of the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency.

It's a little-known but powerful agency that sets the transportation agenda in Cuyahoga, Lorain, Medina, Geauga and Lake counties.

The agency, established under federal law, sets priorities for the spending of tens of millions of dollars, mostly on roads, bridges and transit.

It will be a homecoming for Gallucci. She was the budget and management director at the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority when she left for Chicago in 2007.

"She knows the area," said Ed

Jerse, head of regional collaboration for Cuyahoga County and president of NOACA's 44-member board. "We were impressed that she was dealing with some pretty sophisticated issues in [Chicago] and a six-county area."

Those who believe NOACA focuses too much on roads and bridges have high hopes for Gallucci.

"I think this is a great opportunity for NOACA to become more involved in transit-oriented infrastructure, as well as pedestrian and bicycle improvements," said Chris Alvarado, board president for Bike Cleveland.

Gallucci succeeds Howard Maier, who will be retiring after 23 years as executive director. A funding crunch and uncertainty at the state and federal levels "is a huge issue" for Gallucci, Maier said.

Gallucci said she was eager to return. Two jobs always interested her — the top spots at NOACA or the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority.

She said she will work with the NOACA staff to craft a vision that meets the region's varied needs.

"It's making sure that everybody has what they need in terms of being able to reach jobs, doctors, friends," Gallucci said. "It's about empowering people when it comes to [transportation] choices."