Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad is a tourist excursion railway and private sector, nonprofit 501(c)3 organization operating in partnership with Cuyahoga Valley National Park whose mission is to provide educational, recreational and heritage railroad experiences and to provide alternative transportation to and within the National Park and the Ohio Erie Canalway.

2019 - 2021 Strategic Plan
Executive Summary

Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad (CVSR) is a tourist excursion railway and private, nonprofit 501(c)3 organization established in 1972. CVSR operates regularly scheduled scenic excursions between Akron and Independence as well as educational field trips, charters, theme trains and special events. In partnership with Cuyahoga Valley National Park, CVSR provides alternative transportation to and within the national park and the Ohio & Erie Canalway.

In 2018 more than 168,000 ticketed passengers boarded CVSR's historic rail cars for a scenic excursion, an educational program, a culinary event, or a family-friendly outing. CVSR's signature event, THE POLAR EXPRESS™, drew more than 47,000 riders.

CVSR is governed by an 18-member, volunteer Board of Trustees and has 26 full-time employees. The 2019 annual operating budget of CVSR is $6.5 million; funding for CVSR operations comes primarily from rider fares, charters, special events, concessions, grants and donations from individuals, organizations and corporations.

A total of 1,570 volunteers provided a record 106,514 hours of their time in 2018, serving as conductors, engineers, brakemen, trainmen, special events assistants, Santas, Chefs and Elves during THE POLAR EXPRESS™ and more—the equivalent of 51 full-time employees and nearly $2.2 million in payroll-related expenses. While most of our volunteers assist on board the train, we have a core group of volunteers—many of whom are former railroad employees—who assist with projects at our Fitzwater rail yard under the supervision of our paid operations staff.

Partnership with Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad (CVSR) has a close working relationship with the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), a unit of the National Park Service (NPS). NPS owns and maintains 26 miles of railroad right-of-way, including tracks, bridges, culverts, crossings, signals, embankments, etc. CVSR owns and operates the rolling stock. As a result of this partnership, CVSR preserves the history of railroading in the valley, establishing itself as a cultural resource in CVNP and the Ohio & Erie Canalway Heritage Area.

Tilden House
The headquarters of CVSR are in Tilden House, a NPS property located on Stine Road in Peninsula.

Fitzwater Maintenance Yard
CVSR rail equipment is stored and maintained at the Fitzwater Maintenance Facility which was financed, designed, and constructed by the NPS in 1999.

Boarding Stations
There are currently nine boarding stations along the route of CVSR. These have been designed in the style of the railroad and constructed by the NPS. Seven are within CVNP boundaries.
To Our Community

We are pleased to present our Strategic Plan for 2019-2021, which will guide our work in the coming years. We are building on a proud history of service to the community and are dedicated to fulfilling our mission of providing educational, recreational and heritage railroad experiences.

In this strategic plan, we are committing our energies to six strategic goals that build on our strengths while challenging us to reach new levels of service quality and operational efficiency. Through the successful achievement of these goals we will:

- Attract new and repeat riders from diverse backgrounds who are seeking unique and memorable rail experiences.
- Ensure that safety continues to be our highest priority.
- Strengthen the partnerships that are vital for bringing riders and resources to CVSR.
- Grow our volunteer corps and enhance the volunteer experience, both of which contribute to providing a high-quality guest experience.
- Ensure the long-term financial sustainability of CVSR; the successful execution of our Powering Ahead campaign will raise funds for equipment purchase and maintenance, facility improvements and other capital projects.
- Position CVSR not only as a premier attraction, but also as a trusted partner in historic preservation and regional economic development.
- Provide visionary, effective leadership and operational excellence through a strong board of directors and a high-performing workforce.

This plan reflects the passion and commitment of CVSR board members, staff, volunteers and community partners who willingly and generously participated in the planning process. We are grateful for their thoughtful contributions.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and staff, we thank you for your interest and for your support of our work.

Sincerely,

Joseph W. Mazur                      Peter Buerling
President and Chief Executive Officer   Chair, Board of Trustees
Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad will be America’s premier scenic excursion railroad in terms of safety, overall passenger experience, quality of facilities and equipment and commitment by staff and volunteers to total customer satisfaction. We will make significant contributions to economic development in Northeast Ohio and to the overall quality of life of the region’s residents.

Core Values

Safety
- We believe that safety is of the utmost importance in the discharge of our duties.
- We operate in compliance with all local, state and federal regulations and standards.
- We maintain and operate our equipment in a safe manner.

Customer-focused
- We believe our customers’ expectations are a high priority.
- We go beyond the expected to respond to customers’ needs.
- We believe our success should be measured by customer satisfaction.

Excellence
- We have an unwavering commitment to quality, seeking every opportunity to improve.
- We always pursue the highest level of professionalism and productivity.
- We strive to be leaders in all that we do.

Collaboration
- We believe our mission is enhanced through strategic relationships within Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Park and Canalway partners, and neighboring communities.
- We work with other organizations and people in a spirit of trust and collegiality.
- We encourage and support teamwork in all efforts.

Stewardship
- We maintain the highest standards of financial accountability and make decisions in keeping with the trust the public has accorded us.
- We are vigilant stewards of natural and cultural resources.
- We contribute our time and talent to the communities where we live and work.

“Edu-trainment”
- We strive to be an educational, memorable, fun-filled experience for every train passenger.
- We perceive CVSR to be an important component of the region’s entertainment opportunities.
- We find it exciting to expose many thousands of riders to the history of train travel and especially its role in the heritage of the National Park.
Strategic Planning Process

The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad Board and executive staff embarked on a strategic planning process in 2018 with the intention of developing a plan that would identify strategic priorities and align the efforts of all those involved in supporting the CVSR mission.

This strategic plan sets the overall direction for CVSR for 2019 - 2021. The plan was developed in support of our mission and reflects our values. The strategic priorities identified in this plan reflect our commitment to growth and improvement—in service excellence, in visibility and awareness, in leadership capacity, and in financial strength and stability.

The planning process included the participation of key stakeholders, including: individual interviews with board members, funders, community partners and volunteer leaders; an all-staff retreat, a volunteer survey and a retreat for board members and senior staff.

The critical issues that were considered during the development of this plan included:

- How can we ensure a consistent high-quality guest experience?
- How can we maintain an aging fleet of train cars?
- What new partnerships should we develop and for what purpose?
- What else can be done to increase our visibility and community connections?
- What are the greatest opportunities for revenue growth and long-term financial sustainability?
- What can we do to lessen our financial dependence on THE POLAR EXPRESS™?
- What meaningful benchmarks should we set to measure and improve our performance?
- How can CVSR balance our valued partnership with the Cuyahoga Valley National Park with the need to distinguish ourselves as a separate entity?
- What should we be doing to recruit and retain diverse and dedicated volunteers?

The duration of this strategic plan is expected to be three years, depending on shifting internal priorities, external factors and the pace and success of implementation. Successful implementation of the strategies described in this plan will be challenging but will have a positive impact on CVSR and on the community. These strategies are interdependent and a shortfall in one area may affect others. Each strategic goal will be supported by objectives and tasks.

We are committed to executing this strategic plan in the best interests of those we serve. We will develop annual operations plans to guide the implementation of the strategic plan and key indicators that reflect our progress toward meeting specific performance targets.
**Definition of Terms**

**Strategic Goals**: Strategic goals are high-level topics or activities that CVSR wants to particularly encourage and promote over the long term. These priorities will guide budget and resource allocations decisions.

**Strategic Objectives**: Strategic objectives are the milestones that CVSR aims to achieve that evolve from the strategic priorities. They transform strategic priorities into specific performance targets that impact the entire organization. Objectives can be qualitative or quantitative.

**Annual Operations Plan**: The strategic goals and objectives identified in this Strategic Plan are intended to be high level and relevant for the next two to three years. The successful implementation of the plan will rely on the development of annual operations plans that include annual objectives and specific, measurable tasks. The operations plan also identify individuals or groups accountable for the achievement of tasks, performance indicators and desired outcomes.

**Strategic Goals and Objectives**

**Strategic Goal 1**

*We will provide unique, high-quality rail experiences that meet the diverse needs and interests of our guests.*

Objective 1-1: Ensure that all guests have a safe, comfortable and enjoyable experience.

Objective 1-2: Maintain and enhance existing programs while developing new programs that ensure we are providing educational, recreational and heritage railroad experiences for our customers.

Objective 1-3: Elevate the heritage railroad experience and historic preservation aspect of the CVSR mission.

Objective 1-4: Ensure that all CVSR programs and events achieve financial objectives.

**Strategic Goal 2**

*We will continue to make the safety and health of our employees, volunteers, contractors, visitors and the public the first consideration in our operations.*

Objective 2-1: Comply with all safety requirements established by all regulatory agencies, partner organizations and CVSR.

Objective 2-2: Demonstrate our commitment to safety by strengthening accountability systems and promoting a safety culture.

Objective 2-3: Develop a plan to ensure our fleet is maintained to demonstrate our commitment to safety.

Objective 2-4: Implement the documented safety program to ensure the safety of our staff, volunteers, contractors and customers.
Strategic Goals and Objectives

**Strategic Goal 3**

We will develop and maintain effective partnerships that bring passengers, volunteers and financial resources to CVSR.

Objective 3-1: Preserve and enhance the relationship with CVNP.

Objective 3-2: Bring private and public resources to CVSR through strong relationships with government, nonprofit, foundation and business leaders.

Objective 3-3: Provide a premier volunteer experience that supports and expands the CVSR mission.

**Strategic Goal 4**

We will achieve financial sustainability through earned revenue growth, fundraising, controlling expenses and developing a sufficient accounting infrastructure.

Objective 4-1: Increase funding for CVSR operations through diversified fundraising strategies.

Objective 4-2: Raise funds for capital projects through the successful execution of Powering Ahead campaign.

Objective 4-3: Expand the board’s role in fundraising.

Objective 4-4: Demonstrate accountability through sound fiscal practices.

**Strategic Goal 5**

We will increase the value of our brand by communicating and promoting CVSR’s mission and programs through effective marketing and targeted communications.

Objective 5-1: Position CVSR as a premier educational, entertainment and historical attraction.

Objective 5-2: Elevate the visibility and awareness of CVSR locally, regionally and nationally.

Objective 5-3: Emphasize CVSR’s need for private sector support as a non-governmental nonprofit agency.

**Strategic Goal 6**

We will develop and sustain effective leadership and a high-performing workforce.

Objective 6-1: Demonstrate effective board governance and oversight.

Objective 6-2: Attract and retain talented, dedicated employees to carry out the CVSR mission.
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Tom Jaite - Director of Operations
Taylor Nickel - Director of Marketing
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Amy Lawson - Dispatcher
George Sillet - HVAC Technician
Billy Barton - Electrician
Nate Myers - Locomotive Mechanic

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