

MINUTES  
METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
REGULAR BOARD MEETING  
OCTOBER 18, 2007

The regularly scheduled monthly meeting of the Metropolitan Transit Authority Board of Directors was called to order by Chairman David S. Wolff at 9:10 a.m. Vice Chairman Gerald Smith, Board Secretary Jackie Freeman, and Board Members Burt Ballanfant, George A. DeMontrond, III, Carmen Orta, and C, J. Stewart, III were present and constituted a quorum. Board Member James W. E. Dixon, III, arrived at 10:30 a.m.

As the first order of business, Chairman Wolff called for approval of the Minutes of the Board Meeting of September 20, 2007. Vice Chairman Smith moved approval of the Minutes. Board Member Stewart seconded the Motion, and all Board Members present voted in favor. (Board Member Dixon was not present for the vote on this matter.)

MOTION NO. 2007 – 42

Chairman Wolff next administered the oath of office to Ms. Trinidad Mendenhall Sosa. Board Member Sosa will represent Harris County on the Metropolitan Transit Authority Board of Directors.

Chairman Wolff called upon President & Chief Executive Officer Frank J. Wilson for his business report. Mr. Wilson called upon Bryan Pennington, METRO's Vice President of Planning, Engineering & Construction, who introduced METRO's consultant, Janet Kennison of the firm of Carter Burgess. Ms. Kennison then proceeded with a presentation before the Board regarding the evaluation of transit alternatives for the University Corridor.

Ms. Kennison began her presentation with a review of the alternatives presented in the University Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement, or DEIS. She explained how the federal planning process began with the scoping meeting in the summer of 2006. More than 50 alternatives were identified and evaluated. In December 2006, the METRO Board approved a short list of alternatives to be evaluated in the DEIS. During preparation of the DEIS, more than 100 meetings were held with elected officials, stakeholders and area residents. Ms. Kennison stated that the short list of build alternatives included three possible alignments west of Main Street, and three possible alignments east of Main Street. She explained how federal funding eligibility is based upon an

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evaluation of the cost of the alternative and the ridership that it is likely to produce. A federal funding ratio of \$22,000 per boarding would likely result in a "medium" rating from the Federal Transit Administration which is required for receipt of federal funding. Ms. Kennison's presentation included "slides" showing that the lowest capital cost estimate for the western alignment is the Cummins alternative while the most expensive capital cost estimate is the alignment along U.S. 59. The Cummins alternative also has the highest ridership forecast. The lowest ridership forecast is for the U. S. 59 alternative. On the east, both the Alabama and the Wheeler/Ennis/Alabama alignments are least expensive; while the alignment that terminates at the Eastwood Transit Center is most expensive. Ms. Kennison also presented data showing the rank order of the alternatives when evaluated against the federal funding ratio of \$22,000.

Ms. Kennison stated that a majority of those persons who submitted comments regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Statement were favorable towards the project. The project will result in an overall decrease of traffic congestion. All of the alternatives will require some relocations, although the alternative along U.S. 59 is most problematic. Ms. Kennison showed the project's impact on area trees, but noted METRO's commitment that there be no net loss of trees in the University Corridor. She further stated that any noise and vibration impacts can be mitigated.

Ms. Kennison concluded her presentation with a summary of staff's recommendation of light rail technology as the locally preferred alternative, following a Richmond/Westpark alignment, crossing at Cummins on the west and a Wheeler/Ennis/Alabama/University of Houston alignment on the east. She explained that extending the alignment to the Eastwood Transit Center would substantially increase the project cost but would only add some 2300 riders.

Board Member Burt Ballanfant requested further clarification, and Ms. Kennison explained that the total route alignment, extended to the Eastwood Transit Center, has the highest "cost effective" ratio. The capital costs for the alignment to Eastwood also carries risks of significant escalation. Ms. Kennison stated that property impacts have also been raised as an issue along Wheeler. These impacts can be mitigated. Only seven full property takes would be required on Richmond between Main and Kirby. Only partial property impacts are expected on that part of the alternative from Kirby to Cummins.

Vice Chairman Smith asked about the residential property impacts for the Wheeler alternative. Ms. Kennison explained how initial studies indicated full or partial takes impacting 25 parcels. However, property impacts have now been reduced to seven as a result of redesign and plan modifications. Most of these impacted properties are commercial.

Mr. Pennington added that traffic and parking impacts would be negligible.

Mr. Wilson provided further explanation of modifications to the proposed Dowling Street station, which will lessen property encroachments.

Board Secretary Freeman suggested that information regarding the modifications be provided to those persons at the Board meeting who had scheduled to speak during the Public Comment portion. Chairman Wolff agreed and stressed how neighborhood residents should be aware that METRO is sensitive to their concerns and will do everything possible to preserve, and even improve, their community. He added that an alignment along Wheeler Street will better serve the students at Texas Southern University.

Chairman Wolff then called upon those members of the public who had requested to speak before the Board. The persons who spoke and the substance of their comments were as follows:

1. City of Houston Council Member Peter Brown – stated that the actions taken by the METRO Board enjoy the support of Mayor Bill White and the vast majority of the city council. Houston must have a first class rail system in order to be a first class city. He urged METRO to continue to do whatever possible to minimize the adverse impacts of construction of local businesses and on neighborhoods. Council Member Brown suggested that the University Line extend to the Eastwood Transit Center.

2. Mr. Jose Rivera, representing Congressman Gene Green – Mr. Rivera read a statement from Congressman Green, expressing his support for light rail, rather than bus rapid transit, in the North, Southeast and East End Corridors.

3. Mr. Jack Drake – expressed his support for high capacity transit and the support of certain organizations of which he is associated, i.e. the Greater Houston Partnership's transit planning committee, the Citizens for Public Transit and the North Corridor Coalition for Public Transit. He suggested that the University alignment extend to the Eastwood Transit Center, and that the western portion of the alignment extend along Richmond to Cummins.

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4. Mr. Jeff Mosley – President & CEO of the Greater Houston Partnership, explained that a key initiative of the Partnership's strategic plan is expansion of the light rail system. He expressed support for METRO's work on behalf of the region and urged selection of a financially competitive, technically competent alignment which maximizes ridership.

5. Mr. Chris Seger – expressed opposition to an alignment along Richmond and accused METRO of ignoring the will of the voters of the 2003 referendum.

6. Mr. Claude Wynn – President of the Museum District Business Alliance and President of the Montrose Boulevard Conservancy, expressed support for a University Line alignment along Richmond to Cummins and then to the Hillcroft Transit Center. He further expressed appreciation for the selection process and urged continued consideration for the businesses and residents in the transit corridor.

Chairman Wolff voiced METRO's commitment to work closely with the community. The University Line will be built in segments. There will be storefront neighborhood offices to foster the prompt exchange of information and to address the concerns of area residents and businesses. Chairman Wolff added that METRO intends to minimize construction impacts and, where possible, create more livable and attractive neighborhoods.

7. Ms. Michelle Mays – a resident of Wheeler Street, voiced her opposition to an alignment along this street. She stated that Alabama Street is a more appropriate route.

8. Mr. Ted Richardson – stated that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement should be resubmitted in light of recent changes. He stated his belief that light rail will increase congestion, decrease mobility and disrupt the neighborhoods.

9. Mr. Robert Gallegos, representing Harris County Commissioner Sylvia Garcia – read a statement of Commissioner Garcia's support for an alignment along Wheeler Street to the Eastwood Transit Center.

10. Mr. Christof Spieler – of the Citizens Transportation Coalition, supports the "Elgin option" to the Eastwood Transit Center for the eastern portion of the University Corridor improvements. He also supports the "Richmond/Cummins/Westpark" option for the western portion of the corridor improvements.

11. Ms. Louis Ray – opposes a light rail alignment along Wheeler Street, and fears neighborhood gentrification. She stated that most neighborhood residents and University students do not use transit. She supports an alignment along Alabama Street.

12. Ms. Lizette Cobb – a resident of Wheeler Street, complained that Wheeler residents were not involved in the route planning process.

Chairman Wolff briefly explained the planning process, the identification of likely demand, area activity centers and neighborhood impacts.

13. Mr. Carol Pouncy – opposes an alignment along Wheeler Street.

14. Mr. Doug Childers – of richmonrail.org, stated his support of light rail along Richmond Avenue and Cummins.

15. Ms. Mable Guidry – opposes light rail along Wheeler Street. Ms. Guidry stated that light rail will degrade the quality of life in the community and compromise safety.

16. Mr. James Chastant – stated that the speakers are not opposed to light rail. They are opposed to an alignment along Wheeler, and prefer that the route be constructed on Alabama Street. He urged consideration of the impact of the Wheeler alignment on the people that live along the street.

17. Mr. Donald Wade – a resident of Wheeler Street, accused METRO of failing to listen to the concerns of residents. He believes that light rail will not solve the City's transportation problems.

18. Mr. Cheryl Armitige – opposes the construction of light rail on Wheeler Street. She stated that Wheeler is a residential street, and light rail should be constructed in a more commercial area.

19. Mr. Carroll Robinson – re-iterated his past support for light rail while a member of the Houston City Council. Mr. Robinson stated that he supports extension of the alignment to the Eastwood Transit Center. He also stated his belief that the alignment along Wheeler Street, provides greater ridership potential, will serve major destinations and re-vitalize the community.

20. Ms. Renita Thornton – of the Washington Terrace Civic Association, opposes an alignment along Wheeler Street. She stated that the Alabama option serves more activity centers and avoids negative impact to residential areas.

21. Mr. Bobby Orr – opposes any alignment that would cross Cummins and fears the impact on his business interests.

22. Mr. Patrick Peters – stated how the University Line will permit him to access his home, his University of Houston workplace and his Richmond Avenue business by using transit. He is also supportive of an alignment to the Eastwood Transit Center.

23. Mr. Richard Arellano – of the Greater East End Management District – supports an alignment to the Eastwood Transit Center.

24. Mr. Jonathan Paull – expressed support for an alignment along Richmond Avenue and Cummins. He added that “real change requires real change” and the region should place less emphasis on automobile travel.

25. Mr. Joe Webb – supports the Richmond/Cummins option. He urged continued dialogue with stakeholders and recommended that the alignment be extended to the Eastwood Transit Center.

26. Mr. Robert McClain – fears that light rail along Richmond Avenue will damage the existing 66-inch water line, as had been stated in a report by Lockwood, Andrews & Newnam. He stated that METRO failed to adequately consider the alignment proposed by Congressman Culberson.

Chairman Wolff responded that Mr. McClain’s facts are erroneous, and that the Lockwood, Andrews & Newnam report is flawed. The route proposed by Congressman Culberson is very costly and will not meet federal criteria.

27. Ms. Barbara Keener – owns a business on Richmond Avenue, and asked if METRO would assist small businesses impacted by the construction.

Mr. Frank Wilson responded that studies are ongoing for the mitigation of construction impacts. METRO representatives will contact area business owners to assess their business needs and work with entities that might be able to provide assistance. Vice Chairman Gerald Smith added that the Board is committed to the survival of area businesses. METRO will be responsive and will do what it can to mitigate negative construction impacts.

28. Mr. Ron Scott – supports an alignment along Richmond. Mr. Scott stated that light rail will provide convenient access to activity centers and add to the value of his property.

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29. Ms. Robin Holzer – of the Citizens Transportation Coalition, urged that METRO carefully consider ridership, destination, connectivity and the potential for future transit growth to make its decision regarding the University Line. She supports an alignment west of Main Street on Richmond and Cummins; and east of Main Street along Wheeler and Ennis to the Eastwood Transit Center.

30. Mr. Howard Rose – Assistant Vice President of Facilities Operations and Campus Planning at the University of St. Thomas, expressed the University's support for a Richmond Avenue route for the University Line. Mr. Rose summarized St. Thomas University's mission and plans for expansion. The light rail alignment will benefit the university and provide connection to other educational institutions.

31. Ms. Marilyn Lewis – commended the Main Street light rail route, and expressed her support for light rail on Richmond. Light rail on Richmond Avenue will best serve the City and will have greater ridership potential.

32. Ms. Sylvia Medina – of the East End Chamber of Commerce, recommended extending the eastern portion of the University Line to the Eastwood Transit Center. She also expressed support for the Richmond/Cummins/Westpark alignment for that segment west of Main Street.

33. Mr. Jay Crossley – of the Gulf Coast Institute, supports an alignment along Richmond and Cummins. He also recommended that the eastern segment be extended to the Eastwood Transit Center.

34. Dr. William Harmon – representing the Houston Community College System, stated his support for the University Line and its connectivity with the Houston Community College central campus.

Chairman Wolff read into the record a letter from Lakewood Church expressing the Church's support for a Richmond light rail alignment. Mr. Wolff then turned the meeting over to Vice Chairman Smith for the remainder of the public comment portion and announced that the regular Board meeting would, thereafter, reconvene at 2 pm. Chairman Wolff and Mr. Wilson then left the meeting.

35. Mr. Tom Bazan – called for the "release" of general mobility funds. Mr. Bazan asked that the Board postpone its decisions for the construction of any additional light rail. He believes that light rail does not lower pollution levels. He also believes that light rail generates stray electrical currents.

36. Ms. Sharon Jones – complained of lax enforcement of rules.

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37. Ms. Martha Litt – a METRO employee, complained that her position of Yard Supervisor was eliminated. Another job was offered as a substitute but at a lower pay grade.

38. Ms. S. Rivers – complained of rude bus operator behavior.

39. Ms. Gwendolyn Babineaux – complained of poor METROLift service and scheduling difficulties.

40. Mr. Mark Hogue – supports a light rail alignment along Richmond and Cummins.

Vice Chairman Smith announced that the Board would go into Executive Session to consult with its counsel, then take a short break. The regular meeting will reconvene at 2 pm.

At 2:05 pm, the regular meeting re-convened, Chairman David S. Wolff presiding. All Board Members were present and constituted a quorum.

Chairman Wolff called upon Mr. Frank Wilson for a presentation on technology. Mr. Wilson first reported how the federal government previously advised METRO that its light rail proposal was noncompetitive due to ridership forecasts under then-used methodologies. METRO then proposed bus rapid transit, to be converted to light rail when ridership reached more acceptable levels. The Federal Transit Administration has recently changed its New Starts regulations for ridership forecasts. Mr. Wilson presented a matrix analyzing the travel corridors and the new levels of ridership under the revised models. Each of the transit lines are now more competitive if light rail technology is implemented. METRO has the financial capacity to make the investment in light rail, and meet its other obligations, including general mobility. Mr. Wilson then recommended that the Board select light rail as the preferred technology for the other travel corridors, North, Southeast, East End and Uptown, in addition to the University Line. By implementing light rail at this time, METRO will be able to avoid conversion costs and other factors that would total some \$600 million.

Vice Chairman Smith added that the Finance Committee did review METRO's financial capacity to implement light rail technology at this time, and the Committee was satisfied that METRO could make the investment without jeopardizing other components of the transit system.



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Mr. Wilson further explained that METRO should expect a greater level of federal financial participation for its projects because of METRO's historical underutilization of matching funds.

Chairman Wolff then called for consideration of the summary Agenda, containing Agenda Items 8 and 9. Board Member Stewart moved approval of the Summary Agenda. The Motion was seconded by Board Member Orta and all Board Members voted in favor.

MOTION NO. 2007 – 43

By way of Summary agenda, the Board of directors approved the following:

1. Authorization for the President & Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and deliver a contract with Robert Charles Lessor & Company/Development Services Group, for early stage consultant services, for an amount not to exceed \$250,000.00.

RESOLUTION NO. 2007 – 86

2. Authorization for the President & Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and deliver an agreement with 713 Capital Partners for consulting services for master development of the Intermodal Terminal and the Wheeler Intermodal, for an amount not to exceed \$2 million.

RESOLUTION NO. 2007 – 87

Board Secretary Jackie Freeman stated that Agenda Item 7 includes two matters for the Board's consideration. First, he noted that the federal New Starts process requires adoption for a locally preferred alternative that includes the preferred technology and alignment. There have been numerous studies and public meetings. There has been substantial public input. Board Secretary Freeman moved that the Board adopt light rail as the locally preferred alternative technology for the development of transit system improvements for the University Corridor. He further moved that the Board adopt a locally preferred alternative for an alignment for the University Corridor. The alignment will extend west of Main Street along Richmond Avenue to Cummins and then Westpark to the Hillcroft Transit Center. The alignment will then proceed east of Main Street along Wheeler Street, then along Ennis and Alabama to the University of Houston. The Motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Smith.

MOTION NO. 2007 – 44

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Mr. Wilson explained how another option exists for the Board's consideration. He explained the viability of an extension of the eastern segment of the University Line, north on Scott Street, and then to the Eastwood Transit Center.

Board Member Stewart then moved to amend Board Secretary Freeman's Motion to include an extension of the alignment, if financially possible and feasible, north on Scott, east on Elgin, to the Eastwood Transit Center. The Motion was duly seconded, and all Board Members voted to amend the Motion.

MOTION NO. 2007 – 45

Chairman Wolff then called for a vote on the amended Motion. All Board Members voted their approval.

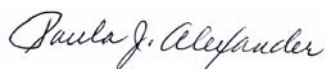
RESOLUTION NO. 2007 – 88

Board Secretary Freeman next moved that the Board adopt light rail as the locally preferred alternative for technology for transit system improvements for the North, Southeast, East End and Uptown Corridors. The Motion was duly seconded, and all Board Members voted their unanimous approval

MOTION NO. 2007 – 46  
RESOLUTION NO. 2007 – 89

There being no further matters to come before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

Respectfully,



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Paula J. Alexander  
Assistant Secretary