

Tuesday, October 7, 2003

The Metro Solutions plan to greatly improve transit in the Houston region will come to a vote on November 4. To help increase understanding of the proposal and of transit's place in the greater transportation picture, the Gulf Coast Institute will publish a series of educational bulletins.

Transit myths

"Transit doesn't reduce congestion" Fact: transit plays a significant role in reducing congestion growth. The existing Houston transit system reduced travel delay in 2001 by 19,795,000 hours¹.

Transit Facts

In the past six years, public transportation ridership in the US has grown by more than 24 percent, faster than highway or air travel. The equivalent of almost a million new trips on public transportation were added each day in 2001².

Economic Benefits

Businesses realize a \$15 million increase in sales for each \$10 million in transit operations spending, or a return 1.5 times investment over the long term. Additionally, businesses realize a \$17 million increase in sales for each \$10 million in transit capital investment, for a return of 1.7 times investment³.

Energy

For every mile traveled, public transportation uses about one half of the fuel consumed by automobiles, and about a third of that used by sport utility vehicles⁴.

Existing Light Rail

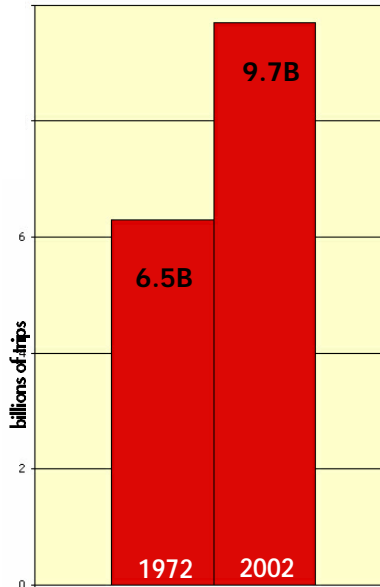
In the first quarter of 2003, light rail ridership in Dallas was up 46.27 percent over the same period in 2002. Total transit ridership was up 5.4 percent over that same period⁵.

Metro Solutions

The November 4 vote will fund the beginning of the 22-year Metro Solutions plan. Metro estimates it will complete full bus system expansion and 22 miles of rail during the first ten years. This vote will authorize the sale of just \$640,000,000 in bonds for this purpose. In 2009, voters will return to the polls to authorize financing for the remaining portions of the plan. No new taxes are proposed⁶.

Metro Facts

Rail opponents often say that Metro only serves one percent of the trips in the region. But the Metro service area only covers a small percent of the region. It serves 4 percent of all the trips in the serv-



Transit ridership in the United States has risen from a low of 6.5 billion trips in 1972 to 9.7 billion trips in 2002⁷.

ice area at morning peak hour, and 26 percent of all trips to the Central Business District at that time. That number is projected to rise to 43 percent by 2025⁷.

Historical Trends

After World War II, transit ridership experienced a decline due to inexpensive fuel and government policies favoring suburban development and financing the interstate highway system. By 1972, ridership had dropped to a low of 6.5 billion trips. Ridership rose gradually to 9.7 billion trips in 2002. Reasons for the increase include a strong economy, improved customer service, and higher levels of investment in public transportation resulting from 1991 federal legislation and succeeding funding bills⁸.

"100 Percent Solution Plan"

Rail opponents say that, instead of the Metro plan, the Houston region should adopt something called the "100 Percent Solution Plan," which is being prepared by the Houston-

Galveston Area Council (H-GAC). But the 100 Percent Solution Plan is not a plan. It's more of a study, according to H-GAC's transportation manager Alan Clark. Federal law prohibits the agency from planning and programming projects for which they have no identified funding. The 100 Percent Solution Plan currently includes projects that have no identified revenue sources as well as those that do have identified sources. For example, the 100 Percent Solution Plan says the region needs to add 10,703 new lane-miles at a cost of \$21 billion to help reduce congestion. Currently, the agency has not identified to the public funding for about half that amount⁹.

1. 2003 *Urban Mobility Report*, Exhibit A-6, published by the Texas Transportation Institute. September 2003. <http://mobility.tamu.edu>.

2. 2003 *Public Transportation Fact Book*, American Public Transportation Association, page v.

3. *Public Transportation and the Nation's Economy*, Cambridge Systematics, Inc. October 1999. <http://www.apta.com/research/info/online/>

4. 2003 *Public Transportation Fact Book*, American Public Transportation Association, page xi.

5. APTA web site,

<http://www.apta.com/research/stats/ridership/riderep/documents/03q1rep.pdf>

6. Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Harris County

7. *Determination of Current and Forecast Transit Market Share*, by Alan Clark et al.

8. APTA web site. <http://www.apta.com>

9. Houston-Galveston Area Council, "The 100 Percent Solution Plan," Draft, September 2003