

PUBLIC TRANSIT ENGAGEMENT

Nov. 6, 2007

Location: Pryor Center, William Jewell College

Facilitator: Mary Henry

Recorder: Jill Cornett

Staff: Gerri Doyle, Bart Rudolph

Attendees: 7

Do you currently use the public transit system in Kansas City? Why or why not?

- No. It takes too long.
- It's too expensive to take the bus to from Liberty to downtown.
- It's not convenient.
- I represent low-income families who don't have transportation to and from Maple Woods Community College. They need a good public transit system and we don't have one.
- I ride bus to work downtown every day. My company subsidizes a bus pass, so it works for me.
- I don't, because my job responsibilities require that I drive all over the city (meetings) all day.
- I'm retired. I don't need to take the bus downtown.

Have you ever used it?

- Yes, in other cities.
- Yes, in Seattle. You can ride the bus from downtown to some destinations *free*. Then you can transfer to another bus and ride to outlying areas cheap.
- Very few cars parked in downtown Seattle. But once the buses arrived, people were moving all over the place. You didn't see cars. Same with San Diego, Chicago and other cities.
- I've been in cities where you don't need to rent a car just to get around. Plus, it costs big bucks to park in those downtowns. St. Louis ... we never rented car there.
- We used public transportation in other cities like Seattle and San Diego.
- I think St. Louis is probably the best experience. You can fly into the airport there, and then get into downtown really quick.
- Yes, Chicago, too.
- Cleveland or Columbus was the worst.
- "Any major city that is going to be a player has to have good public transportation."
- If you are going to get all of the suburbs, they will have to be committed and stay on board. The city of Liberty is always fighting about the funding.
- In other cities (Washington, D.C.; London) I've used the system. To really function, the system has to cross over the place.
- Boston system allows you to get out to all suburbs and get back downtown on light rail and subway.

Do these cities have bus or light rail or both?

- Boston has buses and some light rail.
- There's usually a combination. The St. Louis system works well. You can get off the rail right at the bus stop.

Let's talk about your daily transportation needs. If you typically take car, what do you do if you don't have access to your car?

- I walk.
- I would rely on my friends.
- North of the River there's not a lot of options.
- You can call a cab, but it's very expensive. Buses don't really run up north, especially at night and on weekends.

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- If your schedule doesn't match the bus schedule you are in trouble. To get from downtown to Liberty on the express it takes 30–40 minutes. Not necessarily faster than driving, but I can use the time for other things on the bus. Buses are usually half full or better.
- I'd be stuck without my car.
- I'd have to seek an alternative vehicle like a scooter. But that's seasonal.

What about other destinations?

- I use my car.
- I don't think North Kansas City has any local bus services.
- If I lived in Waldo/Plaza area, I would ride the bus.

If you could design perfect system, what would it look like?

- Bullet train or monorail.
- Easy on, easy off — drive to parking. Park and get on bus.
- Parking garages and lots for commuter parking.
- Must go east and west — routes
- Ideal world: KCI airport to Olathe and Blue Springs to Wyandotte County, like the racetrack or Bonner Springs.
- East/west in the Northland. Independence to Zona Rosa.
- From suburb to suburb. Not just a spoke. I don't want to have to go downtown to get to another town.
- "The only reason I'm here is that when I took a look at the new plan, I didn't see anything going up north on I-35, and I was really disappointed."
- My friends have said that if there was a place in the northland to catch a train to the city (downtown/Plaza/Crown Center), they'd never take their cars there. These are people who drive to the city all the time. All day long. Weekends, too.
- I'd drive to a parking place in the Northland and pick up the rail to get downtown.

What would the perfect public transit system look like?

- Clean and safe. Like the system in Washington, D.C.
- I'd like to be able to use my computer on the system. They should have Wi-Fi.
- As a parent of a 4- and 8-year-old, I'd like to see restraints or protective restraints for the car seats on the bus or train. Safety should be highly considered as far as who is riding the bus, as well as the safety devices on the bus. Like something to hold a stroller in place or lock it down when you are on the bus.
- If it was more child-friendly, more people would be inclined to use it.
- They do have wheelchair locks; I'd think they could lock in a stroller.
- Liberty bus is wheelchair accessible, with ramp and lift.

What would you like to see if bus service could be better? For instance, when would bus start running?

- Some buses should probably run 24/7 for people who work in restaurants and hospitals and stuff.
- Or maybe 5 a.m.–midnight
- Maybe until 2–3 a.m. on Friday and Saturday. Especially buses going to the Plaza, Westport and Briarcliff where there are restaurants and bars.

How close to your destination would it stop?

- Within a half mile.

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How long would you wait for a bus?

- 5–10 minutes.
- It's more variable in the evenings.
- In the wintertime, I've had to wait 45 minutes downtown before.
- I'd want a clean, safe place to wait.
- *(Unrelated comments on this question)* I always had this perception that the downtown buses would be dirty and who knows what would be on it. Then I rode it in other cities and they weren't quite as bad as I thought they'd be. The clientele on this Liberty route is more what I'd like to ride with than on the other routes.

What kind of amenities would you like to see on the bus system?

- Working heat and air conditioning.
- Doors that don't rattle.
- Wi-Fi.

(There was some confusion about the Smart Moves map that was distributed, which prompted a clarification from Gerri: Colored lines are conceptual bus routes. Some exist now, but for the most part it is a conceptual map.)

- "This map says 'Rapid Bus.' Is that a play on words? How fast does the bus go?"
- I don't think the bus is feasible. It's too slow. I'm looking forward to a light rail system, mainly because of the speed. I took my kids on the bus just for the experience (from Liberty to downtown). But it took a long time. That's why we all use cars.
- Especially if you are a mom, driving kids to and from child care. The current bus system isn't working.
- "The bus system has an emergency program. I think they will take you anywhere you want to go once or twice a month."

What value do you see in an improved transit system?

- It's good for the city. It's a marketing tool for tourism.
- Hundreds of thousands of people without cars just makes more sense.
- The key thing is to make sure it gets you where you want to go.
- It could bring development back to low-income areas. Huge benefits as far as middle class, with gas prices rising and choking us at every turn and corner. For the future and our children's children, it will benefit us environmentally.
- There has to be a mind change community-wide.

How do we achieve that?

- "The community of Kansas City spoke and said we want it. Now the city is saying it's not feasible." City Council women are friends of mine. I told them they need to give the citizens a better plan. This city has a reputation of wait-and-see. I spoke to city leaders about commercial real estate developers who told me the red tape in this city is so darn hard that they located commercial enterprises in other places.
- "The voters have spoken. They are progressive and they want light rail. Right now we have all these transit meetings going on. It seems like we are talking this to death." I think they have a plan, they know what they want. But I don't think it's in the foreseeable future. If they don't put out a plan, then Chastain's plan should be implemented. At least that is a start. If we trust the city fathers ... shoot they've got all these engineers to draw up place and going to the community. But they should be the experts.

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- “Are consultants using these forums as part of the plan?”

How might it affect environmental quality?

- If you reach \$5 gas, people will clamor for something.

How might it affect employment?

- I think areas with highest concentration of employees would really benefit.
- I think it works both ways. Northland doesn't have a high employer base, but we are the employees that go downtown to work.
- There's more employment out there than you might realize.
- There's a little mini-bus up in Executive Hills that connects to other lines. Harley Davidson area, too.
- Economic development will follow the lines. Kansas City is so sprawled. It makes sense to build the rail into the high employment areas. But it may also redefine where those areas are.

How do we build it?

- Five or six small light rails broken up through the city. Not so much for shopping, but to get people to and from work. Typically people live about 30 minutes from work. The pockets would connect their homes to work.

Who's going to pay for it?

- One community should not pay for it all.
- Subways in other cities look like a circle with spokes connecting it. Downtown is where the hub would be.
- I think it's going to cost us all. We're all going to have to pay for it. I'm not a Kansas City resident, but I work there. I certainly don't mind paying my fair share, if it's done correctly and most cost effectively. I-35 is now jam-packed. If you consider all the road maintenance and bridge construction, the money could be reallocated.
- This is the only city I can think of that has 2-lanes of traffic going into the city. Even Des Moines has six lanes going into their downtown.
- I pay \$15 per month for my bus pass, because my company subsidizes the pass.
- I have a small pickup and I'm spending \$45 per week on gas.

How would it affect traffic/crime and safety?

- A whole lot less accidents and traffic diversions
- Keep drunk drivers off the road. You could go to concert, have a good home then get on light rail and go home.
- It's not that dangerous downtown. I've worked at Children's Mercy for 15 years. The worst crime I've experienced is someone trying to steal my license plate sticker.
- The criminals can move around on a bus/light rail system. We're kind of isolated from crime in Liberty. But frequent public transit could introduce crime to this area.

When should this plan be implemented?

- Tomorrow.
- Five years.
- Ten years (it will take five years just to plan it).
- It could start next year if they keep Chastain's plan.
- Do they have a date at which they have to start?

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- I don't think they have a date, but if the voters don't reject it again, it has to be built. "As costs go up, the longer we wait, the more it will cost." St. Louis is adding on to their lines. As you get the money, you add on.

Who stands out in your mind as leaders in regional transit planning?

- City Council (Kansas City, Mo.).
- Community members (more progressive than leadership).
- Mr. Nutter (James Nutter, Jr.).

What is your part in regional transit planning?

- We're the taxpayers. We are involved.
- We could push leaders to get involved. Especially in Liberty.
- We need to get our city hooked in.

Did this event make you feel more motivated to use current system?

- No.

Do you have any other concerns that were not discussed tonight?

- The vote that approved light rail and city coming back and saying they cannot do it. I am concerned that will affect the sense of empowerment among voters.
- What is consensus among those who have power? What about consultants?
- "I would recommend more publicity for these meetings. I just happened to find it through some links from another Web site." You need more voices and more opinions. Reach out to local schools and colleges. I don't think your participation numbers are going to be valid statistics.