

PUBLIC TRANSIT ENGAGEMENT

Nov. 13, 2007

Location: Platte County Resource Center, Kansas City north

Facilitator: Airick West

Recorder: Jill Cornett

Staff: Stephanie Williams, Karen Clawson

Attendees: 3

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

- No.
- It's not available. I have used it, but it's not available by my home. I used to ride it from Platte Woods to downtown Kansas City, Mo. But now [I'm] four miles from work. I don't need it.
- I haven't seriously investigated it.
- I don't travel south of the river that much. I'm interested in cost savings for others.

What about other cities?

- Washington, D.C., has a great system. You can go from the airport to nearly any destination. Principally it's a subway system.
- San Diego. The public transit there circles the tourist areas. We used it last spring. They have a trolley system and a light rail to downtown.

What would cause you to ride or not?

- Some of the problems involve comparing Kansas City, Mo., to other cities. In other cities bus stops actually have electronic signs announcing proximity and timeline of approaching buses.
- My normal commute is Parkville to Liberty then on down to Park College. So I don't even consider using public buses.
- I've heard some students try traveling from downtown to Maple Woods. This often involved six hours of travel during the course of the day. That doesn't leave time to have a job.
- Communication is difficult, trying to understand when or where buses run. And it needs to be dependable.

What about amenities?

- Service lanes.
- If the bus could run on up to Platte City from the airport. As far as light rail is concerned, I don't know how you can have light rail without going to the airport. The airport is a critical stop. Downtown, I understand, but the airport is important. People who fly in want to get to their destination on public transit. With the development that going on in Platte City, we need to be connected to the airport.
- Secure, well-lit locations. Benches. Shelters from bad weather.
- Good information about where buses are going and when. Signage and brochures about routes and schedules. If I could go to the airport and catch something down to the Sprint Center and understand how I was getting there, I would do that.

(Audience question) "What's latest about Funkhouser's tax proposal to use for public transit?"

(Facilitator): "I don't know the details, but understand that the mayor is proposing a sales tax."

Where do you need to go on daily basis?

- This is less about our own needs, but more about visitors who need mass transit and enough hotels to meet tourism needs. Kansas City has lost lots of business as a result of not having the things we need like hotels, mass transit and other things we cannot provide conventions like Big 12 and FAA conventions.

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- Also there are a lot of folks that cannot afford cars and gas. We need to make sure we have a means to get them to work.

What other areas of town need to be connected?

- Johnson County, Lenexa, Olathe — specifically light rails to City Halls — such as Lenexa City Hall. Then you could run buses from those central locations to another point, such as downtown Kansas City, Mo., or the airport. City halls could be a starting point in every major town.
- North Kansas City is very industrial, and we have lots of jobs. The system could be built in phases, adding areas where large employers like Ford in Claycomo could utilize the system.
- There's much more population from the Northland south to the Plaza. There is a lot more high density housing down there where people would need public transit. That has to be the focal point. Then build from there.

How do we pay for this system?

- Sales tax and user fees. But you need more money for start-up costs. The more people who use them, the more you can generate user fees.
- The airport pays fees for different services that are provided by the city. The airport could provide fees for connections to and from its area.
- Maybe the individual municipalities could raise money for their own lines by raising taxes or levies.
- It would be the community that it benefits. Like the boats that generate lots of revenue. The cities they are in would benefit. You hear about businesses up north not being able to get employees because of their remote locations. If things are good enough up here to establish a business, why shouldn't those businesses contribute to the transit system that will deliver their workers?

If you didn't have a vehicle, how would you get to the places you need to go? Would public transit take you there?

- Public transit wouldn't work for me. I'm in Platte City.
- The people up here have to have a car. If you have to be downtown for work or whatever and you don't have a car, you'd probably have to move to where they can walk to work.
- Others need to get a better job in order to get the transportation they need to get to work up here.

If this ideal system was built, would you use it?

- I'd absolutely use it if it met my needs.
- If it took us to the major areas of employment.
- I'd take it if I could easily get to those places where I don't want to drive. Like downtown.

What are other values of a regional transit system?

- Reduction in pollution and the usage of gasoline; and wear and tear on highways.
- There might be a tax offset from the savings of not building and maintaining so many highways.
- Could taxes either go down or be transferred to public transit? I don't know where the tax money goes.
- The current plan is to divert some funds from highways to public transit. We need to first identify areas like North Kansas City and Riverside and how to get people to those places where there's lots of industry and jobs. Those cities should have enough interest in bringing workers to their communities. They should be interested in providing funding to the project.
- Lots of businesses up in Platte City suffer from lack of labor force. They would definitely benefit from a system that brings workers to the city.

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What about impact on low-income population?

- Could be the best thing that ever happened. If it ran from areas of low income to areas of high employment, you are looking at an improved quality of life for those people.
- It could mean everything to them. Less dependence on vehicle, gas and insurance and car payments. Optimal system would take them to grocery or whatever their daily destinations are. But if you have to worry about whether the bus is going to be there or on time ... you cannot live like that.
- The other thing is the potential for bringing money from wealthier communities into more impoverished communities by employing individuals from low income areas and infusing money back into their neighborhoods.

What about the impact on the environment?

- It would reduce carbon dioxide dramatically, depending on how many cars and buses are taken off the road. What you also have to consider is less maintenance of roadways, therefore cost savings. And less environmental impact from road construction and usage.
- I wonder if there are any studies in whether public transit reduces the number of highway accidents or deaths.

(Facilitator) Public transit is much safer. I haven't seen the research indicating the numbers, though.

How do you think safety will be impacted?

- Taking cars off roads will reduce the likelihood of accidents. Fewer cars equals fewer accidents. Robust transportation system could get parties off the road.

Do you have concerns about the safety of public transportation?

- No issues that I have seen.

What do you think about the impact on property values?

- I think it would increase commercial property values. I don't know about personal property.
- I think in a region the value of light rail would increase the value of personal property. But in the short-run, local homeowners may not want to have a light rail system close to their home or running by their house. Anytime you can have a user service it should add value to all families. In Washington, D.C., for instance, the whole family was on the subway. Shopping, schools, work, etc.
- Mobility. It's like carpooling. You can solve the same problem with public transit as we did with carpooling when I was young. It saved us lots of money.
- If you lower the need for parking lots, are the existing parking lots convertible to commercial purposes. You could shut down vehicle traffic to areas of the city, allowing only public transportation in. Then those parking lots and streets are converted to retail space and pedestrian thoroughfares.
- Other cities have vibrant downtowns. Kansas City is dead. It's starting to wake up, and over time that issue may go by the wayside. But right now I don't think we could convert a parking lot to anything.
- We have a lot of people living south of downtown. But right now there aren't many people living downtown and there aren't many people down there at night right now.

Who do you see, agency or individual, as being a leader in this conversation about public transit?

- Clay Chastain — and he lives in Virginia.

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- I think Mayor Funkhouser has done a decent job explaining that even if the rail doesn't go to Platte City, it will go to the airport. I think he's doing a lot to get other communities on board and generate interest in proceeding with the plan.

What do you think your role is in this conversation?

- We are the taxpayers, paying the bill.
- We need to stay informed [by] participating in forums like this. Try to get issues on the ballots so we can vote about the issues. But unless you have local legislators or mayors listening, there's not much we can do.
- We've been talking about this for years.

Has this conversation impacted your interest in trying the existing bus system?

- It doesn't change anything for me because it doesn't come to Platte City at all. And I don't expect it to, because I live in a rural area.
- I would check out the schedules to see if it meets my work schedule. But I wouldn't guarantee that I'd use it.

Where would you look for information about this perfect public transit system?

- Online.
- I'd have to have my wife get online. I'm so far behind, I don't do that.
- I'm more interested in the development that's going to happen up here. My motivation is to learn what's going to develop as a result of this. The only government that speaks for me is our county government, and I don't hear them talking at all. I'm interested to find if more people would come here if they could get here on public transit.

What would it take to get your local leaders to get engaged?

- That's a good question. If the activity isn't occurring south of 92 Highway, they really don't care.
- The county is more interested in lot sizes for new homes, rather than whether they can increase economic developing and industry. They seem perfectly happy with this being a bedroom community. I grew up here and that's the way it's always been.