

## **PUBLIC TRANSIT ENGAGEMENT**

**Oct. 17, 2007**

**Location: Roeland Park City Hall**

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Facilitator: Airick Leonard West

Recorder: Alicia Deville

Staff: Liana Riesinger, Karen Clawson

Attendees:

### **Do you use public transit? Why or why not?**

- I have no car, so I use the transit. I am on a huge soap box: Johnson County doesn't communicate with Wyandotte County and vice versa.
- Rarely. I would like to ride more but I drive the company truck. I have been around the world and have gotten around without a personal vehicle.
- My wife is at University of Missouri-Kansas City and would take the bus because it is not that far away — 15 minutes. But when she looked it up, it would be a three-hour bus ride. It was a no-brainer; three hours versus 15 minutes.
- My son used it one time when he worked at Worlds of Fun; it took him 2.5 hours to get back downtown. I would use it more if it was a workable system, but the interconnectivity is terrible.
- Living in Johnson County, you can't use the Web site to figure out where you are going.

### **What would you change?**

- A lot. I would put it on a computer. I just did a paper on the public transit system, and what I would change. I would change the way the Jo ran and have one company do it all for the entire region and not three. I have a change fare card that I can't use because the other systems don't use it. The other thing is that Johnson County and Wyandotte won't take transfers from each company. If it was one company, you would not have to worry about it. The first day of school, I had to spend \$5 because they would not honor each others' transfers. I would also have a bus on every major road, like Metcalf, Quivira and 75<sup>th</sup>, and they would make stops. I have to walk a mile and half to catch the bus, so I have to leave 1.5 hours early.
- Multi-modal would be a good thing. Asking folks to take it everywhere would be hard because of the length of time. We certainly could have a spine that would generate quicker trips.
- I don't currently use the system. Formerly, I did because it was very easy to catch the bus — two trips and I was there. But the bottom line: in the Kansas City area there really needs to be a mixed system — subway trains, buses and cable that operate like elevators. In order to be a 21<sup>st</sup>-century company, there really needs to be a system like in Boston. You can walk out of your house, go to the subway, and be in Paris easy and cheap — it's a no-brainer. Here, it costs \$50 to catch a cab just to get to the airport, so you really disadvantage a huge group of people from participating in travel. Representatives in Congress and state reps. — we could go knock on their doors. I think there is another component we do not discuss, and it is a racial component. What we establish as a broad transportation system, those people would now be able to come into OUR neighborhood. In all of my favorite cities you do not need a car. They at least recognize people need to get around.

### **Has anyone else traveled? What has been your experience elsewhere?**

- It has always been better. I don't use transit because it does not go to where I need it now. I will use it now because our office is using it. Frankfurt runs 15,000 trains per day. It may be valuable to look at other transportation systems and try to duplicate them. Why do we try to operate in a dislocated fashion? Use St. Louis as an example. When you get on public forums there, are all these reasons are given why it works in St. Louis and not here. They used an existing right-of-way that had been abandoned — as if Kansas City does not have a corridor to use. The Rock Island line that runs south through Raytown is available. Could that be regenerated as a rail

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corridor? Other cities have better systems than we do, and so we should at least be able to replicate that.

### **What cities have public transit systems worth replicating?**

- Minneapolis.
- Boston and Washington, DC.
- Cincinnati.
- Denver.
- St. Louis.
- Albuquerque, Sweden, Paris, Dallas, Strasburg — a town in France — with 400,000 people, has a mainline they just put in within the past 10 years. They brought streetcars back into the city and they have a regional system to bring people into the city.
- San Francisco.

### **Where you go in a day? What are your average top three to five destinations?**

- Work.
- Downtown.
- Grocery store.
- Plaza.
- Sunnyside Park.
- School.
- Kansas City, Kan.
- UMKC.
- Rosedale.
- Waldo.
- Westport and basically Main Street.
- Olathe, Overland Park and Lenexa.
- Kansas City used to have an excellent trolley system — it was a wonderful system.
- My father used it.
- I used to drive buses in Washington, DC. You never had to have a car at all. The Smart Moves map looked like a DC map.
- May I offer criticism? I was looking at that map two years ago in August. There has been no real progress.
- Johnson County delegation won't pass the legislation because we are afraid of the money going to Kansas City, Mo.

### **Imagine that you do not have access to a vehicle. How would you get around?**

- Can't.
- I could ride 3 miles on a bike to the Jo connector and ride bus the rest of the way.
- There is just no way.
- I could walk to the grocery store and take a bus to the Plaza.
- I would carpool.

### **Do you travel mostly for errands or leisure?**

- Work mostly, civic meetings.

### **What would the ideal regional transit system look like?**

- Run 24/7 (lots of heads nodding).

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- Think about it: If you work the night shifts, only certain Metros run till 11 p.m. How would you get home?
- It would be comprehensive and able to cover as much geographic area as possible, from Independence to Olathe (or some other permutation), and it would be mutually accessible to as many people as possible. It's a sort of self-feeding thing, including all the neighborhoods.
- I'd like to see a big technology change. Let's move into the future and get away from people driving buses. It needs to be spectacular: quiet, clean, resourceful and run faster — not as effected by traffic. I envision me creeping along at 18 miles an hour in rush hour because buses and autos compete (old system). Tonight was an example — I needed to avoid I-35.
- Punctuality. Buses will be at each bus stop when they are supposed to and run smoothly and on time.
- Create more urban density.
- I agree with that. Kansas City is incredible and has a metro area of 11.2 million people. Tokyo has many more millions of people.
- Stop cutting routes.
- BRT. Why wasn't MAX built with walk-on and walk-off and kiosks to purchase instead of fishing in your pockets, which affects people with mobility systems? Are there plans to have it more available for the platform to fit "grade level"?
- More accessible to a wide variety of people.
- I think the kiosk is a great idea.
- Dedicated bus stops with shelters.
- Accurate shelters. Right now in the shelters, you still get wet!
- Kansas City is built on a huge limestone base. The tunnels at 31<sup>st</sup> and Wyoming streets actually have those tunnels going all the way to Troost. We have a tremendous underground system and structure with which to build.
- A lot of those are railway corridors just sitting there.
- The key is to move toward electricity; the original system was all electric.
- In yesterday's Kansas City newspaper, \$240,000 is projected for parking by Sprint Center. Quit that and make more buses!!

### How long are you willing to wait?

- Right now every 30 minutes is fine.
- 15 minutes.
- 10–15 minutes.
- Depends on the time of day.
- Maybe not as often at night, but still provide service.

### What about type of vehicle?

- A lot more rail than we have now.

### Where would the routes travel?

- Why can't you build it up?
- I'm not concerned about cost. But to quote someone I heard, "whatever it costs to put it on the ground it costs three times more to put it in the air and 10 times more for underground."
- It would follow Chastain's route to the river, to the ASB bridge, go through City Market, up Walnut through the Power and Light district and right up Main to the Plaza, then east to the stadiums. That would be the spine. This would not be the "be all to end all," but the first spine and then something going east and west and supported by electric buses.

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- Definitely ideal if it were not on grade. I agree; I am OK with Chastain's plan. Main Street and at the Plaza. It would be better if we were not on grade at that point.
- I like Walnut. It's flatter and doesn't compete with I-70. Grand is blocked off; it's a quick corridor five blocks from all hotels.
- Along with that is, it would be nice if it looped north of the River Market to the Union Station and be a people-mover.
- Have it out to Kansas City.
- One other thing, they (Strasburg) took lanes away from cars and used them for streetcars. If it's more difficult to get around in cars, use public transportation.
- If they doubled the gas tax and don't provide parking except for park-and-ride, more would use it.

### How would it be paid for?

- Gasoline tax.
- Stop using money for lots.
- Surge tax on large SUVs, a surtax: you can have that Hummer, but it will cost you \$10,000 to \$20,000 extra every year.
- Charge an arm and a leg for parking fees.
- Take parking fees back from the stadiums.
- A toll on the highways.
- As a country we need to make a national commitment. We need 50 percent better vehicles in the next five years. We have to get serious and switch to better vehicles and public transportation — integrated, comprehensive transit in this region and just get serious about it.
- Use gambling fees.
- Is Kansas City such the redheaded stepchild that it is not entitled to the same support? Why can't we get federal bucks? Our area just has not asked.
- Greater density would also help, but it is a chicken/egg thing.
- User fees.
- Once you get enough people riding, you will start getting out of the red.
- Net metering is something we don't have — you cannot sell power back to power company here. Wind turbines; we need it in the state and in the country. A guy in Germany is selling electricity to the company to add to the grid — why can't we do it? We need to have that ability. We have sun and wind, so we've got tremendous capability to produce electricity. So there's that. We don't need to build another Wolfe Creek. We should pass a net metering law and sell electricity back. We can even sell power to other states.

### Would you use it now?

- Yeah.
- Honestly right now, we would pick up and move simply because we would not have to drive on I-35. Yes, absolutely.
- If it could start tomorrow, it would make our lives so much better. Right now, I have an elderly friend and there is not one bus anywhere near her, and she is 87 or 88. For her to catch a bus (she lives in Prairie Village), she has to go to 6000 Lamar. They won't stop — the ones passing her. She could go to the doctor. For the dollar ride, you have to know 24 hours in advance. I don't live close to a grocery store, and I don't want to walk, but I do in order to catch a bus. That's ridiculous to walk so far.
- If light rail ran right now as suggested, I would be able to go more places for lunch during the day. I would use the system to get around downtown rather than have to find a place to park and pay. I would use it.

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- Yeah, definitely use it just because I am not invested in driving a particular car. You have to strategically plan where you live if you don't own a car. My mother-in-law would have a hard time living in Kansas City; she doesn't have a driver's license. That is terrible to say: You can only go here and there 'cause you have a car. It lets people have freedom, freedom to go to a grocery store. I would like to take my dogs on the system to take them to the park to walk.

### **What are other examples of benefits of the impact of a strong transit system?**

- I used to live just under 4 miles and my commute was very simple. I got married and now live 25 miles from work. My wife and I try to carpool a little bit so her car sits and that is a very good thing, I feel green about that. My car is 8 years old, and this one is in great shape because I am not putting more miles on it. I would really like to see my car last. I hate them wearing out so fast and there is an expense. Kansas City residents, according to some study, use 30 percent of their income for transportation. If it is that, I want to use my car less. I look forward to driving to a park-and-ride and taking commuter rail into the city.

### **What is the value of public transit system?**

- In cities like Toronto, right close to downtown was a neat mix in the neighborhood, residence, business etc. It was so cool. It made the street life, and the whole thing was you wanted to be there. I think that is one of the things a comprehensive system does. You get that sort of synergy, it just happens — and that's great for a city. They are redoing the Mission shopping center, so these are tiny steps we are taking, and it contributes to the quality of life. We need that blood stream.
- If people didn't have to sink so much money into cars they could have better homes.
- About 10 years ago, "Divided We Fall" was my eye-opener with what was going wrong — greater highway miles than any city in the country. The more streets we pave, it makes upkeep of the entire system too strained and takes away resources. We can't pay for it; we have too much of a roadway system to upkeep. Where is it going to end? To support the sprawl is an incredible burden.
- One of the statistics is that there are a lot of unemployed who don't have cars, but for those who can own a car because they have to, the average age of the car is 12 years old. Part of the unemployment, welfare and low income — they can't get to jobs. All the jobs are out beyond the boundary. A well-run system would make that job access easier and lower the unemployment rate.
- Tourism and commerce people get around easier without having to get a car. You just need to get around town a couple of places. I laid over in Atlanta on Superbowl Sunday, and I was able to go to Starbuck's and get some coffee and come back in time. It was nice.
- The racial thing, where people are worried about some people coming into their neighborhood, the rationality of this is unbelievable to me. It is more likely someone with a car will burglarize your house than someone on the bus.
- In Rock Creek, there was some talk about a nature path, and people thought if you put in a sidewalk "they" will come. I think there is that component. My comment is "get over it;" this is something we all need. The system I rode on in the '50s was a good system; we should have built on that system. Let's have a comprehensive system that lets everyone get where they want to in the city. The mixture is not a bad thing. I look back at Toronto — you see a mix, there is such an interesting mix of people. I like Kansas City and Roeland Park, and there is no way we can't have it.

### **As it relates to a regional economy? What impact would a public transit system have?**

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- If they are building all these conventions centers, how are they supposed to get there? Cab, which will cost an arm or leg? No bus system goes there. Must have transportation pre-arranged, but they want all these conventions to come to Kansas City. They could fly into Kansas City, but can't get to downtown.
- It's my understanding that quality development will be developed around it.
- There needs to be an extraordinary education campaign to accompany this to overcome a widespread attitude around our neighborhoods, which are really ignorant about transit. At a former transit meeting they had in Fairfax County, Va., speakers came in and showed the before and after aerial shots of transit, and at every stop, you could see this mushroom of development around the stops. Many did not see that and are still playing old tapes.

### **How would it impact low-income populations?**

- I think it makes a tremendous impact. You have a certain amount of money to spend and a chunk is transportation insurance, maintenance — if you didn't have to have it, it could go to other things.
- Low-income people will spend 50 percent of their annual income keeping a car.
- It's not just low-income folks. If I could cancel what I spend to fill up with gas (\$120/month), it's a no-brainer to save the money. It has a big impact across the board.
- It certainly would allow some integration. Economically, this may be the opportunity to acquire different kinds of jobs.
- The school system, too. There would be no need for school buses. Children could use that system.

### **Other impacts on the environment?**

- I'd like to add this: Look at a railway system, there's no trash being thrown off the cars, no stoplights and street sign cost resources to put up, dramatic reduction in urban runoff, the oil dripping from cars, tires, asbestos from older brake pads, concrete swaft and debris is different from transit system. Environmental consideration — that is obvious.

### **Who do you see as the leaders in these talks?**

- Focus groups.
- MARC, but it's the same as what was going on 10 years ago.
- I don't see anyone truly leading it. Everyone's talking about it but no true leaders. A friend in St. Louis had a coalition, it was grassroots, but it was a group doing something.
- Clay Chastain. He finally got a resolution passed. Funk said it was a stupid plan even though voters voted for it!
- But I don't see him doing anything.
- I think parts of it were bad.
- Funk's heart is not really in it. I don't hear Cleaver talking about this. Any reps. in Kansas talking about it? [There is a] total lack of leadership at every political level and it's dumbfounding. Do you not understand the longer we take the further behind we will be? The only saving grace is us being located in the center. We need to do what we need to do to attract business and people. I think Kansas City is a fantastic place to live, incredibly beautiful. We just need to say in 10 years — and someone in leadership needs to take a stand. We can do big things, it's just a matter of will.
- The one thing that bothers me, in Kansas City, Kan., we had a state senator at the school, and he could not tell me who to speak with about this.

### **What is your role in this region?**

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- I've been using it.
- I've been watching people who show interest. Nine of 10 have never had to use a bus, so they don't understand or care 'cause they've never had to use it.
- Holy cow, I didn't know you guys were so involved. I need to write my congressman and state reps. and start pushing buttons/lobbying.
- I'd be at more meetings, but can't get there!
- MARC kind of like acts like its own club. I don't think that they have advocated what the public is asking for, and I could go on but I've made my point. That's been my impression in the encounter I have had with their officials like the area transit alliance. Their agenda doesn't seem to reflect the desires of the metro area and some on the other alliance. (RTA—Regional Transit Alliance)
- To show improvement in the immediate future, all three systems need to interact with each other, they need to be one unit. That can be done without having to build anything. They need to work together right now, and that would show that steps were being made.

**As a result are you more or less motivated to use the current public transit system?**

- Having to ride it is so frustrating, if I could buy a car, I would. If it promised to change I would use it.
- Can take a service dog on? Then yes.