

Thursday, October 9, 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

"America is about cars, and transit is just a fading anachronism." Fact: From 1982 to 2001, passenger-miles of travel increased over 91 percent on freeways and major streets but about 100 percent on the transit systems<sup>1</sup>.

## Transit Facts

Public transportation annually saves US commuters more than one billion hours and almost \$21 billion in congestion costs annually, an amount that is nearly three times the annual federal investment in public transportation<sup>1</sup>.

## Economic Benefits

Transit capital and operating investment generates personal income and business profits that produce positive fiscal impacts. On average, a typical state/local government could realize a 4-6 percent gain in revenues due to the increases in income and employment generated by investments in transit<sup>2</sup>.

## Health

For every passenger mile traveled, public transportation produces only a fraction of the harmful pollution of automobile traffic: only 5 percent as much carbon monoxide, less than 8 percent as many volatile organic compounds, and nearly half as much carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides<sup>3</sup>.

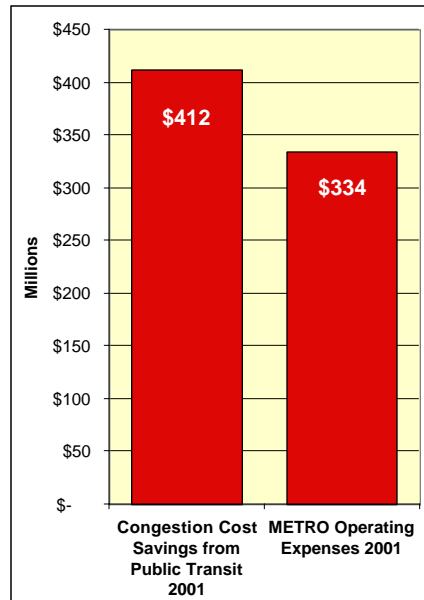
## Equity

For many, public transportation is a necessity. 85,000 households in the City of Houston have no cars<sup>4</sup>. Nationally, of current transit riders, nearly 70 percent do not have access to cars at the time their trip is made<sup>3</sup>. A significant portion of the proposed rail expansion goes into just the low-income areas most in need of better transit options<sup>4</sup>.

## Metro Solutions

Most of the talk in Houston is about the expansion of the light rail

## Houston transit benefits



Transit operations in the Houston region save \$412 million per year in reduced congestion costs<sup>1</sup>, \$78 million more than Metro's operating expenses<sup>6</sup>.

system that would be approved by the November 4 vote. But most of the capital expenditures will go to an enormous expansion of the suburban park and ride bus system (from 108 miles to 250 miles), expanded express and local bus routes, and to build and repair roads all over the Metro service area. The vote is for more rail, more buses, and more roads, with no new taxes<sup>5</sup>.

## Metro Facts

Public transportation in Houston saved commuters \$412 million in congestion costs in 2001<sup>1</sup>. This amount more than covered all of Metro's operating expenses of \$334 million during that same year<sup>6</sup>.

## "100 Percent Solution Plan"

The 100 Percent Solutions Plan<sup>7</sup>, a transportation study deemed as an alternative to METRO's transit plan by its opponents, estimates that the region needs to add 10,703 more lane miles to the region to cut road congestion. Such an amount of lane-miles would pave a bridge from San Francisco to South Africa. The early cost estimate for the added lanes is over \$21 billion, about half of which doesn't include right of way costs and currently lacks funding<sup>8</sup>.

*Correction: In Bulletin 1, the note about the growth of ridership for the Dallas light rail system has a link to the wrong document. The correct link is this: <http://www.aptam.com/research/stats/ridership/riderep/documents/O3q1rep.pdf>*

1. 2003 Urban Mobility Report, Texas Transportation Institute. September 2003. <http://mobility.tamu.edu>.
2. Public Transportation and the Nation's Economy, Cambridge Systematics, Inc. October 1999. <http://www.aptam.com/research/info/online/>
3. The Benefits of Public Transportation, American Public Transportation Association, September 2002.
4. Auto Availability in Houston, Max Beauregard, with data from the US Census.
5. Metro Solutions, Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Harris County
6. Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Harris County 2002 Annual Report
7. The 100 Percent Solution Plan (draft) Houston-Galveston Area Council, September 2003