

Wednesday, October 15, 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 is heavily subsidized, cars are not." Fact: All transportation is subsidized. US transit expenditures total about \$30 billion annually, of which two-thirds are subsidies, compared with \$120 billion spent on roads of which \$50 billion are subsidies (from general taxes), plus \$30 billion in general taxes spent on traffic services, \$270 billion in parking subsidies, and \$600 billion spent on private motor vehicles¹.

Transit Facts

Across the nation, public transit rail revenue vehicle miles operated increased by nearly 20 percent between 1991 and 2000. Non-rail revenue vehicle miles (mostly bus) grew about 18 percent during the same period².

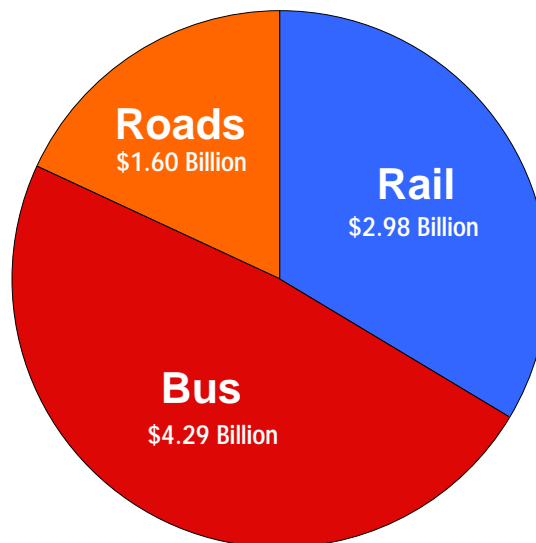
Metro Solutions

METRO held 178 public and stakeholder meetings during its development of the METRO Solutions plan between December 2001 and July 2003. The alternative "plan" backed by METRO Solutions opponents, the "100 Percent Solution Plan," is still in draft form and has not yet had specific public involvement for the additional 5,000 lane-miles on top of the already planned 5,600 lane-miles³.

Economic Benefits

The reduced pollution emissions (from nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds) that result from public transportation use save between \$130 million and \$200 million a year in regulatory costs⁴.

Metro Solutions capital expenditures



The Metro Solutions plan before voters on November 4 is only partly about expansion of the rail system. Sixty-seven percent of the Metro Solutions capital expenditures through 2025 goes to roads and new buses⁸.

Health

During the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, expanded public transportation services reduced morning peak auto use by 22.5 percent and reduced mobile source emissions. There was a 44.1 percent reduction in asthma-related medical visits among HMO enrollees.⁵

Metro Facts

Metro's Main Street light rail line that will open January 1, 2004 will feature 16 light rail stations, each uniquely designed by local artists for the neighborhood it represents⁶.

Existing Rail Systems

In 2000, Dallas's voters approved \$2.9 billion in long-term bonds to accelerate future light rail line construction. Dallas currently has over 44 miles of light rail with plans to expand to 93 miles⁷.

Equity

Transportation policies that encourage personal automobile travel have an inequitable effect on the finances of minority and low-income individuals with those in the lowest fifth of income earners spending 36 percent of their household budget on transportation compared with those in the highest fifth income spending 14 percent⁵.

1. *Evaluating Criticism of Smart Growth (draft)*, Todd Litman, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, September 16, 2003. <http://www.vtpi.org/sgcritics.pdf>
2. Fitch Ratings, "Running for the Train: the Path Ahead for US Transit," June 2003.
3. Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Harris County.
4. *The Benefits of Public Transportation*, American Public Transportation Association, September 2002.
5. Center for Transportation Excellence website, <http://www.ctfe.org/>
6. Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Harris County <http://www.mocah.org/newsite/metro/metro.htm>
7. Dallas Area Rapid Transit, DART Inmotion newsletter, summer 2003.
8. Metro Solutions Plan, Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Harris County.