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NOW

Let's take the opportunity to steer future of Metro

Transit agency seeking input from the community

By D. WAYNE KLOTZ
TRANSPORTATION ADVOCACY GROUP

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When I think of the Houston my grandchildren and great-grandchildren will inherit, there are pieces that are essential for providing a community they can love. Without question, a big part of this future community is a great transportation infrastructure, including a great transit system.

As citizens and taxpayers, we need to consider all transit options and look to the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County as our primary provider.

This month the public has the opportunity to speak out and help build the blueprint for our future transit system, to envision the framework we want and need. Although they began last month, on June 16 additional community workshops throughout Metro's service area will provide us with a great opportunity to tell Metro our own vision for the future.

Houston is a great place because leaders in past generations had big dreams about how to solve big problems. Transportation is one of our big challenges. We do not need to copy New York or Los Angeles or even Dallas. We need a uniquely Houston solution. Fortunately, many people and companies continue to move here. With that continued growth, improved transit is essential. Younger adults expect options that will allow them to get around town while taking better care of our air quality. And in light of the gas prices we've all seen creep up, and the dramatic decline in funding for traditional highways and roads, we must look for other means of transporting people.

In the Houston area we already use high-occupancy-vehicle lanes and high-occupancy-toll lanes — those lanes in the middle of our freeways that carry more people in a shorter time period than the other lanes. We also have the essential buses, light rail, van pools, park-and-ride commuter buses and MetroLift for those who need them. In these workshops we can talk about these and other options, including commuter rail and any other mode of transportation we want.

With our input, the long-range plan can be a working model of what we need as a mobility plan - even down to the tiniest details of particular routes and where they go.

Although many in Houston will continue to rely on automobiles, we cannot pave the whole city. Neighborhood preservation is a growing movement in our city. We need other safe, reliable and affordable forms of transit that will connect people from their homes to schools, jobs and shopping or entertainment.

Creating a great transportation infrastructure is complicated. It's a hard puzzle to solve. No one person can pretend to know how it all fits together, but we all have the opportunity to help.

Metro officials offer these workshops as listening sessions, so we need to take them at their word. Let's share our ideas and observe the new Metro at work. They've asked us what we think. Let's tell them. Obsessing over what does not work does not get us closer to a workable transit solution. At the very least, let's go online and draw the plans we want for better mobility.

Metro matters to Houston's economic life - and our quality of life - today and tomorrow. It matters for my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. And it matters for yours, too.

Klotz is the president of Klotz Associates, a founding officer of the Transportation Advocacy Group and was recently named Texas Engineer of the Year by the Texas Society of Professional Engineers.

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