

# Citizens For Efficient Mass Transit



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## Wait Until South Corridor is Running Before Making Final Decisions

When the half-cent sales tax to build a new rapid transit system was passed by a solid majority of Charlotte/Mecklenburg taxpayers the general idea was to give the voters in each of the five designated transit corridors something to show for their money within a reasonable number of years. However the question remains, was that "something" something they want, or just something that can be built for the money currently available? **Giving voters transit they don't want won't help them.**

A case in point right now is the Southeast Corridor. Citizens in the area are nearly unanimously in favor of light rail. Although both light rail and bus rapid transit (BRT) are being studied, indications are that the selection will be a busway. Several reasons are often mentioned for doing this. One is that buses are more adaptable to Independence Blvd. However the biggest reason always given is simply lack of money to build light rail.

Although no definite order of construction has been decided upon it is generally accepted that the North and Northeast Corridors will be next. This is because their planning seems to have advanced further toward completion. The West and the Southeast Corridors will therefore bring up the rear. The problem is by that time money to pay for them will likely be running very thin.

Why not wait to make a final decision on the mode (light rail vs. busway in the Southeast Corridor) until the success of light rail in the South Corridor can be measured? If it is as successful as we think it will be it is possible voters in Charlotte/Mecklenburg might be willing to pay more to get the best transit possible for their neighborhoods, and get it finished sooner than the 10 to 20 year build-out schedule now proposed. In order for that to happen the South Corridor light rail will not only have to be a success, it will have to be a smashing success that will get the attention of the voting public.

Despite the worn-out, and totally unsupportable stories we often hear from anti-light rail people, light rail has been successful in almost every city where it has been built. The only thing that varies is the degree of success, and its ability to catch the imagination of the general public. Dallas and Denver happen to be two cities where light rail was so successful voters decided to raise their taxes in order to get more light rail, and get it sooner.

(see related article "Dallas paying twice as much for transit" in this newsletter, page 3.)

We do not know if Charlotte voters will respond the way they did in Dallas and Denver. We do know when we voted by a solid majority for the half-cent sales tax people around the entire country took notice that the citizens of the Charlotte area were willing to tax themselves to solve their traffic problems. Our city was suddenly on the map for a lot of places where it had never been before.

There is a long list of other items to catch the voters' attention right now. Schools, roads, art funding, and crime all compete for the taxpayers' dollar.

Right along with these other important items however comes transportation. The rapid transit system and the five transit corridors we are now building will be the system future generations will ride. It is also important to remember if we do decide to spend more money on transit we are not spending it solely for the benefit of any one section of the city, such as the southeast. Other transit corridors will also benefit by having the timetable for their construction moved up.

For example, it will be up to 15 years before the Northeast Corridor light rail project can be completed under the current schedule. We should be able to speed that up if we had the money. We need to keep in mind however that other factors must be considered, such as the availability of federal funding, and the competition from other cities for that funding.

In our opinion, using the Dallas and Denver experiences as an example, we should not make any hasty decisions on light rail or streetcar verses bus rapid transit until we have allowed adequate time to measure the success of our first light rail project on the South Corridor. We can then gauge the public's reaction and their willingness to make any additional investment in mass transit that would upgrade its services, and move up its scheduled completion date.

It is plain to see that the added investments in transit in Dallas and Denver are more than paying for themselves by expanding the tax base, improving the economy, and by the concentration of growth in areas that can be better served by public transportation.

Let's not build something people in the neighborhood don't want, and we may all later regret, simply to show that we are doing "something" for the voters now. Let's explore all the possibilities before making that final decision. The end result may be well worth the wait.

# US Mass Transit Lacks Adequate Security

After the attacks on the London Underground and bus system, and the attack not long ago on the train in Madrid, it was revealed that our government has spent just six-tenths of a penny per passenger on security for our mass transit systems, while it the same time spending \$9.16 per passenger on airline security. This revelation comes despite the fact mass transit systems in this country carry 16 times the number of passengers as do the airlines.

We understand the arguments that any security for mass transit will be much more difficult to accomplish. The controlled nature of boarding airline passengers is simply impossible to achieve on a subway train or bus. Nevertheless we feel much more can and should be done than has been up to this point, ironically London has one of the best security systems in the world in its Underground. Thousands of cameras are everywhere, and even more are being installed. This did not prevent the attacks, but we are sure it must make life more difficult for would-be terrorists.

We need to install cameras at all our major transit stations. Bomb-sniffing dogs need to make frequent random checks at transit stations, as well as ride trains and buses. Specially trained security guards, mostly in plain clothes, and every manor of disguise, need to be at the stations, and riding the transit system. Transit riders need to become aware of the fact any unattended bags or packages will be immediately removed from transit stations or vehicles. Metal detectors need to be installed at every major transit station. Obviously you can't check everyone coming through a turnstile or boarding a transit vehicle, but you can pull aside suspicious people, and search them, or their packages. This should be done randomly and frequently so that people know it could happen at any time, night or day. Commuters should be told to expect to add two or three extra minutes every day to their commute time for security. We think most people will support it in the name of safety.

The above ideas for added security should be only the "tip of the iceberg" for security planning on the nation's mass transit systems. Much more needs to be done. The idea that it can be done for six-tenths of a penny is ridiculous and an insult to our national transit riders.

Both Democrats and Republicans have joined together in demanding the Bush administration give the same consideration to the safety of our mass transit riders as they do the safety of our airline passengers. It is long overdue!

Our homeland security people have downplayed the chances of something on the order of the London bombings happening here in the U.S. However we have heard very few good reasons why we should have confidence that we are any less vulnerable. Our almost total lack of preparation for the possibility of attack only leaves an open invitation for it to happen.

Here in Charlotte, at the present time, our focus seems to be on domestic security issues, rather than international terrorist groups. The Fourth of July disturbances seem to have brought out the need for better security at our bus transit hub Uptown. We understand CATS will be putting in place their own security force. According to a recent CATS survey the number one general concern of both CATS riders and non-riders was safety from crime.

## *Where should CATS headquarters be located?*

Former City Councilman John Tabor has suggested that CATS needs to locate their headquarters somewhere along the South Corridor light rail line, now under construction. Tabor believes CATS should do this to show its support for the area in which the South Corridor will be built. CATS has announced their choice for a new headquarters location is an office building to be built as part of the planned Multi-modal Transportation center on West Trade Street in Uptown.

We are opposed to Councilman Tabor's suggestion for several reasons. First of all CATS has no more, or no less, commitment to the South Corridor than it has to any of the other four designated transit corridors. Each of the other corridors that will be built could justifiably ask for the same commitment. The one neutral site for CATS is Uptown.

However a neutral site in itself might not be a strong enough reason to oppose Councilman Tabors suggestion. A much more compelling reason is that CATS center of operations has always been in the past, is now, and probably always will be  
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### Citizens For Efficient Mass Transit



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# South Corridor 1-485 Parking Needs to be Expandable

The recent announcement that the South Corridor light rail parking garage at the planned 1-485 terminal will be reduced in size is cause for concern. CATS will cut its size by 89 spaces to save \$2 million dollars, which will be used as a contingency fund to cover ever increasing steel and cement prices. The parking deck will now have 1,125 spaces, it was reported.

While recognizing the need to cover increasing costs, we nevertheless are concerned that cutting the available parking at this critical terminal could limit future growth on the South Corridor light rail line. Parking at this station is likely to be the most important factor in the success or failure of the light rail line, because it will determine how successful the new line is in pulling drivers off 1-77 and 1-485. The South Corridor light rail line should attract riders from a wide area around Southwest Charlotte, and the northern sections of York and Lancaster Counties in South Carolina, including Ft. Mill. It should also draw motorists coming up 1-77 from as far away as Rock Hill.

In order to be successful however plenty of easily accessible parking needs to be available at the I-485 terminal. We say it needs to be easily accessible because a commuter does not want to spend valuable minutes hunting for a parking space, plus the time it takes to make the transfer to light rail. He will weigh that time against just staying with his car in slow moving traffic on 1-77. Whichever comes out faster is likely to be the winner. Of course we need to stress that there are other factors that motorists need to consider. Among them is the high cost of parking Uptown, as opposed to free parking at

CATS parking facilities along the South Corridor light rail line. Also there is the high price of gasoline, wear and tear on the car, and the greater risk of accidents on congested 1-77. All of these factors, added together, will likely determine the degree of success for the South Corridor light rail project, and the number of cars removed from congested 1-77.

As we see it, the important thing will be to have the ability to easily expand the 1-485 terminal parking when needed. Without that ability the ultimate degree of success of light rail will be limited. Other cities that have already built light rail systems, such as Denver, have warned us that they erred by not building into their projects enough parking. We need to make sure that we don't make the same mistake, because the success of our first light rail project will likely determine the future of other rail projects in Charlotte.

## Where should CATS be located?

*(Continued from Page 2)*

Uptown. To put it elsewhere is simply not logical. For example it would create a situation whereby many employees would have to spend extra time to get to work. Wasted time means wasted money, and a less efficient operation.

In case the above arguments were not enough, we think CATS has already contributed greatly to the South corridor area. The huge new bus maintenance facility on South Tryon Street was recently completed. It was a multi-million dollar investment by CATS. This very attractive facility will employ hundreds, including many minority workers. In addition to that CATS is building a new light rail maintenance facility on property adjoining the new bus operations. When it is up and running even more people will be working there. All of this is quite possibly a more valuable asset to the surrounding community than any headquarters office building could be.

## Dallas Paying Twice as Much

*(Related to front page article)*

The Dallas (TX) Area Rapid Transit System (DART) light rail lines are spurring billions of dollars in development. Since 1999, developers have started building or announced plans for \$3.3 billion dollars in new projects along rail lines. "Transit-oriented development is transforming our region," said DART President and CEO Gary Thomas.

In a 2001 study property values for office buildings along rail lines grew at twice the rate of comparable office buildings not near transit. Residential properties near transit lines also grew at a substantially higher rate than in non-transit areas.

In the early 1990's, when light rail planning started, the public didn't embrace it. Now that light rail is running, the competition between called area towns for light rail is fierce. Everyone wants to be on a light rail line, or near a station.

In order to pay for all these new light rail projects, and get them done in a timely fashion, Dallas area voters approved a 1% sales tax for transit, twice what we are currently paying here in Charlotte.

Source: *Dallas Morning News*

## Short Cuts



**Portland, Oregon** -- This city's newest light rail line, the MAX Yellow Line has it's first anniversary May 1st. The line runs along Interstate Avenue, a somewhat struggling street. Light rail has caused tremendous changes in just one year of operation. Ridership is up 92% from that of the former bus line it replaced. The number of new businesses along the line increased 50%. A powerful example of what light rail can accomplish in just a short time.

**Seattle, Washington**-- The Waterfront Streetcar line, popular with both tourists and local citizens, has recently been threatened by the Seattle Art Museum's plan to build a sculpture garden on the spot where their car barn was located. This spring the Port of Seattle came to the rescue of the trolley line, offering property to build a new car barn, and offering to extend the line 1.2 miles in order to reach the new location.

# Seattle Monorail is Canceled

The projected 14-mile monorail system through the heart of Seattle appears dead. Voters this November finally gave the system a resounding rejection, after having narrowly approved of the system on four separate votes in the last couple of years. Voter frustration over rising costs, and a shrinking system resulted in monorail's defeat this time around however. With hope for its revival all but gone, city officials pulled the plug on the ambitious project.

The \$1.7 billion dollar project appeared to be in trouble practically from the start. Financing depended almost entirely from an annual motor vehicle tax levied within the City of Seattle. All indications seemed to point to a seriously underfunded financial plan. The monorail board of directors glossed over these doubts and said the new system would be so efficient and well automated it would eventually pay for itself, something no major transit system has ever achieved.

As costs to build the system rose higher, problems began to develop. The motor vehicle tax was not generating the expected revenue. To adjust to this threat the last mile of the route in West Seattle was cut back. Later, the system was further reduced by cutting several miles off the route in the Ballard area of North Seattle. Monorail stations, which proponents promised would be designed to fit each individual neighborhood in which the line operated, were reduced in number, and downgraded to a "cookie-cutter" styling. Giant

concrete support posts for the monorail structure were substituted for thinner steel supports. All of these economies alienated the voters and would-be transit riders.

Voters were turned off by the shaky financing and proposed changes to the initial plans, not by the transit mode itself. Many still believe monorail to be the mass transit solution of the future. Even those who doubt this to be true might have liked to see Seattle build this system, if for no other reason than to prove once and for all if monorail is actually a workable solution to our modern transit needs.

Although monorail is nearly as old as the streetcar or conventional elevated railway, there are still very few examples of it operating in a regular rapid transit service. Even the recently built line in Las Vegas does not qualify. It is a short line, built chiefly for the purpose of transporting hotel and casino guests and workers within the confines of the Las Vegas "strip."

Cancellation of the monorail project will have no effect on Seattle's new \$2.4 billion dollar light rail project, which is separately funded by Sound Transit. The light rail line is currently under construction from Seattle's downtown transit tunnel to Sea-Tac International Airport, and is scheduled to be finished in 2007.

*(We will go into greater detail about the history of monorail, and where and how it is working in our next newsletter.)*

## Your Membership Will Help Us Help You!

Please help us continue our fight for the best possible transit system for the Charlotte area. Become a member of Citizen's for Efficient Mass Transit. We are a totally volunteer, non-profit organization.

**Your membership entitles you to one year of the quarterly CEMT Newsletter** and occasional news releases. We monitor all public transit meetings. Please take a minute to help us keep you informed. Thank you!

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