

MAYOR'S TRANSITION TASK FORCE

on the

Metropolitan Transit  
Authority

Report of the

Committee on Regional Coordination

# Committee Members

- Maureen Crocker
- Mark Ellis
- Ramiro Fonseca
- Jagat Kamdar
- William Millar
- Laura Nichol
- Randhir Sahni
- Allen Watson, Chair

# Research

- 2 phone interviews
- 13 interviews

# Methodology - Research Meetings

DATE	GUESTS	TEAM MEMBERS	LOCATION
January 22, 2010	Mayor Allen Owen	Allen Watson	Phone interview
January 22, 2010	Jeanette Rash	Allen Watson	Phone interview
January 25, 2010	Maureen Crocker – GCRD Director	Allen Watson, Mark Loethen, Ramiro Fonseca	Central Houston, 2 Houston Center, 909 Fannin, Ste. 1650 (713-650-1470)
January 25, 2010	Alan Clark, Ashby Johnson – HGAC & Comm. James Patterson	Allen Watson, Mark Loethen, Randy Sahni, Ramiro Fonseca, Maureen Crocker	3555 Timmons Lane, Ste. 120 (713-627-3200)
January 26, 2010	Judge James Yarbrough, Barry Goodman	Allen Watson, Maureen Crocker	722 Moody, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor, Galveston (409-766-2244)
January 27, 2010	Joe Adams – UPRR	Laura Nichol	United Way,
January 27, 2010	Delvin Dennis – TxDOT	Laura Nichol, Jagat Kamdar, Randy Sahni	7211 Washington Ave (contact Sonya Trojan)
January 27, 2010	Metro Area Small Cities	Maureen Crocker, Allen Watson, Laura Nichol	City of Bellaire City Hall, 7008 S. Rice, Bellaire
January 28, 2010	Rebecca Reyna – Exec. Dir, Carlos Doroteo – Dist. H Public Affairs	Allen Watson	Greater Northside Mgmt. District, 6219 Irvington, Suite B, (713-229-0900)
January 28, 2010	Judge Robert Herbert	Allen Watson, Jagat Kamdar	301 Jackson St., Ste. 719, Richmond (281-341-8606)
January 28, 2010	Harris County Transit	Allen Watson, Jagat Kamdar	1001 Preston Ave, 9 <sup>th</sup> Flr., (713-755-8379)
January 29, 2010	FBC Cities and County	Allen Watson	Missouri City, City Hall
January 29, 2010	Comm. James Patterson, Don Smithers, FBC Transp. Director	Allen Watson	County Offices
February 1, 2010	Peter McStravik	Allen Watson	Hilton Americas
February 9, 2010	METRO Staff	Maureen Crocker, Ramiro Fonseca, Allen Watson	METRO offices

## Other Possible Sources

- Gary Thomas & Tim McCay - DART

## Methodology - Documents reviewed

- The 2035 Houston-Galveston Regional Transportation Plan
- Metro Solutions Overview and Update, Spring 2007
- Downtown Houston Commute Survey Report, August 2009
- TCRP Report 85 (Public Transit Board Governance Guidebook)
- Harris County Community Services Department Office of Transit Services - Summary of Transit Services
- Houston Chronicle, Fontaine Resigns from Metro Board, Takes Staff Position
- Regional Commuter Rail Connectivity Study

## Continued -

- HGAC US-90A Rail Feasibility Study & Framework RFQ
- Harris County Community Services Department Office of Transit Services - Summary of Transit Services
- Commuter Rail, A Plan for the Future, Metropolitan Transit Authority Infrastructure & Service Development
- Building America, Union Pacific Railroad Map
- General Mobility Program, FY2005 thru FY2009 Expenditures
- Advance Plan, A Livable Centers Study for Waller, Texas
- General Mobility Program Funding Methodology (METRO)

# Current State Assessment: Key Findings

- Regional partners lack trust in METRO to lead a Transit Solution
  - Poor Communication
  - Tarnished work history
  - Censored agenda
- Regional Partners acknowledge the need for a Regional Transit Solution
  - Connectivity
  - Cost-sharing
  - Boundary Limitations
- Funding and solutions for regional transit are becoming fragmented
  - Fort Bend & Harris County transit authorities
  - Others forming transit districts
  - Municipalities need/want to continue general mobility funding



# Strategic Choices

1. What changes can be made within METRO to regain the trust of regional partners and the community?
2. How should METRO and the region balance transit needs in light of funding limitations?
3. What is METRO's role in a regional transit solution?

# Strategic Choices

1. What changes can be made within METRO to regain the trust of regional partners and the community?
  - A. Improve communication and public openness at METRO.
  - B. Improve leadership at METRO including senior staff.
  - C. Assign planning, development and implementation of a regional transit solution to another agency.

## A. Improve communication and public openness at METRO - Options:

- i. Insist on appropriate peer level decision makers engaging with other agencies (send the right person).
- ii. Improve community awareness of METRO's planned actions and decisions. This includes public notices.
- iii. Assure consistent and fact-based communication with public and other agencies.

# Strategic Options: Implications

- i. Insist on appropriate peer level decision makers engaging with other agencies (send the right person)
  - Faster more efficient decisions.
  - Demonstrates METRO's willingness to participate.
- ii. Improve community awareness of Metro's planned actions and decisions. This includes public notices.
  - The public has a right to know what METRO is doing.
  - Will enable identification and resolution of issues earlier in the project development process.
  - Will enable development of consensus rather than selling the agency's preferred option.
- iii. Assure consistent and fact-based communication with public and other agencies.
  - Eliminates conflicting messages.
  - Improves reliability and trust.

## B. Improve leadership at METRO including senior staff - Options:

- i. Strengthen corporate leadership and management (excluding Board)
- ii. Augment senior management
- iii. Improve employee morale

Board's Role: Direct, Engage and ensure Public Trust

# Strategic Options: Implications

- i. Improve and strengthen corporate leadership and management
  - Improved public acceptance
  - Improved communications and responsiveness
  - Improve tarnished image
  - May change direction
  - Symbol of positive change to the region
  
- ii. Augment senior management
  - Potential improvement to decision-making process
  - Program and project delays
  - New direction
  - Lose institutional knowledge at staff level

# Strategic Options: Implications

## iii. Improve employee morale

- Improves or declines
- Indecision and commitment
- Attrition

## C. Assign planning, development and implementation of a regional transit to another agency - Options:

- i. Assign complete or limited responsibility to other agencies such as GCRD or H-GAC
- ii. Create combined agency
- iii. Create new agency



# Strategic Options: Implications

- i. Assign complete or limited responsibility to other agencies such as GCRD or H-GAC
  - H-GAC currently responsible for regional transportation and transit planning.
  - H-GAC's Transportation Planning Council includes regional representation.
  - GCRD has Regional Mobility Authority (RMA) powers; can own, construct and maintain systems; and regional membership is growing.
    - ❖ Limitations:
      - ★ GCRD does not currently have transit authority.
      - ★ GCRD and H-GAC do not have dedicated revenue.
      - ★ GCRD and H-GAC do not have adequate staff and resources.
      - ★ H-GAC has not taken a leadership role.
      - ★ Perceived equal and fair representation on both boards.

# Strategic Options: Implications

## ii. Create combined agency

- Creating another public agency or board
- Governance and makeup issues
- Dedicated funding and resources
- Legislative action needed - lengthy

## iii. Create new agency

- Creating another public agency or board
- Governance and makeup issues
- Dedicated funding and resources
- Legislative action needed - lengthy

Generally accepted alternative chosen by other regions

# Strategic Choices

2. How should METRO and the region balance transit needs in light of funding limitations?
  - A. Continue general mobility funding.
  - B. Maintain focus on dependent riders transit options.
  - C. Expand METRO service area to include other H-GAC cities and counties.
  - D. Expand METRO authority to lead commuter rail.

## A. Continue general mobility funding - Options:

- i. Continue general mobility funding at current levels after 2014 to COH, Harris County and Multi Cities.
- ii. Modify general mobility funding formulas.
- iii. Use general mobility funding to entice other cities and counties to join METRO.

**Needs attention.**

# Strategic Options: Implications

- i. Continue general mobility funding after 2014 to COH, Harris County and Multi Cities
  - Reduces METRO Solutions funding
  - Limits METRO operation and expansion funding
  - **Current recipients remain engaged and supportive of METRO**
  - Infrastructure is maintained for transit services
- ii. Modify general mobility funding formulas
  - Reduce general mobility funding to non-METRO agencies
  - Increases METRO's available funding for METRO Solutions, operations and other programs.
  - Lose support of general mobility funding recipients.

# Strategic Options: Implications

- iii. Use general mobility funding as incentive for other cities and counties to join METRO
  - Increases revenue
  - Creates a larger and stronger transit-oriented region

## B. Maintain focus on dependent riders' transit options - Options:

- i. Let METRO do what they do best.
- ii. Integrate METRO Light Rail into evolving regional transit solution.

# Strategic Options: Implications

- i. Let METRO do what they do best
  - Continue to provide and improve a necessary service.
  - Maintain current public perception and awareness of METRO thereby minimizing costs to rebrand.
  - Sacrificing public/private partnership opportunities by not offering a “new and improved” METRO.
  
- ii. Integrate METRO Light Rail into evolving regional transit solution
  - Sets the stage for better regional mobility.
  - Supports extensive core connectivity.
  - Affords options for increased transit ridership/users.
  - Potential for enhanced return on public investment.



## C. Expand METRO service area to include other H-GAC cities and counties -

### Options:

- i. Increases transit funding.
- ii. Legislative and local opposition.
- iii. METRO's current operations may not be expandable.

# Strategic Options: Implications

- i. Increases transit funding
  - Larger tax base
  - Stronger regional solution
- iii. Legislative and local opposition
  - Multi cities and counties support?
- iii. METRO's current operations may not be expandable
  - Dependent riders versus choice riders expectations and interaction
  - Density factors
  - Equipment and trip times

# Strategic Options: Implications

3. What is METRO's role in a regional transit solution?
  - A. Designate METRO as the lead agency for regional transit
  - B. **Maintain current roles for all transit agencies including METRO and assign regional planning, development and implementation authority to another agency**
  - C. Create a new regional transit agency

## A. Designate METRO as the lead agency for regional transit - Options:

- i. Regional mistrust
- ii. Current funding mechanism cannot support regional responsibility
- iii. Sharing current funding sources are unfair
- iv. Boundary limitations
- v. Refine METRO's mission to enhance regional transit solutions

# Strategic Options: Implications

- i. Regional mistrust
  - Past performance
  - Tarnished reputation - not a team player
- ii. Current funding mechanism cannot support regional responsibility
  - One cent sales tax insufficient for regional plan
- iii. Sharing current funding sources are unfair and unsustainable
  - Agencies can't / don't share resources for joint projects

# Strategic Options: Implications

## iv. Boundary limitations

- Not inclusive enough to offer total regional solution
- **Interlocal arrangements provide limited seamless transit solutions for users**

# Strategic Options: Implications

- v. Refine METRO's mission to enhance regional transit solutions
  - Must provide connectivity to other agencies
  - Continue to develop light rail and bus services to collaborate with other agency plans

B. Maintain current roles for all transit agencies including METRO and assign regional planning, development and implementation authority to another agency- Options:

- i. Transit experience needed to operate efficient agency.
- ii. Transit demands different for each agency.
- iii. Need independent agency to provide regional oversight, governance, guidance and critical interagency programs and projects.
- iv. Existing agencies with potential capabilities are H-GAC, GCRD.



# Strategic Options: Implications

- i. Transit experience needed to operate efficient agency.
  - Service is first responsibility of all agencies
  
- iii. Transit demands different for each agency
  - Allow independent transit agencies
  
- v. Need independent agency to provide regional oversight, governance, guidance and critical interagency programs and projects
  - Better collaboration
  - Fairer interlocal agreements
  - Regional perspective on connectivity and cost sharing

## C. Create a new regional transit agency

### - Options:

- i. New agency that assumes the roles of all current transit providers/agencies
- ii. New agency that controls funding and planning
- iii. New regional governing board that focuses on consensus and policy planning

# Strategic Options: Implications

## Super Agency

### i. New agency that assumes the roles of all current transit providers/agencies

- Legislative, legal and governance complications
- Broad representation
- **Unified voice to Federal Agencies**
- Longer-term option
- Potential broader funding base
- Coordinated regional development
- Reduces transit agencies

### ii. New agency that controls funding and planning

- Legislative and legal complications
- Broad representation
- Another administrative layer
- Potential broader funding base
- No operational responsibilities

# Strategic Options: Implications

- iii. New regional governing board that focuses on consensus and policy planning
  - Lack of funding control
  - Shorter-term implementation strategy
  - Recommends options and strategies for funding and regional response (directs H-GAC activities through a subset of TPC board reps)
  - Broad representation
  - No operational responsibilities

INTERIM STEP

# Questions and Issues Outstanding

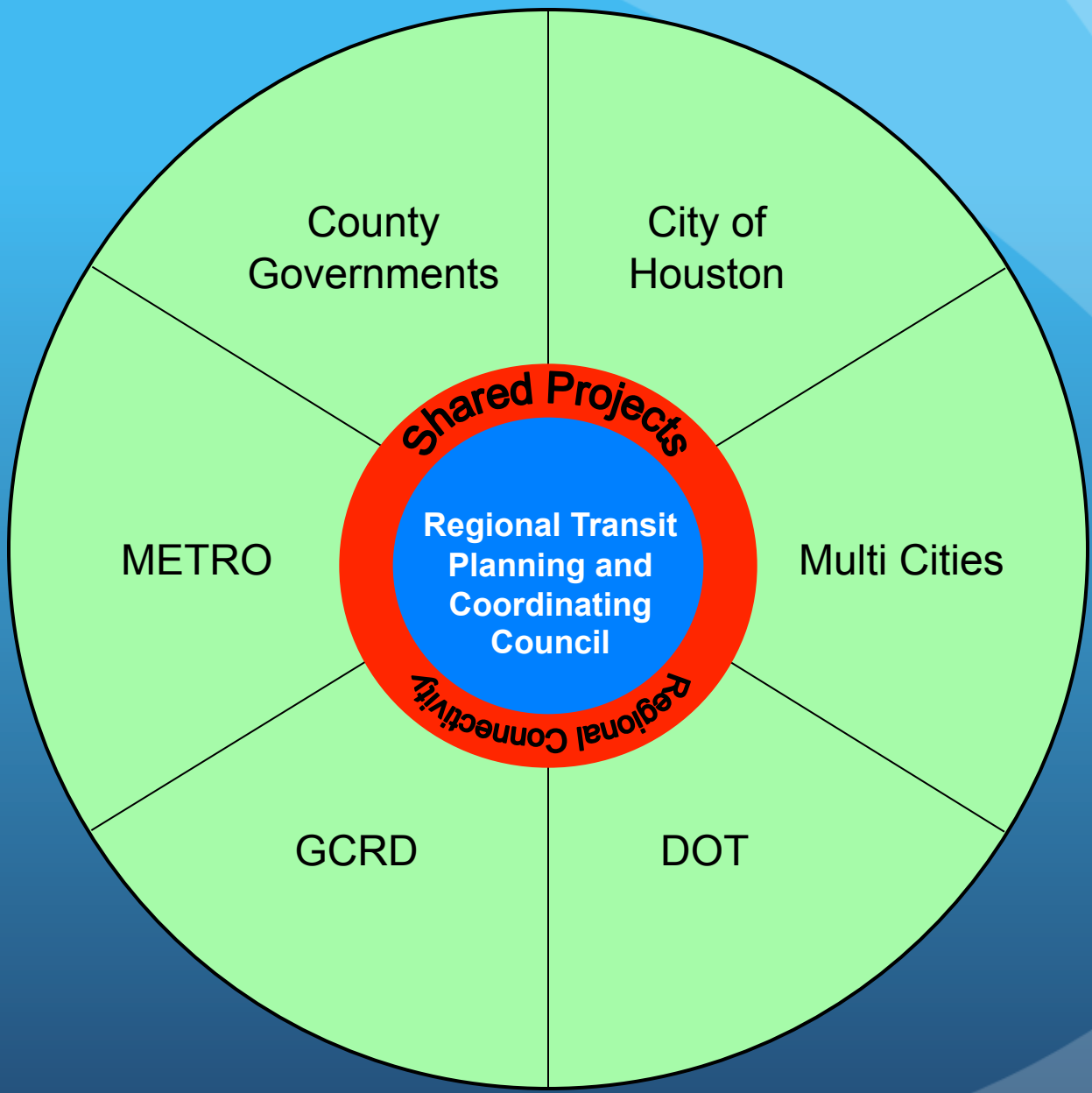
- Is METRO the best agency to oversee the regional transit solution?
- Can METRO properly manage a commuter rail solution?
- Does fragmented regional transit agencies reduce the overall effectiveness to secure FTA funds? What is the most effective means?
- Should another or new agency take the lead on planning, development and implementation of a regional transit plan?

# Tactical Issues Requiring Near-term Action

- Meet with the Houston Convention Center Hotel Corporation to discuss future development of Discovery Green Park and convention center hotels in coordination with METRO's Southeast light rail line.
- Meet with Fort Bend County Tollroad Authority to discuss selling right of way for the Fort Bend Tollroad.
- Meet with the Greater Northside Management District to develop reasonable construction response plans for citizens and businesses along the North light rail line.
- Meet with the Multi Cities' Mayors to discuss future general mobility funding.
- Request agency survey/review with METRO's staff to discuss morale and internal operations.

# Tactical Issues Requiring Near-term Action

- Public designation of a lead agency for commuter rail development.
- Review METRO's contracting practices for legal and fairness irregularities.
- Review METRO's employee hiring practices for legal and fairness irregularities.



County Governments

City of Houston

Shared Projects

Regional Transit Planning and Coordinating Council

METRO

Multi Cities

Regional Connectivity

GCRD

DOT



# Closing Considerations

- Meet with the multi-cities' Mayors to discuss transit solutions and continued METRO's general mobility support.
- Consider creating a separate and independent regional transit agency or assigning authority to an existing agency other than METRO.
  - 3 large regions have implemented some form of regional transit agency
- Review benefits and consequences of maintaining the general mobility funding to all participants.
- Find ways to improve METRO's responsiveness, coordination, leadership and public openness.

# Closing Considerations

- METRO Solutions must be successful for commuter rail to become a part of the regional transit landscape.
- A regional solution is necessary for the 4<sup>th</sup> largest metropolitan area.
- Meet with County Judges to discuss a regional transit plan and funding mechanism (Interim TPC approach).