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METRO SOLUTIONS
NORTH CORRIDOR DEIS PUBLIC HEARING
AUGUST 5, 2006
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. MARTINEZ: May I have your attention, please. Welcome. We are bringing this public hearing to order. We want to remind everyone that we have Spanish translation headsets available at the registration area. (Speaking Spanish).

If you would like to use these headsets, we ask two small favors, that you please sign the headsets out before taking them and that you return them before you leave. (Speaking Spanish).

At this time, I would like to introduce our public hearing officer, Mr. John Sedlak, executive vice-president for METRO. John...

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you very much, Mike. Good afternoon everyone. I would like to thank all of you for joining us this afternoon. It's important that you have joined us for this public hearing. It's important to hear from you and hear your comments. That's what we're here for.

But first before we begin the proceedings, let me make a few introductions. We have with us several of our board members and elected officials. I'd like to first introduce our board members that are with us, seated at the table, Mr. Rafael Ortega. We also have

with us Ms. Carmen Orta. I haven't seen Ms. Orta yet. I don't know if she's here in the auditorium with us, but Ms. Orta is either here at the school or will be joining us shortly. When she comes in, I'll also introduce her.

We also have with us today Ms. Marnene Thomas that's representing U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee. Marnene, where are you? Marnene is right here in the front. Thank you, Marnene, for joining us. We also have Isaiah Warner, representing State Representative Jessica Farrar's office. Where is Isaiah? Thank you for being with us. I appreciate it. And also we have here U.S. Representative Gene Green. And I'd like to bring Gene Green to the podium for a few remarks. Congressman...

CONGRESSMAN GREEN: Thank you. I'll just -- I have a statement we have back at a number of the tables that we have, and I just want to read it into the record and put it officially into the record. The overall vote to approve the next phase of METRO Solutions of 52 percent to 48 percent and it was strongly supported in the north side area. North side is the highest transit use area, and since the folks out here pay a lot in bus fares already, I think we deserve a fair share of the benefits under METRO Solutions.

Houston is the fourth largest city, and until the Main Street Line opened since January 1st of 2004, Houston was the largest city in the country without rail transit. So we need to move rapidly to expand our rail system to catch up with Dallas and Atlanta and literally cities half our Houston size.

Like many, I was surprised and upset and disappointed when we were going to have to use bus rapid transit, BRT, as a temporary stop on the way to light rail. Unfortunately, the Federal Transit Administration changed its rules on us making them harder for light rail projects with -- not considering our ridership level expected to qualify for federal funding which forced METRO to look at BRT for some new temporary solutions.

I support the METRO Solutions because we need to put rails on the ground and build the stations and other infrastructure so we can make that transition from BRT to light rail when we show the North side and the East End -- because we have two routes -- that we have the ridership to justify it.

The ridership on Main Street far exceeded its projections, and I think we can do the same thing here in our North line. As ridership increases, I want to be pushing to get the trains on the tracks as fast as

possible. First we need to get the North line project funded on the federal level and there are no guarantees, no matter what happens today. I'm glad to see folks in our public hearing to discuss the final alignment of the North line. There is a lot of competition for federal transit funding, so we need to pick the most safest and economical route that will have good ridership numbers and that's the fastest way we can upgrade to light rail.

We also need to make sure that the number and placement of light rail stations are right especially to the north of the 610 loop. And I was disappointed a lot of the plans had very few stations on the North line going to Northline shopping mall, but I know there is ways that that can be corrected. But I also would particularly like to see one north of 610 loop between that and Northline because there is a whole community there under current plans that was not served.

But again, you're here to hear from a lot of folks today, and I just appreciate the time to put a statement into the record.

MR. SEDLAK: Congressman Green, thank you very much. You've been a real supporter of METRO's programs for many, many years. We sincerely appreciate your support and all of your hard work in Congress. Thank you for joining us here again today.

Let me tell you all about the proceedings of this public hearing. It is a formal process that we're about today, and we're here to receive your comments. That's really the significant part of that. And it's to receive the comments on the North Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This is so that the public can submit -- also if they wish to submit written comments, and if you wish to do that, they can be provided through Ms. Rhonda Boyer. And we have provided that material out in the lobby, but we can provide it again. Let me read it into the record here. Ms. Rhonda Boyer with the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County. That's at Post Office Box 61429, Houston, Texas, 77208, and comments must be postmarked by August the 17th, 2006.

Now, the way our public hearing will be conducted is as follows: We will have a brief presentation by Janet Kennison. Janet Kennison is with Carter Burgess engineers. They have been conducting the Draft Environmental Impact Statement work for this particular corridor. We will then have -- go to our speakers. And I will call upon speakers in segments of four or five at a time. Now, we've only had so many signed up to speak and I assume additional are signing up to speak as we're continuing here. So I will receive additional cards,

but I will call speakers in the order that they were given to me. And following the registered speakers, we will then call upon anybody that hasn't registered to speak so that you will also have an opportunity to comment as we are taking this as a formal record here today. We have court reporters that are transcribing your comments and they become part of the formal record.

We're asking that the verbal comments be limited to two minutes. So Mike Martinez here at the table -- Mike will be the time-keeper, and he will give you some indication if you're getting close to that two minutes, and at that point I'll ask you to try to bring your comments to a summary as soon as you can.

We'd also encourage, if you'd like, to submit your comments in writing so they can be put forward into the record. Now, all the comments will be transcribed and will become part of the formal record of this hearing. Comments that are offered in Spanish will be translated to English and they will be transcribed. Written comments will be accepted for the record.

Now, at this point, I would like to turn the podium over to Janet Kennison for a brief presentation concerning the environmental impact statement work.

MS. KENNISON: Thank you, John. First of all, can you hear me in the back? Yes? Very good.

Next slide.

The purpose of today's public hearing is to provide a status report on the North Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement, including a summary of the document, to provide an opportunity for the public to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and to develop a public record to accompany the recommendations for future decisions on the North Corridor.

This flow chart outlines the process for preparing an environmental impact statement. We are about two-thirds of the way through the process with the circulation of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and today's public hearing. The next steps will be to complete the Final Environmental Impact Statement and receive a Record of Decision or approval of the document.

This slide shows the process for recommending a preferred alternative. Obviously the first step is to prepare the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Next, the DEIS is sent to state, local and federal resource agencies for a minimum of 45 days for review and comment. The document is also made available to elected officials and to the public for review and comment. During the 45 day comment period, a public hearing is

conducted to solicit comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. After the public hearing, METRO will review the agency and public comments received. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the comments received and the resolution to those comments will be presented to the METRO board. Based on this information, the METRO board recommends what is called a Locally Preferred Alternative. The Final Environmental Impact Statement is then prepared to address comments received and to document the recommended Locally Preferred Alternative. Preliminary engineering is completed during this time. Once the Final Environmental Impact Statement is circulated for 30 days, the Federal Transit Administration then issues a Record of Decision in the final environmental approval and selection of the locally preferred alternative.

The DEIS discusses social, economic and environmental effects of the North Corridor alternatives. The document contains seven chapters, as well as an executive summary and technical appendices. In addition to the No Build alternative, the North Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement analyzed and evaluated three Build Alternatives, the light rail transit alternative, the bus rapid transit convertible to light rail alternative, and a bus rapid transit

alternative along with alignment options in four areas. All alignment options begin at the University of Houston Downtown station on the existing Main Street Line and end at Northline Mall. Alignment Options A and B are at the southern terminus of the line where the North Intermodal Terminal is being planned. Option C follows only Boundary in connecting North Main to Fulton where Option D uses both Boundary and Morris Streets.

Option E follows Irvington and Cavalcade and then back to Fulton, while Option F follows Fulton only. Options G and H are at the northern terminus and involve an elevated versus an at-grade section through the Fulton and Crosstimbers intersection.

The DEIS covers many required areas of potential impact. These areas range from air quality and transit conditions to land use and historic properties.

Several resources will experience no adverse effects as a result of the North Corridor build alternatives. In fact, some resources like air quality and transit conditions would actually be improved by the project.

Other resources will have varying impacts that result from the North Corridor build alternatives. Bike lanes on Fulton would need to be relocated as a result of the build alternatives. Alignment Option E, which

follows Irvington and Cavalcade, would remove trees from the medians of those streets. Also if Option E on Irvington is chosen, the American Freightways driveway would need to be relocated to line up with Patton Street.

The DEIS does identify residential and commercial properties including historic properties that could be displaced by the North Corridor build alternatives. Properties on North Main, Boundary, Morris, Irvington, Cavalcade and Fulton could be affected. However, as the preliminary engineering for this corridor is completed, every effort will be made to minimize or eliminate these potential displacements and relocations. Changes in the potential displacements and relocations will be documented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Visual intrusions can be expected with all build alternatives. In addition to the aerial structures on North Main and Fulton, the light rail overhead catenary wires would contribute to visual impacts. In addition, the light rail build alternative would increase noise at station locations and vibration along the alignment.

Vibration is not an issue for the bus rapid transit alternatives, and noise from the bus rapid transit alternative is only a factor with a few sensitive noise receptors on Morris Street. Six potential at-risk sites

for hazardous and regulated materials have been identified in the study area. These sites, including two sites on Irvington and one on Cavalcade, are potential gas station leaks that could lead to contamination of soils and groundwater.

Comments on the North Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement can be given online at METRO's website or they can be given today during this public -- the public comment portion of this hearing. Written comments may also be submitted to METRO, but they must be postmarked by August 17th, 2006 which is the end of the 45 day comment period.

After this brief presentation, the public comment portion will begin. First, elected officials present or their representatives will have an opportunity to provide their comments. Next, speakers will be called based on the order of the returned speaker cards. Once all registered speakers have offered their comments, unregistered speakers will have an opportunity to comment. A court reporter will record the comments and transcribe the comments that will become a part of the official record. Comments offered in Spanish will be translated into English. All comments will also be -- all written comments will also be accepted for the record. This particular presentation will also be on

METRO's website early next week. I'll turn it back over to John.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Janet. And at this time we begin the public comment portion of the public hearing. And I'd like to go to the first speaker, which is Isaiah Warner. Isaiah, please come to the microphone for your comments. Isaiah, again, represents State Representative Jessica Farrar.

MR. WARNER: How are we doing? Like he said, I'm here with Representative Farrar's office. Carlos normally handles the transportation issues, so unfortunately I don't know too much about this. He is on vacation in Miami where he's the only person who goes towards a hurricane, and he'll be back in town on Monday or Tuesday. What is really important here is that we're all here. So if you have opinions and that they are voiced or heard and I want to say thanks to METRO for providing the presentation in Spanish so that everybody here can get equal information. And with that, next person.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Isaiah. I also want to mention that there are copies I've been told of the presentation out in the lobby. So if you'd like to have a copy of the presentation that Janet Kennison has just gone through, it is available.

I'm going to call three speakers here that will be the next three speakers, and if they could come down and take seats in the front and the first speaker then could approach the microphone, and then we can follow after that. So the first three speakers will be Abby Harrison followed by John Buck followed by John Guajardo. Abby, if you could approach the microphone.

MS. HARRISON: Thank you. My name is Abby Harrison, and I live on 712 Caplin Street. I want to thank you for having us speak, especially the part about where you're limiting the length of talks. I've been to other public hearings where people went on for a half hour rant and it was very nice to know we have limits.

My first point is that just because someone comes to you and says I represent such and such civic association, that they may be representing -- they may not necessarily always speak for the civic association unless there has been a public vote. For example, I'm a member of the North Lindale Civic Association, and in the last meeting we did not vote on where the civic association felt about it. It's very clear that it was divided. A lot of raised voices leads me to believe that it has not been voted on. So I'm just a homeowner.

Anyway, I want to thank you for the parts -- people

were very good about explaining lots of things, particularly about the elevated portion over the railroad tracks taking into account that it would sort of be smoothing out the curve. There is consideration about the school there, lifting it up, and also about how much traffic there is on that railroad track. It's very clear that a lot of thought has gone into this and that has been well taken care of.

MR. MARTINEZ: Thirty seconds.

MS. HARRISON: My last point is very loud and clear, please do not go up Irvington. I think it's a clearer straight shot to go up Fulton, and taking out all those great trees along Irvington, as pretty as the scenery would be for all those riders, is not a good idea. I think it makes much more sense to go up Fulton. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Abby, thank you very much for your comments. Again, we're recording all of the comments that are being provided. Our next speaker is John Buck.

MR. BUCK: My name is John Buck. I'm a resident of the North Lindale 610 North to the railroad tracks. I'm here today to give support to METRO for a Fulton Street route north of Cavalcade to Northline. I believe this -- with this route on Fulton, you'd have

less of an impact to the neighborhoods along the route. And I would just wish METRO would sign off to a Fulton route as soon as possible and begin construction soon.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, John, for attending and providing your comments. Next speaker, John Guajardo.

MR. GUAJARDO: I'd like to begin by letting METRO know that I'm a strong supporter of y'all's visions; however, I'm disappointed in some of y'all's current plans and changes. I would like to begin by introducing myself. I'm John Guajardo. I'm a student at the University of Houston Central and Downtown campus. I'm also employed in the Medical Center, so I do utilize a lot of the light rail accessibility.

The Houston area is in need of some type of mass transit system in place. However, the near north side area wants to know exactly how, when and where this is going to be placed here in this area. We were guaranteed LRT, but now we're being shown a BRT or an alternate plan for this area.

Y'all also have some issues with the Richmond residents not wanting the LRT in their area. Well, we want it, and I guarantee you if we can get the LRT in this area, then we will have the ridership that y'all

are wanting and that y'all are looking for.

I would like y'all to stop using phrases such as "could be affected." I want to know if we're going to be affected and how we're going to be affected. I'd like to thank y'all for the chance that y'all gave me to voice my opinion here. Thank you, sir.

MR. SEDLAK: John, thank you for your comments and some of the comments that you've raised and some of the questions you had, there may be some staff outside that could answer those questions if you want to try to approach some of the staff. They could provide some answers to you and try to clarify some of those schedule questions that you have. We're here to receive the comments rather than get into a dialogue, but there are some staff back there that I believe could answer some questions for you. Thank you, John.

Our next three speakers I'd like to call upon -- I have two cards here. Let me get a few additional ones. Thank you very much. Next speakers will be Richard Leal, Jeanette Rash, followed by Patrick Castillo.

MR. LEAL: Should I face you or face them or does it make any difference?

MR. SEDLAK: Your pleasure, Richard.

MR. LEAL: Thanks very much. I'm glad we have quite a few people here. My name is Richard Leal.

I'm with Houston ACORN, and I'm a board member of the Houston ACORN. I'm also on various other boards. I'm a member of the mayor's Hispanic Advisory Board and also the North Hispanic Positive Interaction Program.

But anyway, first of all, I want to thank METRO for taking the effort they are taking to do what they are doing with regards to getting the public input with regards to this issue. I'm all for this issue. I think if the federal government wants to give money to a region, let's figure out a way to take it and do something positive with it. We need the investment coming through our community. Our community has been so, let's say, put down or neglected for so long that it needs rapid -- a system going through our neighborhood.

There is some issues that have been brought up with regards to the schools and METRO not caring about the children at the schools. I totally disagree with that. I have a child that's going to be in first grade. She was in kindergarten last year at Roosevelt Elementary which is one of the impacted schools. And I'm not concerned about METRO going through there because I understand it's going to be elevated, et cetera, and I know that METRO will go out of their way to protect the children, and I've got a bigger problem with the railroad line that goes through there and blocks the

traffic for extended periods of time while we're trying to pick up and drop off our daughter at the school. Anyway, thank you very much, and I'm all for it and let's start building this thing. Thank you very much.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you for attending here, Richard. Next speaker is Jeanette Rash.

MS. RASH: My name is Jeanette Rash and transportation is my business. I've been all over the United States to study how we can move traffic better on freeways. And I'm here to tell you we're doing an excellent job here in Houston of doing that, but today I wanted to talk to you as a grandmother of eight and an employer for 40 people, and I want to say that you have to consider what has happened to our citizens. If we consider the cost of transportation, we have to consider the cost of fuel and the possibility of fuel going to five dollars a gallon. We have to consider the cost of insurance for our automobiles that's required. We have to consider the inability to buy vehicles that don't meet emissions standards which raises the cost for an automobile. And we also have to consider the cost of parking if you work downtown.

We need a mass transit system, and it is long over due. If we do not get this transit system done this time, our light rail, whether it be BRT or whatever we

need to do, then we will have failed. I feel like for myself, for my grandchildren, for the future of my employees and my company, we will have failed if we do not get this light rail on the ground and running.

Please, please, it is time for you to work with us, and we will help in any way for anyone who is impacted by this system; but we must move forward for our generation and for the future of our children and grandchildren. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you very much, Jeanette. Our next speaker is Patrick Castillo.

MR. CASTILLO: Thank you very much. I was just talking to Ms. Rash not too long ago. I'm also a Davis graduate, and it's kind of funny sitting in this auditorium because back then I had hair. It's all gone now.

Anyway, my name is Patrick Castillo. I'm a born Houstonian. I grew up in this neighborhood. I live in this neighborhood and have a business in this neighborhood as well. One of the things I wanted to mention is my father back in 1948 started a realty business in this area up until '93 called Castillo Realty. During that time back in the day, he was leasing and selling homes to Latinos and African Americans back in the day when nobody wanted to give

anyone a home. This is not a race issue, but it's a rail issue now, and really what it boils down to is back then it was a time of change. This is also a time of change. And I think we need to move with that and come together as a community and go ahead and support rail as we do, as I do, and as I know as acting director of the management district to support this.

Now, one of the things is, is rail wrong? I've asked myself and I emphatically said no. The other thing is, is rail right? And since we don't have it here yet, I couldn't answer that. One thing I did come to the conclusion was it can and will make the community better and because of that we support it 100 percent.

Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you very much, Patrick. The next three speakers in order will be Dolores Buck, Estela Jimenez and Cristobal Hinojosa. If I could have Dolores Buck, please.

MS. BUCK: Good afternoon. My name is Dolores Buck. This is my first time to be speaking in one of these public meetings. I do not envy the decisions you have to make, but I highly support you.

I'm a convert to mass transit. Years ago I caught the HOV, and I was angry all the time at all the construction, at all the delay. I only thought about

me, but now I look today at all the parking lots. I would hate to think what would happen to our freeways today if we had all those cars individually and plus people don't tell when you have a hard time trying to convince people to work downtown with the gas, the cost of gas, the more cars on the road, the more it's going to tear up and the more you have to repair them and then you'll have to be aggravated by construction.

Times are changing. It is unfortunate when things do interrupt our neighborhood, but Houston has changed. My mother was born on Williams Street by I-10 across from the Dakota lofts if anybody is familiar with that part of town. She remembers going to St. Patrick's Church. I-10 did not exist. They had to get rid of St. Patrick. Some of you may remember your parents talking about that so the freeway can come in.

We've seen homes uplited for schools. Who can tell me we don't need schools for our kids. I'm a teacher. Tell me we don't need schools. Sometimes things happen, and it is unfortunate, and we look upon you to do the best you can.

I really think the best route would be down Fulton. I don't wish to argue with my friends who disagree with that, but we do live in a free country and we can have a disagreement but we can still be friends, and I don't

want to upset anybody, but environmentally, there are less people affected. Loop 610 is -- the only access on to it is on Irvington. The only exit. We need to have a quick route for our ambulances, fire trucks to get on to that end. My father has recently died. Time is of the essence to get on to those freeways. You cannot lose time. So please consider going the least -- the shortest route. As I tell my students, take the shortest route. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you very much, Dolores. Our next speaker is Estela Jimenez, and Jose is going to translate for Estela.

MS. JIMENEZ: Good afternoon. As I can see, there are a lot of people who are accepting the METRO project but they ignore the impact that it will have. Let's remember -- let's recall Mayor Bill White's word. He said that nothing will be pushed through the throat of the whole community. And Mr. Frank Wilson said that the utmost attraction for a kid will be the rail tracks of the train. These two people seem to have forgotten very quickly the very same words that they have said, or is it that there is an economic interest into it so that's the reason we're being pushed out of our community. The president, Mr. Benito Juarez, the Mexican president who said respecting everybody's right

is key and we're not being respected anymore. Let's recall that there have been a lot of accidents downtown, and do we want children to die in the hands of train drivers, train operators? Go out on the streets and exercise Democracy. It is very important that everyone goes out and exercises in this month. Or do you just want the Olympic games to take place here and that's the reason why you are really in a rush to get this train project going, and therefore you do not care what happens to our community? Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Muchos gracias, Estela. We appreciate you being here with us and appreciate your comments. Our next speaker is Cristobal Hinojosa.

MR. HINOJOSA: The last time that I was here, Mr. Mike Martinez here mentioned something, it was a meeting for the community and not for the organizers that were outside. Just to remind Mr. Martinez and part of the north side (Inaudible) and also with (Inaudible) like I mentioned to Mr. Wilson, I use the METRO so I know about what I am talking about. We are talking about accidents. You are going to see double the accidents if they put the METRORail on the north side. It doesn't matter. They mentioned several routes to run the METRORail, but never changed the streets. It is the same Fulton Street. From three years ago, we were

(Inaudible) about to put the METRORail on the north side. It is a floating area, but there is an area where more or less about five schools are around the route. So when we are talking about accidents, it is a fact. There are going to be a lot of accidents that we're going to be sorry about. Besides that, they aren't mentioning, but they aren't covering the damages for the businesses or to the properties or to the residents of this neighborhood. Believe me they are not -- they are talking about we're going to do this or that, but they are not mentioning how, and this is the vote that we have to think about it because it doesn't matter how much money they spend on this thing. It is the kind of future that we are going to delegate to our people. Just to mention one thing, taxes are going to increase for businesses and residents and properties. Thank you. (Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Cristobal. Our next three speakers in order will be Frumencio Reyes, Maria Sylvia Olmos and Maria Guadalupe Cruz.

MR. REYES: Okay, my name is Frumencio Reyes. I live in Woodland Heights. I have an office on North Main. So -- and I've been in this area for since 1970. I came here from the city of Chicago back in 1970 where my wife and two daughters lived there for the

better part of 11 years. During that period of time, I never owned a car. I had no need for a car. I lived close to downtown. I worked downtown, and I had public transportation in Chicago to take me anywhere and everywhere that we wanted to go, rail included, subway, L stations, buses and the like. Not until I came to Houston in 1970 did I have to buy a car.

Now, I am presently the chair of the Hispanic Advisory Committee for Mayor White. I'm also the newly elected chair of the Northside Management District. I had conversations with board members of the management district, and there is a unanimous consensus that we need and we're way behind building this corridor.

I can remember back in 1973 when the bill was created -- was passed in the legislature to create the Metropolitan Transit Authority, and how Mayor Hofheinz and Conn thereafter pushed to have this thing done. Much money was spent in doing the research and putting together the plans and all, only to go by the wayside and the city of Dallas picking up what we started here in Houston and Dallas beating us to the punch to where they are at least 20 years ahead of us. It's a shame that we let that slip through our hands. It's a matter of politics. It was a matter of politics then and a matter of politics now. We stand the best opportunity

in the north side to build this corridor.

MR. SEDLAK: If you could just wrap up.

MR. REYES: And to get the funding from the federal government. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to speak.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Frumencio.

Appreciate it.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Next speaker is Maria Sylvia Olmos. Maria? Okay, we'll come back to Maria. Maria Guadalupe Cruz. Our next speaker then would be Victoria Arteaga. Victoria Arteaga. I have a next speaker signed up, Beatrice de la Garza.

MS. GARZA: Hello to everybody. My name is Beatrice de la Garza. I live at 703 Avenue of Oaks.

I want to let you know that I oppose the METRO going down Irvington. I agree on it going down Fulton where there are a bunch of bars there.

(Applause).

MS. GARZA: That is all I have to say. I will not take all the time.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you. Our next speaker is Josephine DeLeon. Josephine...

MS. DELEON: I'm a resident of Lindale,

and I oppose the METRO going down Irvington. We have access to the 610 loop from Irvington. And I'm for it going down Fulton. I'm for the Option H, 5-E, 4-B. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Josephine. I will call several more speakers now if you can join us down front. Erminia Martinez, Mario Umanzor and Moses Villalpando. Erminia Martinez? Mario.

MR. UMANZOR: My name is Mario Umanzor. I manage a business on 1622 North Main, and I'm here to say that I'm against this light rail or BRT for many reasons I already stated on previous speaks that I have done. Reasons why -- so many changes on this project, people who are not going to be directly affected by it support this project. People who are -- as this project approached the neighborhood, they go against and that's not right. We should stick together. We should see what is right for our neighborhood, and I think light rail or BRT is not going to come and solve the problems that we have in our neighborhood. This is just a mass transportation thing which is something that I don't think we need. Like I said, I have this business on North Main. I have noticed about METRO buses being empty most of the time. Why do we need some kind of mass transportation for us? I do not understand. I

would think that this will be kind of like a waste of taxpayer's money. I don't understand either why our representatives like Mr. Congressman Gene Green, he just came and did his speech and took off.

(Applause).

MR. UMANZOR: Jessica Farrar, the same thing, he left. (Inaudible) about this problem. That's all I have to say.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Mario. I appreciate you being here. Appreciate your comments. Moses Villapando.

MR. VILLALPANDO: Good afternoon, Mr. Sedlak. Good afternoon, Mr. Ortega. My name is Moses Villapando, president of North Lindale Civic Association. Mr. Sedlak, it has been two years that our organization has been meeting with METRO to resolve our differences. In 2003, Houston voted for light rail. In that resolution, 77-2003, we voted for light rail on North Hardy. We voted for real trains, not buses. Why did the route change in the north side? And why was it gerrymandered so much that it would go around the homes of the politicians that live in Lindale Park? Why are we more interested in saving trees over the safety of children? Why would METRO run their rail in locations where we did not vote for it, and in places where we're

not seeing the danger of losing the businesses that have stayed in our community? Most important, the safety and the welfare of our children. METRO will have a 25-foot bridge directly in front of Roosevelt Elementary. We did not vote for that, and we do not want that. Who here would want a bridge that's 25 feet high, less than 70 feet in front of their elementary school? Who are our politicians catering to, the special interest groups such as developers that give money to their political slush funds? Hear me out -- stop BRT on the north side now. There is no trust in what you do, so let's bring this back to the voters.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Moses. Next speaker, Hector Hernandez. Michael Valle will follow Hector Hernandez, and then Harold Lomeli. Hector Hernandez, please.

MR. HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon, my name is Hector Hernandez. I'm the director of the North Lindale Civic Organization. I started the civic club 15 years ago, and I know exactly what it takes to bring people together, people like yourselves. You're all in here for a special cause -- most of it is from your heart because you care about doing something for your community. It's about time that we paid a lot more close attention to what's happening to our communities,

our schools. We protect our children. They are the future and going to be making decisions like these people are going to be doing. So we've got to be educating these kids and tell them, hey, we're going to fight for it. We've had enough. Let's don't put this bridge in front of our school, Roosevelt Elementary. Seventy-five years in the making.

We just had a Spark Park dedicated last year and it was nice. We already had our National Night Out, and it was a good gathering of people coming together. But what METRO has done is divided communities against communities. Residents against residents. I think there should be a common goal. I'm for METRO, but not in front of our students, not in front of these kids.

We've already had 140 accidents downtown. Two of them that METRO said themselves -- Frank Wilson, yes, there are two that we have -- that is METRO's fault. How can we tell? They had cameras set on the light rail. Well, that's great. So that tells me that 130 accidents were people of ages 18 and above, motor vehicles, not even on foot. And now you're going to put that same issue with kids under 12 years old crossing the railroad tracks. Think of the future of the kids. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Next speaker, Michael Valle.

MR. VALLE: I've been in this neighborhood about 30 years. I'm going to agree with the gentleman who was just up here.

I used to work downtown at a restaurant called Bossa. I was the chef there. I got to see professional adults working as lawyers, doctors, whatever they did downtown, try to beat the train. This is completely absurd. This is really stupid because you're going to put a light rail, which is a calling card for children dodging them, hit me if you can, and I can guarantee you this right now, you'll be paying a pretty penny to the people you just killed their child over. It's not worth it.

I had a friend who lost her daughter several years ago, and METRO paid her 10 million to say, I'm sorry, we didn't mean to burn your child to death. There is the half mile radius, five schools. Quite honestly, I don't think METRO has actually taken that into consideration, hasn't looked at it. I've gone with my parents and I've traveled the route. You're not thinking.

I guarantee you this right now, the 130 that he just talked about accidents, you're going to have twice as many over here with twice as many deaths of children under the age of 12 because they believe they can beat this train. Grown up adults downtown think they can do

that. And they pay taxes. Here we are putting this light rail train through our neighborhood, and if METRO or everybody else believes like Mr. Green did -- believes it's a great thing to happen, put it in your neighborhood. Because right now what we need -- (Applause).

MR. VALLE: Right now what we need is not a light rail system, not a new bus route. Nobody wants to go to Northline. Let's get real. What's there for us? Nothing. (Applause).

MR. VALLE: Second of all, this is just not in our best interest. If the city wants to help us, repave the street. Let's redo the sewers. Let's do the electricity outside. Let's do the telephones. It is not worth it.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you very much. Thank you, Michael. Next speaker Harold Lomeli.

MR. LOMELI: Good afternoon. My name is Harold Lomeli. I'm just a resident who lives on Reid Street here north of the North Loop. I lived here in this area all my life. Changing transportation is good. Let's reroute the rail system along the freeway on I-45 instead of destroying our neighborhoods. (Applause).

MR. LOMELI: The same impact would happen if you rerouted using the I-45 right of way to Northline without destroying neighborhoods or businesses.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Folks, I'd ask that you not respond to the speakers. It gives them more of an opportunity to speak. Thank you.

MR. LOMELI: Let's protect our children. METRO light rail will pass by four elementary schools, Travis Elementary at Quitman and Main; Martinez Elementary at Fulton and Hayes; Thomas Jefferson near Cavalcade and Fulton; and Roosevelt Elementary School on Fulton north of the 610 loop. Many students will walk to and from schools or have their parents drive them to and from schools. Some of these parents don't drive very much. They are housewives and they just drive a little bit to carry their children to school. That's not a whole lot of experience for some people, but that's what they do.

METRO says that kids will be educated in light rail safety in the near future and will continue to do so on safety; but these are still K-I-D-S, kids. They are not mature enough with abilities to think like grown adults. Let's look at what happened to the adults that had accidents on the south end of town with METRO. These

are adults. People will still try to beat the train across the tracks. Let's not destroy our neighborhoods, businesses and most of all our boulevards. Find a different alternative for METRO to go through with light rail. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you very much. Our next speaker is -- let me call three in order, Ken Lindow, Mary Almendarez, and Armando Bermudez in that order. Ken Lindow, please.

MR. LINDOW: Hi, Ken Lindow, Woodland Heights. There are some issues that happened since the 2003 vote. One of them is the technology is changed from light rail to bus rapid transit. We didn't vote for that. Once again, METRO lied. Some of the routes have changed -- North Corridor, Irvington, trees, come on, now. Transit hub never mentioned. Bus service reduced instead of expanded -- they told us it wouldn't be reduced. They lied again.

METRO is doing commercial real estate investments and intend to use eminent domain for the purpose that was not stated in the 2003 plan. Frank didn't get a big enough raise? University Corridor rail line -- that's a travesty. They're going to do the same thing on Richmond and get away with it that they did in downtown. They're going to ruin lots of businesses for no purpose.

The only way that METRO light rail is succeeding now is by rerouting bus routes so people that had one bus from one stop to another now take the bus to light rail to another bus. It makes no sense. As for Culberson, good guy, wish we had him instead of Gene Green.

Okay, Gene, Frank, y'all want part of Northline?

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Ken.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Next speaker is Mary Almendarez. Mary...

MS. ALMENDAREZ: Thank you for letting me speak. My name is Mary Almendarez. I live at 608 Joyce. I am a community volunteer for over 30 years. I'm a graduate of Jeff Davis. I live in Lindale. I was born in Kress, Texas; however, I've been here all my life except for ten years when I lived in Spring, Texas, which I don't want to do that again. I don't like the travel, the gas, the frustration. I've also had the privilege to -- by the way, I'm a 24/7 volunteer in our community serving on numerous boards for the mayor, the Houston Foundation and LULAC, but I'm not representing any of them. I am representing myself as a very concerned citizen.

I've had the privilege to travel as well. I traveled to places like Chicago, New York, Washington D.

C., Paris where that massive transportation works. You know, we all know the economy as far as fuel. We're suffering about that issue. Rail works. It's a blessing, and we could have it and have it where people are going to all not be affected negatively, but unfortunately what I've learned in my experience is that folks resist change, in particular, if it affects them individually. I would hope our community would think out of the box and really look at the positive things it will have, that really a positive for our near north side that I don't think we've thought about is the fact that those folks that live in suburbia, they can stay there and travel the lines and leave us in our homes here. So that we can stay in the near north side.

As far as the community -- nothing at Northline? Well, my understanding -- and I hope it's not a rumor -- that they're going to bring a campus like the one they have at southeast so we will have that. Another thing we need is our chambers to work on redeveloping the Northline so that we can have what they have going in Gulfgate. That is something that we need, and I apologize for extending my time, but I think we need to work together -- and by the way, Congressman Gene Green works so hard. It's not fair for him -- he has other issues that he works on for us. So I thank the

congressman for at least coming by and letting us know where he's at. Thank you. And by the way, I worked to get the vote to get rail, and when they were talking about taking it off, I was not happy with that, and we voted for it and we need it and we want it. Find a way to help everybody be happy here, but let's just get it going.

MR. SEDLAK: Mary, thank you. Thank you for being here as all of you. We thank you for all being here. Next speaker Armando Bermudez.

MR. BERMUDEZ: Good evening. My name is Armando Bermudez. Born and raised here in Houston. Most of my life has been the north side. Right now I'm a precinct judge here in this area. In fact, we have an election right here. I'm also vice-president of Near Northside Bond, one organization here in Northside.

When we got the news about light rail coming to Houston, I mean, this area here, everybody was excited. But then things changed up and down, which light rail or BRT or whatever it was going to be. Well, still it's something we ain't had. The near north side hasn't had no revitalization in years, over 40 years. The same thing over and over again. You drive other neighborhoods, and you see real nice streets, stores, people walking down sidewalks. We don't have that here.

I fight for closing cantinas down. Why? Because we can't walk down these streets.

Now, right here today I'm here representing Harris County Hospital District because I'm a council member also for Casa Amigos, and my concern right now is the clinics on North Main. And what I'd like to see that we get some kind of -- if the rail is going to go through, I'd like to make sure that everything is taken care of and make sure our patrons are able to get in and get out. Sometimes we have emergencies there with ambulances or whatever. Anyway, let's see what happens.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Armando. Appreciate it. Our next speaker, I'd like to introduce Council Member Peter Brown, an at large council member for the Houston City Council. Peter.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN: Thank you. As many of you know, I'm a native Houstonian. I'm an architect, an urban planner. I've worked in a lot of cities on urban rail systems, and I'm very supportive of the expansion of our METRORail here in Houston. But we have to be sensitive to neighborhood concerns, and I think METRO is doing a pretty good job of listening to the neighborhoods and is going to spend extra money to make sure that there are no real negative impacts on neighborhoods.

But what we've got here -- and I remember my mother used to tell me about it -- we've got a modern street car system. Look at the old pictures of Houston. We had a great rail system, street car system. Everybody loved it. My mother couldn't quit talking about it. Everybody was sad when they took it away. Now we're bringing it back.

This is a modern street car system. It's designed to work at grade with cars and pedestrians. It's safe. It's quiet. It's fuel efficient. It's nonpolluting. And it's designed specifically to work in urban neighborhoods. That's different than heavy rail like you see in the New York subway and stuff like that. This is good for neighborhoods. It helps property values. It creates jobs, and we just don't have enough experience here in Houston -- maybe there are some folks here who are old enough -- I'm not quite that old -- to remember the old street car system, but if you did, boy, you would be in favor of this rail system I can tell you. You wouldn't worry about it in your neighborhood.

I'll say this, there are 36 American cities that are getting massive federal dollars to expand their rail systems. They couldn't be wrong. And in Denver, for example, where I have spent a lot of time, they have a master plan for rail. They are spending \$7 billion on

rail, supported by the state as well. And every neighborhood in Denver wants a light rail system coming to their neighborhood. The guy who runs the transit agency there, he says, "My problem is I can't give everybody rail," but you see Denver has seen it work in their city.

We're starting to see it work in our city on Main Street. And we've got the highest ridership of any short segment of rail in the country. So I would ask you all to open your eyes, open your minds, and work with METRO and we can make this a really great rail system. If Houston does not expand its rail system, we're not going to be able to compete in the 21st century economy. There will be loss of jobs, loss of economic development. We've got to compete. We've got to have a great rail system. So I urge you to take -- if you are a doubter, take a second look and we'll make this the best rail system in America. Thank you very much.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Council Member, thank you very much. Thank you for being here. Thanks for all your hard work at city council.

Next three speakers I'd like to introduce and join us down front -- Virginia Duke, Juanita Rodriguez and

Anita Bernal. Virginia Duke...

MS. DUKE: I'm Virginia Duke, and I'm a resident of Lindale Park since 1978. I am here to support light rail. I have been going to every meeting with this idea of light rail since the inception, including going before the METRO board when the board wanted to do away with light rail completely. I will leave the Option A/B and C/D to the residents of their area. We would like Option F. Take it all the way down Fulton Street. We do not need Irvington Boulevard destroyed. The Lindale Park Civic Club has spent many an hour and a lot of dollars putting in the beautification on the project. When our trees were destroyed by the Hurricane Alicia, the Moody Foundation gave us our trees for the boulevard.

We do not need to divide the residents of Lindale Park by bringing the street down Irvington Boulevard. We also need to keep the Graceland station for the Lindale Park residents.

We need light rail as a quick way to get to downtown. Currently it takes us 45 minutes to get to downtown. I would like light rail, but if we cannot get the rail immediately, we will accept Congressman Green's infrastructure of building the rail and the station and using the buses. We do need to keep our buses to run

from station to station.

I believe the residents of Northside Village can be good parents and protect their children from the rail as they have done from the cars and buses. I don't remember any kids being hit by cars and buses on the Fulton Street. The people of Roosevelt know how to do parent management. Northline is getting rebuilt. Let's give good transportation to Northline. If we have the good businesses, we'll support it. Let's get going.

I asked to be on the first railcar out in 2008. Now it's already a deadline of 2010. At the rate we're going, METROLift will have to pick us up from our retirement homes before the line is finished. Let's get going and let's build the rail. Thank you.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Virginia. Appreciate you being here. Next speaker, Juanita Rodriguez, please. Juanita...

MS. RODRIGUEZ: My name is Juanita Rodriguez. I live at 4713 Edison, across the street from the YMCA. I know there is a lot of people here that are concerned about the schools. I'm concerned about the schools as well, but I'm also concerned about the YMCA. A lot of our kids in our neighborhoods, that's where they go after school. That's the after

school program. That's why a lot of kids are there right now during the summer. There is a lot of kids that go, that walk there with and without their families, crossing the streets.

My concern is -- my request is for METRO to please, please listen to the community. Me, I'm a resident. I live there. That's where my family is living now. If you choose to go for Option E, which is Irvington/Cavalcade, it's going to be more of a negative impact than a pro. There is more cons than pros with Option E. Option F -- I understand that there is more properties for you to purchase. However, the properties -- I'm sure everybody is well aware of -- are probably not as -- they're not the same caliber as the properties on Irvington Boulevard. I believe if anybody is going to be losing out, it would be the residents of the area that are closer to Irvington/Cavalcade because the properties on Fulton that you'll be purchasing are more run down homes. Somebody said earlier a lot of cantinas, a lot of bars. That is more of a negative impact to our community.

People that aren't familiar with our area, if they go down Fulton, what do they see? They just see something negative, like an old, run down neighborhood as opposed to going down Irvington. Don't mess up as

nice a street as Irvington. Please go for Option F or
Fulton. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Juanita, for
being here. Next speaker, Anita Bernal.

MS. BERNAL: Hi, my name is Anita Bernal.
I live at 1507 Freeman, right after the Hernandez
bridge. I'm not here to say go down Irvington, go down
Fulton. My worries are the children. That's it. I
have grandchildren. I have 18 grandchildren, okay? And
I worry about them. Parents can teach them. METRORail
can teach them. HISD -- why aren't they at these
meetings? They're going to be involved and teach. All
I'm hearing is I don't want you to go down Irvington.
You're going to mess up the trees. Trees can be
replanted. Homes can be replaced, children cannot.
That's my main concern are the children. That's all I
have to say.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you very much, Anita.
Our next speaker I'd like to bring to the microphone,
U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee.

CONGRESSWOMAN LEE: Thank you. Thank you
very much. Good afternoon, everyone. I've been -- good
afternoon, everyone. Got to be some life in this room.
We can't be all mad, are we? I hope not. It's a

pleasure to listen a little bit in the back of the room, and I will continue to listen for a moment.

Let me just say that I applaud the process that is taking place now. There may be rail proponents in this room. There may be those who are questioning, and there may be died in the wool opponents, but what I do want to say is that METRO is engaging in a process that at least we can applaud. We are listening to you.

The issue as to the route is one that they have to take several things into account -- the cost, one, but your input and your desires. That's what these meetings are all about. And I have confidence that METRO has enough good public relations sense, common sense, that they will not do what the majority of you desire them not to do.

To those who are concerned about the children, I will not give that disrespect. It is going through neighborhoods. Other cities go through neighborhoods in terms of their rail system. We should be concerned about the safest measures for our children. And during the process for those of us who deal with the federal funding, we will ask the hard questions.

There is some other step that METRO has to go through. It's called a federal funding -- what's the terminology -- the full funding grant agreement, and

that has to be vetted by the federal government. They will look for all of the nuances and all of the questions that you have raised to be answered.

Now, safety is not a perfect concept because all of your best efforts doesn't prevent some occurrence; but the federal government will have to oversee that they've answered everything that you've raised and particularly the routing. So as you are presenting your case, my bottom line is don't let us come this far and give up now. A transit system that is integrated throughout the city, including a potential commuter rail that goes to the airport, gives great comfort to all of you in terms of the economic stability, the growth, and the class -- world class nature of this city.

So I'm just asking, just don't go back now. Let's answer the questions. Let's get you comfortable. Let's make sure the federal government provides greater oversight, and let METRO answer to you, but do its job and provide this city with a world class system that all of you -- I see a dog sitting there on the front -- and the METRO system takes everybody.

Get on with your pup. You can get on if you are disabled. You can get on with your children. You can get on it if you're a tourist. You can get on if you're a senior citizen. It can be safe. You know what, you

hold them to a safety record. I'm not shying away from being safe. You hold them to protecting your children, but let us not go back now. Let's get our rail system. Can we do that?

(Applause).

CONGRESSWOMAN LEE: Some of us in this room, can we work together to reconcile our differences and have a system that we can benefit from? For those of you who are not applauding, I know you're the wait and see crowd, but wait and see and get on board when the train starts running because it's going to start running. Thank you very much.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Congresswoman Lee. We really appreciate you joining us and your comments here this afternoon.

Next speakers that we have in order, I'd like to call down to the microphone Gerald Brady, Lucy Garcia, followed by Frank Morales.

MR. BRADY: Good afternoon. My name is Gerald Brady. I'm a director of the Greater Northside Management District, and I have 35 years of transportation experience in Houston, Texas. I support the BRT proposal to provide faster, more efficient transportation service to the residents of the north

side. Service from the north side both to downtown and the Medical Center will open the door to job opportunities for young people and other north side residents. The BRT proposal will also encourage downtown brokers and residents to come up to the north side and do business which will help our businesses and restaurants in this area.

I strongly recommend that y'all support this BRT proposal so that we can make the greater north side just a little bit more a part of the City of Houston. This proposal is good for the north side. It is good for the City of Houston. It's time for us to get going and get this transportation thing happening. Thank you.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Gerald. Next speaker, Lucy Garcia. Lucy...

MS. GARCIA: I am a native Houstonian from Houston. And I've been living in the north side for over 50 something years, and I like to live in north side. We have everything that we need here around us, and we have restaurants. We have drug stores, and I'm always -- oh, well, turning to the rail, I would like to have the rail come through. I've been looking forward for Houston to be connected to the north side. We're five minutes or six minutes from downtown, and I have

been for the rail. I've been for it for the longest with the other councilman and now with this one, and I'm also with the civic -- North Central Civic Club, and I'm for it.

I'm for rail regardless. I'm saying if it goes through whichever -- the people that are going to put up the rail, the METRORail, that's a good decision. Whatever they make is okay for me because if it's for anything else, we need the rail.

Sometimes I don't feel like driving. I like to get the rail, and there is some in Washington. I've been to Washington, and I see the way children are with their parents and they are shopping. They stand there and don't get in front. They stand and go on to the rail -- the train, and it's no problem. So I think we need it approved, and I've been waiting for the north side to be approved for a long time. It's been too long.

I've been at the north side over 50 years, but I'm a native Houstonian. So I really am for that. So I'm with the central -- North Central Civic Club. I've been going, and I see what's happening, and I know that it's coming. So I'm for the rail. So hopefully all of you think about this because we can -- it can be a very, very good experience of the rail in this community and north side, and it's going to go to a lot of places

farther down. And then we have a lot of businesses around here that people from downtown would want to come. They come for the restaurants.

MR. SEDLAK: Could you bring your comments to a close, please.

MS. GARCIA: Okay.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Ms. Garcia. Thank you very much. Frank Morales.

MR. MORALES: Yes, sir, I'm Frank Morales. I don't know whether I'm for or against rail. I have a couple of questions. Bus 15 going to Northline, if there are three passengers in there, the thing is crowded. Most of the time it's empty. I don't know whether you people have been by lately, there is nothing there except the show.

I think tearing up the trees on Irvington is one of the most stupid ideas I've heard in 87 years of living in this world. The public address system here is lousy. I wish METRO would build some shelters that people that go to the Farmer's Market and sit there in the dust and dirt -- nothing there. And you ask METRO for a shelter, and they have the longest, most bureaucratic process you ever saw. (Inaudible) and then we may build a shelter. Okay, well, whatever you do, I won't be around to see it.

MR. SEDLAK: Mr. Morales, we have a few staff members out back there that could help you out with some of those questions out in the back there. I'd like to see if we could have a few staff members meet with you in the back there.

MR. MORALES: Are you talking to me?

MR. SEDLAK: Yes, sir.

CONGRESSWOMAN LEE: John, I want to help him, too. He's talking about shelters where people can sit while they're waiting on the bus. So I want to work on that with him on that. And I just wanted to make sure that my staff was introduced, Marnene Thomas. Can you stand up again so that people can get to you their numbers or anything like that. Thank you very much.

MR. MORALES: Can I make one more comment? If the federal government is going to get involved in this, we're sunk.

MR. SEDLAK: Next three speakers are Otto Glaser, Ira Silvers, followed by Barry Klein.

MR. GLASER: Hi, I've been following METRO or rail a long time, and I suggest we test drive the system. Since the rail is going to be in the streets, we can duplicate what they are proposing with buses. You wouldn't buy a car without a test drive. You wouldn't buy a new house without seeing the plans.

METRO has numerous changes that they keep coming up with all the time in regard to changing the plans.

What I propose is to -- first is to install the proposed boundaries of all the proposed rail routes so we can see where they are going to take the land away and see where the rail will go. It's very difficult to understand where it is going to be placed.

Then I propose that they duplicate the present system -- the proposed system using buses. They can have temporary stations. They can block the streets. They can dedicate bus only lanes with traffic cones. This would give everybody an experience of what the rail will do before we spend all the money on trying it out. We could have a trial first. The trial could last a year or two so we get used to what you are doing and understand whether it's valuable or not.

They could check the ridership at that time also. They could use the big articulated buses and take out 55 percent of the seats in the buses because the railcars are configured that way, and if you carry a full load of passengers, 55 percent of them will be standing. So if you took out the seats on the buses, then you can experience the standing ride that you're going to get with the rail.

The bus system could be a little bit slower than

the rail, and the ride would also not be as smooth and you can tell that to the riders.

Another question is what effect will the proposed redevelopment along the rail tracks do to property values? And will this cause present homeowners to be forced to move because of the higher taxes?

And lastly, what are the costs per passenger on operating the new system? It's very difficult to get a number in terms of what it's really going to cost and a number that you can understand. When they talk millions of dollars, it's hard to understand. When they talk it down to how much it's going to cost for you to ride it, then you need to know that. Thank you.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you. Next speaker is Ira -- Iris Silvers.

MS. SILVERS: I'm here today as a concerned citizen. I've supported mass transit -- mass rail transit from its inception. I think we've had some people say way back in the early '70's, MTA was formed then to provide mass rail transit. Some of you that have been around awhile may remember the monorail that was out at Hobby Airport. We were supposed to get and voted for mass transit. Because at that time, as now, it was a more ecological, environmental and economical

way to transport people. Its goal got sidetracked along the way, possibly parallel to the present situation is the documentary film Who Killed the Electric Car? The automobile and highway construction industry lobbies work together and are a powerful manifest.

When interstate highways were expanded, we've got what -- 22 lanes on one of our new ones. Rapid transit lines should have been included. I'm talking about rail should have been included, but they haven't been.

It appears that the proposed current mass transit rail corridors, the Southwest and the North, are going to do damage to neighborhoods, school children, safety and trees, social and environmental damage. We need mass transit rails that get us -- get rid of some of these gas guzzling, global warming vehicles and get them off the congested streets and highways while not destroying established neighborhoods, compromising safety of school children and destroying big old trees that help solve some of the global warming problem. So at the time I am definitely for mass transit, rail I'm talking about, for ecological and environmental reasons where it seems that it's almost counterproductive, and that happens a lot in our government. I'm in the health care industry.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Ms. Silvers.

Thank you for your comments. Next speaker is Barry Klein. Barry...

MR. KLEIN: How do you do? I'm Barry Klein. I've been active on the transit issue since 1982 when I became concerned about METRO's plan to build a heavy rail system at that point. Fortunately we defeated it.

Let me tell you why I'm opposed to rail transit today and that's because to look at the big picture, we have a 15,000-mile road system in Harris County and METRO runs a 3,000-mile bus system. METRO wants to spend about \$5 billion replacing about 100 miles of bus service with 100 miles of rail service. The result will be a system which is less convenient than it is now because they get their riders by rerouting bus passengers to the train stations and making them transfer. That's very irritating and upsetting to the riders. METRO is already causing that inconvenience to the current ridership. A lot of the bus riders have complained. If anybody here has friends or relatives who use the bus service, I'm sure they'll report to you that they are taking longer trips and doing more transfers.

If METRO proceeds with its plan to build more guided transit, whether it be light rail or bus rapid

transit, those problems will become more extensive and the service will decline.

In other cities, ridership does decline when you cause the riders to go through more transfers. METRO is going through that now with lost riders. Even though they double count the riders when they get on the train, that makes them look like they've got a successful system. In fact, they were losing riders until the Katrina refugees arrived and then those people in many cases are transit dependent and METRO's numbers began to rise again.

So that's the big picture of why I'm opposing METRO's plan to put in rail and BRT. I want to talk about METRO's plan to use their powers --

MR. MARTINEZ: Time.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Mr. Klein.

Appreciate you coming.

Our next speakers are Ms. Angela Saenz, Mr. Ron Robles and followed by Kevin Hoffman. Ms. Saenz.

MS. SAENZ: My name is Angela Saenz, and I live on Boundary, 719. I've been living there for the last 25 years. I raised my children there, sent them to school -- as a matter of fact, two of them graduated from this school and two of -- the other two, they graduated from another school. And I'm against this

rail system to go through, especially if they choose my street on Boundary, for three reasons only. One of them is that if anybody has ever gone to San Francisco, California and ride the BART, you will see that crime really increased definitely. Because I've been over there to visit, and they had to warn me not to take the BART because especially where you buy the tickets, there is a lot of crime there. A lot of rape on young women. Now, this is going to happen if this rail system passes through the streets already mentioned.

Now, how about New York? They have the system and there is a lot of crime. This is the first concern I have. Now, what about the children that stays here in the neighborhoods trying to go to school? They will be runned over by this train. Definitely they will be runned over. Is it your grandchildren or is it your children?

Now, another concern -- that's the second concern that I have. The third concern is how much money are they going to give me for my house? Are they going to give me enough money to buy me another one? Will I have to get a mortgage? How long do I have to live? How much more longer? I don't have enough money to buy another house. Thank you.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Ron Robles.

MR. ROBLES: My name is Ron Robles, and I live at 2324 North Main. I've been a Houstonian all my life and I'm against light rail or BRT because it will put a lot of businesses out of work on North Main Street. I have suggested putting BRT along the bayou on I-45 going to Northline Mall or METRO should reconsider putting light rail or BRT on Hardy Street to Crosstimbers.

My property is in danger of being taken away if it comes down North Main Street at Morris. This project will affect too many people's livelihood and destroy what the people have worked for all their lives. No BRT on North Main Street. I have 3,800 signatures to support no rail on Richmond. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Ron. Mr. Kevin Hoffman, please.

MR. HOFFMAN: Good afternoon. My name is Kevin Hoffman, and I am former president of Lindale Park Civic Club and I have worked very diligently by attending all of the meetings that METRO has had over the many years that this discussion has been going on. I support the light rail. I think it's good for the north side. I have gone to New York, San Francisco, lived in those communities and saw what mass transit --

the effectiveness of being able to get around in your community, bringing people in without having to have cars. It's a wonderful thing.

When I lived in New York, it was great. I could just jump on the train and go back into the city because I was in Brooklyn at the time. All in all, it's just a great thing.

As far as the concerns that people have for their children -- I, too, am concerned about their children and I have led several protests against beer and wine establishments in our community, and where were you then? Where were you when we had to raise other concerns just for the safety of your children? So I think you're a little disingenuous when you come down and say that the trains are going to run over your children when you didn't care if the drunk driver is going to run over your child when leaving the bars that are right by the same elementary schools that you named off today. So I challenge you to come to those events as well. So if you really want to protect your children, you do that as well. It's not just limited to one thing, but METRO has taken every precaution that they can find to make this a very safe transit system in and around the schools. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Our next three speakers in

order will be Theresa Gaas, Moustapha El-Hakam and Paula Parshall. Theresa, please.

MS. GAAS: Hi, I'm Theresa Gaas. I live on Egypt. I'm a member of the North Central Civic Association, but today I'm here as an individual. I voted for light rail. I prefer light rail over BRT, but I will take the BRT because we need to improve this side of town. I've lived on the north side all my life. Several years ago I joined the North Central Civic Association to try to bring down the crime rate here in Houston and this side of town. We've been working closely with the police department. So in order for us to improve this side of town, we need to have the BRT.

As far as where the route goes -- I prefer going down Irvington because the infrastructure is already in there. A lot of people prefer it down Fulton, but I'd like to see an impact statement. I talked to several METRO people today. They can't tell me the cost of going down Fulton or Irvington at this time. So I'm waiting to see what they say about that. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Theresa. Next speaker Moustapha El-Hakam? Moustapha here? Paula.

MS. PARSHALL: My name is Paula Parshall, and I think the key thing I want to talk about today is when we went and we voted -- when you vote for

candidates, you either vote for Candidate A or B and either Candidate A or Candidate B is the winner in the end. When we went to vote for the light rail, we voted for North Hardy. We didn't vote for Irvington. We didn't vote for Fulton. Those weren't options. And today what it's done is it's totally divided communities.

As you know, Mr. Sedlak, our area which is south of -- or north of 610 have met continuously with the METRO board, with you and others, and you talk about the fact that -- Sheila Jackson Lee talked about the fact that work with us. We'll work with communities and so forth. For two years we tried to work with METRO and your maps have not changed. We've issued our concerns as far as the bridge. It's easy to talk about a bridge and the children and so forth, but if that bridge isn't going to be in your community, what's the fastest thing that can divide a community? A bridge, and especially when you have a school on the other end. That's a concern that I have.

My concern is that we've tried to work with METRO. The maps haven't changed, folks. Not at all. I guess in some ways -- and I do sympathize with the people that are on this side who are going to lose their businesses and houses, and I realize there are a large majority of

people that are for it, but bottom line is considering the rail itself will go five miles on our end of it, a mile and a half, we get no stop, a bridge -- it doesn't go to move our people on the other side as far as getting them on there. So what benefit have you given us, METRO, on our side of it? You haven't changed the situation. Bottom line is we voted for North Hardy. We're not even getting North Hardy. Thank you.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you. Our next three speakers, I'd like to call Don Quintero, Joe Webb followed by Neal Myer.

MR. QUINTERO: Hello, good afternoon. My name is Don Quintero and I've got two stories: One, I'm an avid customer of METRO services. Beginning of January this year, I work downtown and I decided to stop driving my car and take a bus down to work every day.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you.

MR. QUINTERO: It's a new experience. I take the 78. I take it downtown every day. Every day I take it and it's really educated me. I have a greater appreciation of the bus system and mass transit. I went from paying \$120 a month in parking, plus my company, El Paso Corporation, pays for my bus fare. So it's a win-win for me.

I think the -- I'm for rail. I think it's a plus for the community. The option that I like is going down Fulton. I know that 15 is well traveled. Well -- it's one of the higher population bus routes, and I think that those passengers will get great use of using that instead of taking that bus. And believe me, I've ridden 15, and those bus drivers go pretty fast, too.

And that brings another option. A lot of people are talking about safety of schools. I'm the Roosevelt PTO president, and I'll be happy to report to the principal that there will be an elevated area in front of the school. My wife is a teacher there. And talking about education, she went through three field excursions with her kids. She took the bus because every time she takes an HISD sponsored bus, they have to pay \$1,300 in transportation. She took 75 kids on the 15 and took transfers. That's how you educate kids. That's how you make them safe by getting them on the transportation and learning how to use it and not abuse it.

So I welcome those parents who are concerned. Please come to our school. You can talk to me if you want to address something specifically about the school. I'll be able to get that back to the principal.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you for your comments.
Thank you for riding. Joe Webb.

MR. WEBB: I'm Joe Webb. I'm an architect. I'm a planner. I worked with this community in 2001 because the then council member and you and the community heard that METRO was thinking about putting a line to this part of the city. Well, in that process, a group of about 20 to 30 community leaders met for a solid year in an open, public process. They convinced the council member at that point and METRO at that point there were a couple of versions or a couple of routes that should go through the neighborhood. One of those was Irvington and one was Fulton.

And if you don't think METRO is listening, they listened. They haven't changed since that day. They understood the value of what the community said. They listened and they've come back to you with those options. You guys -- they are going to listen to you now.

To give you an idea of some of the things we learned about the near north side back in 2001, there were 30,000 of you at that point in time. The two bus lines on Irvington and Fulton at that point had 5500 boardings a day. One-sixth of your population rode the bus every day. Those are phenomenal numbers when you think about it. Now they can have access to the rest of the system.

What we heard from the community at that point in time, like I said, was the Irvington -- in fact, there were a couple of three routes, slow, but mainly up North Main to about either Boundary or Quitman, Irvington, then either maybe Fulton, but primarily Irvington up to Cavalcade over to Fulton and on out. Don't forget this does not stop ultimately at Northline. It goes to Greenspoint. It goes to the airport, and in the opposite direction it takes you downtown and to the Med Center. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Joe.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Neal Myer here?

MR. MYER: Hi, my name is Neal Myer. I'm working with other business people up here. I'm a near native Houstonian. Earlier it was -- it's been mentioned that the community has been divided over this proposal. Earlier Council Member Brown said that there used to be street cars in the city. What he failed to say was once upon a time rail and bus service were provided to urban areas by private operators. This all faded away. People basically started buying cars because of the greater mobility and greater speed to carry hundreds of pounds of equipment, and they basically -- most of the private operation went under.

And the reason why you're divided now is because your transportation decisions are being politicized. And in politics, people get divided.

Having said that, the other thing is that the current light rail line has cost hundreds of millions of dollars. There were plenty of bus routes in that area. We don't know how many people were riding those buses, and so the reason why I've come out against light rail is I've come to the very strong conclusion that it's not going to make a difference. So that's all I have to say.

(Applause).

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you. Next speaker James Schriver.

MR. SCHRIVER: Good afternoon. My name is James Shriver. I represent the Old Sixth Ward Historic District. My home is four blocks from Interstate 45 near downtown. Two blocks further is downtown Houston. I've been following the process of the North Corridor Coalition for two years, and I've been to numerous meetings at which Carter Burgess, represented by Janet Kennison, and other elected and appointed officials have attended.

It amazes me that transportation planners do not consider using the Interstate 45 corridor for the

METRORail system. It's an oversight of gigantic proportions, and one of the comments by Frank Wilson, the CEO of METRO, that comes to mind is that METRO will not build a link to Intercontinental Airport in our lifetime. And that's because they are cutting through neighborhoods where there is enormous opposition to their rail plan when they could be using the HOV lanes in the center of I-45 where it's a natural for rail to exist.

A similar plan exists in Dallas. It's enormously successful, the North Corridor rail, and it just amazes me that METRO doesn't consider this. Carter Burgess is planning a company that works with METRO. TxDOT, HGAC should be well aware that this corridor exists for a METRO light rail system. Thank you for your time.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Mr. Schriver.

Next three speakers, Richard Galindo, Heron Moreno followed by Giovanni Garibay.

MR. GALINDO: Thank you very much. Thank you very much. First of all, I want to say this, that METRO to me has never gotten there and told me how many people ride this bus that it's going to help. I live on Fulton and I see how many people it's going to help. It's not going to help that many.

Secondly, they want to end at Northline. We are

north siders, unless you want to go to Magic Johnson or Pappas BBQ, let's go (Inaudible).

Everyone is worried about Fulton and Irvington. Let's take downtown. Downtown had three lanes coming and going. METRO took four lanes. You've got one lane coming and going. If I was going to put this down Fulton, Irvington, where would I go? Lindale you've got a surprise coming.

A solution -- the only solution he mentioned earlier, counterflow, put your rails on counterflow. Have a hub at Little York. Have a hub at Crosstimbers. Have a hub at West Road and it will move traffic. This way it's not going to move. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thanks, Richard. Heron Moreno.

MR. MORENO: Hello, my name is Heron Moreno, and I've been a customer of METRO for many years now. I lived in Kingwood, but I worked downtown until I moved to the north side over here. I have a family owned business for 31 years, and it started going under because of this project that you're doing. It would take away our parking, and we depend on parking for our customers. It also occurred to me when you finished putting the light rail in, my transit time to where I work increased by 30 minutes. I have to get off my bus,

wait for the light rail, get on the light rail, get off the light rail, wait for another bus, get on that bus and get off my bus and get back to work. Before I'd just get off my bus, transfer to another bus, and that was it. It was nice, easy and efficient. I don't like the light rail, but I ride it every day because I'm forced to. I am a rider, but I'm not a satisfied rider.

I see the system isn't in my favor. No one ever asked me for my ticket. In the whole time I've ridden it, not a single time. How do you count the numbers? I don't understand that. Your numbers are bogus because I've never been called on or asked for my ticket. I have no idea how you do it because no one ever asked for my ticket. I don't buy my ticket at the terminal. I buy it on the bus. I just believe that there needs to be an oversight community to check the numbers. You don't have to convince me, but until you convince me I'm going to be against you every step of the way.

MR. SEDLAK: Appreciate you being here. I will tell you every time you get on that train, above the doors, there is two little holes and two lights up there. That's what counts the people every time you get on it. Take a look at that.

MR. MORENO: I stand by those holes because it's crowded. How can it count me?

MR. SEDLAK: It doesn't count you when you stand there, only when you pass underneath it. The last speaker that I have signed up here is Giovanni Garibay.

MR. GARIBAY: Thank you, John. I'm Council Member Adrian Garcia's chief of staff, and I have been here the entire two hours as you have been, and I really want to thank the METRO board members, the staff, the translators for doing last minute open house. And we look forward to what METRO takes in today and processes as the next step. Thank you very much.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you, Giovanni. I would like to at this time -- anybody that hasn't signed up, and if you would like to come and provide comments to us, you are welcome to do so. Again, our two minute time limit does apply if you would like to come and speak before the microphone here and have it recorded into the record, please do. Yes, ma'am, could you please state your name for the record.

MS. LEWIS: Yolanda Lewis, 2526 North Main. You have a big gun in your arsenal which is called eminent domain, and our property will be impacted definitely by this. My concern is that certain things may not be factored in when you are -- when we're talking about monetary compensation for the loss of our

place or -- well, the loss of your right of way I believe is the term that you used. There are two things that come to mind -- actually three -- one, the Hardy yard. Southern Pacific -- I understand a developer from Austin has bought that property after the previous owner flipped it because they were concerned about affordable housing. So that TIRZ is being resurrected. I was a member of that board, but at that time it was dormant and now they are planning to resurrect that again. I declined to serve on it for this term because I will need to focus my attention on what's going on here with this rail system.

There is something else that's coming up -- the intermodal. From what I understand, the conversion of all the different modes of transportation right here just right on Main right outside the downtown area. I would like to know if -- when you get an independent appraiser, if some of these issues -- and the third one -- let me backtrack -- is we're having some new structures, some very nice townhomes, homes being remodeled and things are happening. We've been here -- my husband has been in business for 41 years. We are near north siders. We live in Woodland Heights, but we are definitely north siders.

I concur with Virginia Duke because I have worked

with her with the civic organization. There has been a lot of ditches that we've cleaned out in this area. There has been a lot of lots that we have cleaned out in this area. So my concern is the fairness when you're having to consider the compensation to these land owners. What is it that your independent appraiser is going to factor into it? Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Thank you for your comment. Do I have anyone else that would like to make a comment? Yes, sir, approach the microphone and please state your name for the record.

MR. LOMELI: Harold Lomeli. I've already spoken one time. I would like to say something. If we're going to be fair and have a hearing here, just like the man is timing everyone here, the ones that are pro, for the light rail, he lets them speak a little bit louder and a little bit longer, excuse me, and the ones that have questions or raising good issues were cut off. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Would anybody else like to make comments here today? We've done everything to conduct this hearing following the federal regulations. We really do appreciate your attendance here. We thank all of the staff for all of their hard work. Sincerely thank board member Rafael Ortega for his attendance.

Rafael, would you like to mention anything to the crowd here?

MR. ORTEGA: I'd like to thank those who have remained throughout the entire public hearing, and we're going to look at very carefully the questions and issues that have been brought up and try to make a fair and right decision. Thank you.

MR. SEDLAK: Once again, I thank all of you for attending. Thank you all sincerely for your comments. As the board member has -- Mr. Ortega has stated, everything will be taken into serious consideration before our final decisions are made on the North Corridor for the METRO Solutions program. Thank you for being here with us this afternoon. Michael, thank you for moderating our session. Thank you. We are officially ending this meeting at 3:58 p.m. on August 5, 2006.

(Hearing adjourned).

THE STATE OF TEXAS:

COUNTY OF HARRIS:

I, Lynda Marie Bryant, Certified Shorthand Reporter, in and for the State of Texas, do hereby certify that these proceedings were taken by me in machine shorthand and later transcribed from machine shorthand to typewritten form by me.

I further certify that the above and foregoing transcription, as set forth in typewriting, is a full, true and correct transcript of the proceedings.

Given under my hand and seal of office on this, the 10th day of August 2006.

Lynda Marie Bryant
CSR, RPR, RMR, CRR, CCP
CSR No. 2756
State of Texas
Expiration 12/31/07

