



Minutes of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board Meeting – June 11, 2024

A meeting of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board of Directors was held on Tuesday, June 11, 2024 at Houston TranStar and-via video conference. In attendance at the meeting were Directors Angelique Bartholomew, Ronald A. Beeson, Stephen Gilbreath, Veronica Chapa Gorczynski, Kendric Jones, Jon Keeney, Carol Abel Lewis, Robert Maldonado, Jr., Bruce Mann, and Jeff E. Ross. Absent were Directors Robert A. Fry, Jean Mann, and Allen Owen. Written notices of the meeting including the date, hour, place and agenda for the meeting were posted with Harris County, with the Secretary of State, and at the Gulf Coast Rail District office located at Houston TranStar in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act. The inaudible portions of the recording were removed from these minutes.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Hello, everyone. I'm Dr. Carol Lewis, Presiding Officer of Gulf Coast Rail District. I'm going to call our meeting to order. It's June 11, 2024. It is 2:03 p.m. Today's meeting is being conducted with options to participate in person or by video conference. The public meeting location is Houston TranStar, 6922 Katy Road, Conference Center Room 120A. The video conference is conducted through Microsoft Teams and that link can be found in the meeting invitation, the agenda, and the public postings. Our meeting is open to the public. The public will have the opportunity to address the board during the public comment section. You'll have a limit of three minutes for each speaker. If you do wish to address the board, please approach the podium if you're in the room, or raise your hand if you're online during that public comment period. Board members may participate by video conference in accordance with the provisions of Section 551.127 of the Texas Government Code applicable to a governmental body that extends into three or more counties. Based on Open Meetings Act requirements, the Gulf Coast Rail District board members participating in the Microsoft Teams will need to be seen and heard throughout the meeting for attendance and to record our voting. Therefore, members calling in via telephone, we won't be able to count you for quorum or for voting. As required, I'm physically present and ask that the secretary conduct the roll call. Please respond audibly. Director Keeney, please.

Director Jon Keeney: Yes. Ronald Beeson?

Director Ronald Beeson: Present.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Robert Maldonado?

Director Robert Maldonado, Jr.: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you, sir. Veronica Chapa Gorczynski? No. Stephen Gilbreath?

Director Stephen Gilbreath: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Jeff Ross?

Director Jeff Ross: Present.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Dr. Lewis?
Chairperson Carol Lewis: I'm present.

Director Jon Keeney: I'm here. I hope. Bruce Mann, we know, is in the hospital.
Ms. Lisa Patke: He is online.
Chairperson Carol Lewis: He's online though.
Director Jon Keeney: Is he online?
Ms. Lisa Patke: He is online.
Director Jon Keeney: Alright. Bruce.
Director Bruce Mann: I'm here, Mayor.
Director Jon Keeney: Good. We hope you're doing well, sir.
Director Bruce Mann: Thank you.

Director Jon Keeney: Angelique Bartholomew?
Director Angelique Bartholomew: I'm present.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Allen Owen. He had to leave. Kendric Jones.
Director Kendric Jones: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Jean Mann? And Robert Fry. He had to leave. We do have a quorum, Madam Chair.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. Thank you so much for that. We're on to item number four, discussion and possible action on the minutes for May 14th. Again, Director Keeney.

Ms. Lisa Patke: I'll note that Veronica has joined us online.

Director Jon Keeney: Oh, okay. Thank you.

Director Jon Keeney: Alright. Do we have any questions on the minutes or concerns? Hearing none, I need a motion for approval.

Director Ronald Beeson: I will motion for approval.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you, sir. And a second?

Director Robert Maldonado, Jr.: I second.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you.

Director Ronald Beeson: That's Maldonado and Beeson.

Director Jon Keeney: Any discussion? Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Board: Aye.

Director Jon Keeney: Any opposed? Then it is unanimous. Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you so much for that. We're on to item six, report from the treasurer. Director Owen is not here. He and Jean Mann both attended our workshop a few minutes ago, but I did not hear Director Jean Mann answer. So, I'll just...

Ms. Lisa Patke: Arleste is going to present.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay, great. Alright, thank you. So, the report from the treasurer, we're going to...

Ms. Arleste Pietrofeso: Yes, Arleste Pietrofeso.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay. Thank you. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Arleste Pietrofeso: Okay, can everyone hear me?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes.

Ms. Arleste Pietrofeso: Okay, great. Good afternoon, everyone. We'll get started on page 22 in your packet today. We're showing disbursements this month of \$14,871, leaving a balance of \$19,484 in your checking account. The next page is your account balances showing your CDs, money market, and checking account. And pages 24 and 25 are your actual versus budget comparison through May. And finally, the next few pages are your grant status report with no changes from last month. And that's all I have for you unless you have any questions for me.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Any questions for Arleste?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay, hearing none, we'll go on to item number six asking you to ratify 24-13 based upon that report. Is there a motion?

Director Jeff Ross: Motion, Ross.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you.

Director Ronald Beeson: Director Beeson, second.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay, thank you, Ross and Beeson. All in favor?

Board: Aye. Okay, any opposed? Okay, none opposed. Thank you. That's a unanimous pass. Thank you, everyone. Thank you, Ms. Arleste.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Moving on to item seven, public comments. Is there anyone who'd like to speak today?

Ms. Lisa Patke: Looks like we have Dominic.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: One hand, Dominic Mazoch. I also see Eric Potts. Go ahead, Dominic.

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: Okay, can you hear me, Chair?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: Okay, three minutes starts now. As you well know, we should be getting steamed up about trains on Monday. I think the return of the steam train to Kansas City... I mean Canadian Pacific-Kansas City's tour... on the 15th and will be coming through the Houston Corridor on the 17th. Sticking with that railroad, I still think it would be appropriate for this group to, maybe not every meeting, but at least put on your website any things regarding the Surface Board requirements for congestion problems in the Houston Corridor secondary to the merger. The merger is one year old, and that was one point that the Surface Board put on the two railroads being is stuff that would affect the Houston Corridor. In other words, increase congestion. Lastly, with the thing with the public movement, I think it's the subject behind me, the idea of advertising THE HART and this group. One thing I think you have to be careful of, a group like this, and I'm guilty of it too, using jargon, abbreviations, and so forth, that the general public don't know. So, I think in trying to do some PR work for this group and for THE HART,

maybe the thing is, is when somebody makes a big term or a jargon or that sort of thing, once or twice explain what it is. And maybe too, as this group goes on, on the Gulf Coast Rail District website, maybe we need to have a place on that website for a dictionary where you put all these jargon terms down and they're defined. I think the more the public knows about it, it's good, but also in a way that we can present this to somebody like George Jetson. He can understand this without yelling, "Jane," at the top of his voice. "I don't understand this, Jane!" And with that, I send it back to you, Chair. Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Mazoch. Is there anyone else? Alright. Seeing none, we will move on to item number eight, closing out our public comment section, media strategy. Director Bartholomew, please.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: We have Ms. Erika Johnson to present. Definitely in light of communications and the PR that has been done, we're excited to just kind of give the board an update on the analytics. So, Erika is going to share the details of that.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Can you go to the microphone?

Ms. Erika Johnson: Can you all hear me?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Press the button.

Ms. Erika Johnson: Okay. Well, good afternoon. I have a brief presentation overlooking the analytics that we have collected for last month. We'll move forward from there. It's the third slide. Awesome. I don't know if you all can see that. This is the benchmark that we created over a three-month span. So, if you can see, we started off with impressions around 3,000 and the reach was 4,000. Again, this is without any paid social media followers, without any ads, we're starting at ground zero. I'm happy to announce that we tripled those numbers. So, now we're looking at over 14,000 impressions and 12,000 in reach. So, that's a pretty significant jump. Next slide. And this is the overall engagement. The colored blocks represent different social media profiles. So, we have Facebook, LinkedIn. We also have YouTube as well and Instagram. And we received over 600 engagement points. So, that equals reactions, comments, shares, and clicks to the website. I believe in a modest approach as it relates to advertisement. So, just to give you some idea of what a future advertisement budget could look like for you, just for \$50 on Instagram, we received over 214 website clicks, and that's pretty significant. So, at any point where you all can adjust that budget, you can see at least the baseline of what a budget looks like. And this is also the ad performance on LinkedIn. We have a very small conservative budget internally that's included in our contract, which is \$300. So, just look at what \$300 can do. You received over 11,000 impressions on LinkedIn. So, last month was the Community Rails campaign. I want to extend that campaign because it was well received. For example, we would submit information or the document of the content that was captured today and include that in the Community Rails campaign. But it's really to spotlight your partnerships and share goals and accomplishments. And this month, we're focusing on the Innovate GCRD campaign. Thank you, Barbara, for the questions that you compiled, the FAQs. We created a two-part series. We're going to start engaging the audience on what THE HART does and what GCRD does as well. Alright, that's it. Any questions?

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you.

Ms. Erika Johnson: You're welcome.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I do have a question. So, you said that people were starting to comment back and asking, did you say, questions or...?

Ms. Erika Johnson: Yes. Actually, we received a response from Super Neighborhood requesting a meeting. They wanted Executive Katherine Parker to go out there and present to them. So, the public is starting to engage.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Oh, wow. So, we've got a request for...

Ms. Erika Johnson: Yes. You're going to become quite busy as reach...

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Wonderful, wonderful.

Ms. Katherine Parker: I spoke to the Rotary Club of Harrisburg about THE HART and GCRD, and so as a result of that meeting, they put that on their page and then asked if I could come speak to the Second Ward. So, it is connecting the dots. So, I think it is making a difference.

Ms. Erika Johnson: It's good to see the conservative approach, and yes, I don't believe in... You can do a campaign from the bots, you can do paid advertising, but I want to see the organic baseline first and then build on that. Awesome. Thank you.

Director Jeff Ross: One question. This is for Chairman Lewis as well. We're working on this 90A study now. It seems like this would be a good time to get something on the system about 90A so we can start driving attendance at these public meetings that are going to be happening over the next six months probably. So, I think that's a suggestion that we do a write-up about what's going on with that H-GAC study.

Ms. Erika Johnson: Absolutely. You can do an information campaign built around that.

Director Jeff Ross: Yes, and that way we can see. We don't know. I mean, H-GAC is going to do their own stuff to publicize this, but there's no reason that we can't also. We may have a broader outreach.

Ms. Erika Johnson: Absolutely.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: We absolutely should. Thank you for that. Anything else? Thank you so much, Ms. Erika. Alright. So, now we are on to... And Director Bartholomew. Thank you. Most appreciated. On to item number nine, project manager update from Barbara Koslov.

Director Jeff Ross: You want to use this?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Well, you can probably sit...

Ms. Barbara Koslov: I can just stay right here. Okay. Hi, I'm Barbara Koslov.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: You need the microphone.

Ms. Barbara Koslov: Okay.

Director Jeff Ross: They can't hear you.

Ms. Barbara Koslov: Hi, I'm Barbara Koslov, and I'm project manager. I'm still kind of learning my way, but a couple things. I think it was just mentioned I did put together a series of frequently asked questions, and I'm very excited that they're going to be used. But mine focused more on THE HART than GCRD, but I'm happy to produce more. But I go on the website all the time, and I see what's happening, so it's exciting to see what's going on.

The two big things I've been working on, the meeting with Carol and with Katherine, and we're working on, I guess, a legislative appropriations request for funding. And I put together a one-pager, I've been doing some research, put together a little one-page report. Carol and Katherine and I are going to work on it to just take it to the, I don't know, legislature or some of our advocates and see how we can work with the Texas Freight Advisory Committee and the Texas Transportation Commission to get a set-aside for some special funding for rail. I had a couple meetings. I met with Mayor Keeney, and I met with Judge Emmett, who chairs the Freight Advisory Committee, and he gave me some advice on how we work to do that. And he is a big supporter, so we've got a lot of support, we just need to act on it. So, the next thing I'm going to do in that respect is start looking at our list of 10 projects, and I know Allen's is working on it too, and just get more information. Who are the legislature, legislative representatives and the senators where these projects are located? How do we tap into some federal support? And just try to come up with a little fact package for each project that's been identified. And there might be more coming out of Montgomery County. So, I'm just trying to learn as much as I can and put together a package so we can move forward with funding. And on the 90A, I'm going to start helping on that. At their first kickoff meeting, I happened to be out of town, so I missed it. I read the PowerPoint for it and all the information. So, it's a good start. There's a lot of support for that project, which we've talked about probably for 20 years now. So, that's what I'm working on. Any questions? Alright, thank you.

Director Ronald Beeson: Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you, Barbara. Next report from our executive director, Ms. Parker.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Thank you so much. First, let me say thank you to all the board members who have been here with us all day, whether online or in person. I really appreciate your support. Where do I start?

Okay, I've had a lot of meetings this month. BayTran Transportation Committee, we presented to them to talk about what we're doing with THE HART. We also attended the State of Mobility for Mayor Whitmire this month as well. TPC was canceled. I was to make a presentation at TPC about THE HART. We'll see whether that will be rescheduled. I'm not quite sure. We'll probably find out at TAC tomorrow. We also have been meeting monthly. What we're calling it is our grade separation funding project Barbara alluded to with the one-pager. We've been meeting with Class I Railroads, TxDOT, and just trying to figure out a way to expand this funding piece, which will always be an issue, not just with rail, but any project that you have. So, we're working on that monthly. Also, the US 90A piece. Lastly, like I said, I presented to the Rotary Club of Harrisburg. That was a great meeting, a very lively group. I learned a lot about

the Rotary Club that I did not know. And they are passionate about the work that they're doing for not only just the Harrisburg area, but for the City of Houston as well. And so after that meeting came the invite as they transition to a new president. So she put it on their website, so that helped us to get some traction, if you will, in the community.

And then lastly, our Rails Grant 101 Workshop, I think, was a success. I heard a lot of... great input. People who were helped, which is what the goal was. It was THE HART's goal to have a workshop this year, and so we can check that off our list. And also FRA came up to me afterwards and said that they would like to use this workshop as a model for them to take throughout the region. So, it may be an opportunity for us. When I say us, I will enlist some help from board members if need be to go and speak your input. But I think that's great and thank you to everyone who had a hand in making that a success, appreciate it. I think that's all that I have.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Any questions for Ms. Parker?

Director Ronald Beeson: No, but I would like to say thank you, Katherine. That was awesome to put together that many people coordinated to attend a workshop, and it probably is well received by the FRA. I'm not surprised that they would like to see others implement something, so we have to stay ahead of the curve.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: And our social media people were here taking photos and videos, so we'll probably get some of that uploaded as well. I would say that I'm most appreciative of it. I didn't know what to expect, but I was very well pleased with the information that we got and all the advisement about going forward. I will say, because it is no secret, two things they said that were kind of, I will say, semi-stunning, but not really. One, that we have got to spend the money that we already have. So, you all know, last year, we got the award for Commerce/Navigation. It went to the city, but we're in the mix. It has not moved forward, and we're going to have to get that. Making sure I'm still on the agenda because I don't want to do anything that we didn't post Ms. Patke. But making sure, indeed, that we move forward with doing our part to get that project advanced so that we spend that. Because if we're hindered from getting additional money because we didn't spend the first award we got in a timely manner, we don't want that on our record. So that was kind of it.

Director Jeff Ross: So, what do we need to do to help get it spent? Veronica, can you spend it?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Veronica? So, the answer to the question is that we are working with the city, and we have to have a conversation with FRA because to let you know what the little glitch is, is that our portion has been in the H-GAC TIP for a number of years, but it's under Federal Highway. We really want to get the money moved to Federal Railroad. Therein is the glitch. So, I think what we decided earlier this week, and I'll say that this... be Legislative and Bylaws, what they mean. What we talked about earlier this week is giving ourselves a deadline of July 15th. If we haven't been able to get it moved by July 15, then we'll move it to TxDOT, which is what Federal Railroad wants. They want the money to stay where it is under FHWA and be managed by TxDOT.

When I said there were two stunning points, the second one was related to that. I looked at Katherine when they said that because what they said is that even if we let TxDOT manage the project, which is what FRA wants us to do, the city is still the responsible party. So, even if... So anyway, I'm not going to repeat myself because it's stunning. But all that said, that's where we

are, and so we will try to get to a decision point on that by really, within another month, along with the city. Okay. So, that was my takeaway from the Rail Grants workshop. Does anybody else have any takeaways from the workshop that they'd like to mention?

Director Ronald Beeson: Well, I think it was emphasized the requirement for collaboration. It wasn't a surprise, but it was certainly emphasized by multiple people, and I think we need to take that to heart, and THE HART. How about that? The key role of THE HART is to coordinate all the activities, and it's obviously needed. Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: And I was well impressed with the participation of our board, so all of you who participated in that, I'm sure that FRA had to notice that, and most appreciate it. Alright, so if that's it for Executive Director Parker, on to announcements by me. Concurrent order, Director Bruce Mann had asked us to put this on so that we could talk about it. There are no updates from my chair. We still are in the, I guess, treading water trying to move forward standpoint from that. So, I don't know if anyone else wants to say anything about that, but at this moment we're on stall.

Director Jeff Ross: Well, wasn't Director Mann going to help us with Montgomery County on this?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I don't actually remember, but I know that he's had a couple of health challenges.

Director Jeff Ross: Not Bruce Mann, Jean.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Bruce Mann, yes.

Director Jeff Ross: Jean Mann was going to.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Oh, I don't know. Well, she's not on, so she's not going to be able to answer that. So, therein, yes, maybe she was supposed to help.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: She was going to revisit or have them revisit the verbiage and the conversation and how it was presented so that it could be better understood. And there was going to be a call made or something to try to facilitate that process.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright, thank you. Alright.

Director Jon Keeney: I'd like to comment about the legislative issues.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Sure.

Director Jon Keeney: I'm involved in two economic development groups, and they're both now going through the process of developing their priorities and what they're going to go to Austin for their asks. And so the more information we can get, the better off we are, sooner rather than later, let's put it that way. The second thing is, and you're aware, I'd talked to Congressman Babin, who's perfectly willing to help. I haven't had a direct conversation with Congressman Weber, but I'm sure he will be in the same place as Congressman Babin. So, our asks, even though we may not have specific projects in his district, he's still on the Transportation

Committee, and we still will need his support regardless of where we go. So, these folks are willing to step up and help us, so we need to give them the information necessary to make it happen.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you for that.

Ms. Lisa Patke: Director Gorczynski has her hand raised.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Oh, okay. Yes, Director Chapa Gorczynski, please go ahead.

Director Veronica Chapa Gorczynski: Thank you so much. This comment is in reference to a comment that I made at the workshop this morning, but also to dovetail with the conversation on legislative. Just to remind the members of the public and my fellow directors, one of the challenges with infrastructure projects is you typically have to produce a match of 20%, and that can be hard for smaller communities or communities that are distressed. And so one of the pieces that I would recommend that we add to a talking point in educating members of the congressional delegation, but also in the state legislature, is if they could ask DAC to look at opportunities for match to be reduced.

What does match reduction look like? Well, very often when we get HUD funds after a hurricane disaster, in the disaster declaration, they'll waive either all or part of the match because we're dealing with the aftermath of costs resulting in a hurricane. And so when we might have some additional local dollars to provide match, we may not because we had to go do emergency cleanup or we had to distribute water or whatever else those funds were spent on. So, I just wanted to remind folks that it is well within our, I don't know, it's an opportunity, it's well within I think our mandate as leaders to talk about that there can be a big push, and we can say at a workshop, or we can say in Congress or even in the state, all this money is available and you have to apply. But if areas that are distressed economically, either because they're lower income or they're rural or they had a hurricane, will not be able to apply for needed funds because match, as I've seen over my career in 20 years, is a consistent challenge and a problem.

So, my ask of all of you is to educate and talk to your staff about what match looks like and continue to help me as we educate legislators. While we definitely support the issues of skin in the game, as people like to say, I think being able to bring the money in a way that meets the needs in communities, this is a federal and local issue that we're going to have to look at and be able to talk about from an educated perspective much more closely.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. Thank you for that. And I will say, Ms. Chapa Gorczynski, that item B on our agenda is Legislative and Bylaws update and meeting, which Ms. Patke is trying to schedule for THE HART committee. And so that's an item that would be well-suited for that discussion that day. What we intend to do, although I might not be able to come because we'll have to watch, and if it takes us to quorum, either we'll have to post it and/or I'll have to not come. We don't know which one yet, but either way, the purpose of that day is to come out of our GCRD, THE HART, with our legislative for this year and what we want to do beyond that. First of all, with the legislature because they're going to be there, and then secondarily with others that we need to help support our agenda and our program. And I will say too, that you were mentioning the organizations you're in that are doing their legislative agenda, you all know I also serve as a board member for TAG, so TAG is also doing theirs. And, of course, you won't be surprised that I've got our request front and center on the TAG legislative agenda. So, we will

have at least a united perspective kind of going forth from our local area. So, we'll keep talking about that. And when you all meet for THE HART committee, that's one of the things that you all can talk about is how we spread our wings on what we're wanting to ask. So, that's the last item I have. Our next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 9th. I'm going to have an issue that day. Director Beeson, are you available?

Director Ronald Beeson: On Tuesday, July 9th?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: July 9th, yes. To be here because if I'm not here, you have to be here.

Director Ronald Beeson: I have a daughter that is due on the 14th in Virginia. As tentatively, yes. But I will say that they likely will take the baby at 39 weeks as of yesterday. So, I don't know what date that is. That's probably July 4th or 3rd or something. So, we shall see.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay. So, we may have to reschedule.

Director Ronald Beeson: But let's plan on it. We can plan on it, and if we have to juggle, we juggle.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, we'll keep talking about that. So, I'll tell you, we have the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials, the national conference is here in Houston that week. That day, July 9th, we're having a youth symposium at Texas Southern University. So, I will have to be there all day. And it's introducing high school students to transportation careers, which is a really big and important thing to us. So, we will keep you posted and apprised. You probably need to reschedule because you're not going to... Babies are very interesting people the first time they decide to...

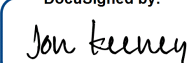
Director Ronald Beeson: Yes, first time grandfather, it's a little important. Not the most important, but it's important.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: That is hugely important... That that baby is going to have a mind of his or her own already. So, we'll keep you apprised about that. And if there's nothing else, I will entertain a motion to adjourn.

Director Jon Kenney: So moved.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. Then I will say we're adjourned. Thank you all (adjourned at 2:36 p.m.)

ATTEST:

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Jon Keeney, Secretary
Gulf Coast Rail District

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