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Minutes of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board Meeting – August 9, 2022

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A meeting of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board of Directors was held on Tuesday, August 9, 2022 at Houston TranStar and via video conference. In attendance at the meeting were Directors Ronald A. Beeson, Trey Duhon, Michael Dyll, Abigail M. Gonzalez, Veronica Chapa Gorczyński, Carol Abel Lewis, Bruce Mann, Richard L. Muller, Jr., Allen Owen, Tina Arias Peterman, Jeff E. Ross, and Dennis Winker. Absent was Director Christopher Lane. 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.

Vice Chair Beeson: Alright, I think we can get started. Ms. Parker's going to go get Judge Duhon, I believe, but let's go ahead and get started. I will call the meeting to order (2:00 p.m.). We are conducting today's Gulf Coast Rail District Meeting with the option to participate by videoconference due to health and safety concerns related to COVID-19. The meeting is open to the public, but restrictions regarding mask, allowable room capacity, and seating arrangements are in place. The public meeting location is TranStar, 6922 Katy Road, in Briefing Room 216.

I'm Ron Beeson, the presiding officer of the Gulf Coast Rail District and confirm the following board members are physically present, and that is myself... Is Judge Duhon here? He won't be here yet, okay. Others participating by videoconference, we will have a roll call and certification of a quorum. Before we go to you, Director Winkler, I'll remind everyone to please put your computers on mute when you're not speaking, announce when you're ready to speak or to vote on something, announce your name. Is there anything else I need to remind us of as far as meeting format?

Ms. Katherine Parker: That's it.

Vice Chair Beeson: I see that everybody can be seen and heard. Judge Duhon has joined us, by the way, Director Winkler. So, we do need to have everybody seen and heard. Okay, with that, we will go to agenda item number 2, which is certification of a quorum. Director Winkler?

Director Winkler: Okay. Do you want me to actually do a roll call?

Vice Chair Beeson: Sure.

Director Winkler: Alright. Vice Chair Beeson?

Vice Chair Beeson: Present.

Director Winkler: Director Dyll?  
Director Dyll: Here.

Director Winkler: Thank you. Director Gorczynski?  
Director Gorczynski: Good afternoon, present.

Director Winkler: Did not show Director Gonzalez as attending, is that...?  
Director Gonzalez: I'm here.

Director Winkler: Fantastic, thank you. Director Ross?  
Director Ross: On camera.

Director Winkler: I see you there. Vice Treasurer Peterman? She said she might be running late.  
I see that Chair Lewis is here, correct?  
Chairperson Lewis: Correct, present. Thank you.

Director Winkler: Obviously, Director Winkler is here. Director Owen?  
Director Owen: Yes, here.

Director Winkler: And Director Duhon?  
Director Duhon: I am present.

Director Winkler: Okay. Director Muller?  
Director Muller: Here.

Director Winkler: Okay, thank you. Sorry, I did not see you on the screen. And so that would leave us at this time with only Director Peterman, Mann, and Lane not in.  
Director Mann: I'm here.  
Director Winkler: Oh, you are, Director Lane, fantastic.  
Director Mann: No, this is Bruce Mann.  
Vice Chair Beeson: Director Mann is on, and I think Director Peterman is attempting to join.  
Director Winkler: Okay, super.  
Director Peterman: I'm on.

Director Winkler: We certainly have a quorum.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay. Thank you, Director Winkler.

Director Winkler: Agenda item number 3 is to confirm meeting posting compliance with the Open Meetings Act, and I can confirm that that has been done from Lisa Patke. Agenda item number 4 is discussion and possible action on minutes of the July 12th, 2022, meeting.

Director Winkler: I'll ask if anybody has any changes to the minutes? Hearing none, I'll make a motion that we approve the minutes.  
Director Duhon: I'll second, Duhon.  
Vice Chair Beeson: Okay, we have a motion and a second. All in favor?  
Board: Aye.  
Vice Chair Beeson: Any opposed? I will abstain since I was not at the meeting.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay. Agenda item number 5 is a report from the treasurer, Director Owen.

Director Owen: Yes, Vice Chairman, I would ask Chris Palis to give us our report.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay. Chris is here.

Mr. Chris Palis: Good afternoon, everybody. You should have a copy of the report dated August 9th, 2022. Page 2 is just the cash flow report showing a starting balance of \$106,309. And we had total disbursements totaling \$10,697, leaving \$95,612 balance in the checking account there. Page 3 is just a list of all the account balances, so you can see a total here of \$1,412,754 as of August 9th there. Really actually going to be for the checking and money market as of the end of the month. Pages 4 and 5 is the actual verse budget report. I do want to make a comment. You'll notice on that first column, it's kind of weird, it says June. That's really supposed to be July, so this is the July month here. But you can see total revenue there of \$998 for interest on those CDs and money markets, and the total expenditures there, \$10,317. And of course, then on page 5 is just the pro bono items showing the income and then the expense. And then after that, pages 6 through 9 is the same report that's just been included in this; no additional activity on there since the last month. That concludes the bookkeeper's report.

Director Owen: Anyone have any questions for him? If not, I would make a motion that Resolution 22-12 ratifying our payments be approved.

Director Ross: Second, Ross.

Vice Chair Beeson: Alright. All in favor of ratifying payments, Resolution 22-12?

Board: Aye.

Vice Chair Beeson: Any opposed? Alright.

Mr. Chris Palis: Thank you very much.

Vice Chair Beeson: Approved unanimously.

Vice Chair Beeson: Alright. Item number 7 is for public comments, and we have had someone join us. I will allow them to sit and be front in stage here, or I'll turn it to you, how about that?

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: I'll sit up here.

Vice Chair Beeson: Dominic has joined us.

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: For the record, my name is Dominic Mazoch. I am here at TranStar building, and my comments will begin now. Number 8, anything that resolves a grade crossing anywhere in the country is a positive, so 8, I'm for. The one thing I am concerned about is last week, the environmental impact statement for the Kansas City Southern/Canadian Pacific merger came out, and there were some things in that document that I'm a little bit concerned about, and one thing that was hardly mentioned and it's going to hit Houston very hard is increased rail traffic with the merger. There was no mention, hardly any mention in that document about increased grade crossings, congealing of freight, congealing of everything else.

I know the Rail District itself can't make a positive or negative statement, but I think the various entities that are part of the Rail District and METRO, which is ex-officio, and Mayor Fry, you're out there, welcome. I miss Jim, but I think you're going to be a good replacement for him. I think this needs to be looked at. This needs to be looked at very, very carefully. Already UP and BNSF traffic's increasing, and KCS is coming through here on trackage rights. No, this needs to be

slowed down. And in fact, UP and BNSF have basically said even if the merger goes through, that they are not going to allow any more KCS trains through the area, so this could be a quagmire, both legally and traffic-wise. This came up so fast; I found out yesterday. I think there might be some rail lines present to the west of us that could provide a blow-off or as a bypass route. I didn't have time. I will put that together and present this to TPC later in the month, and I'll have some copies I can give to the Board next month. End of comments. Back to you, Chair.

Vice Chair Beeson: Very good, thank you. Thanks for your comments. I do not have anyone else registered, so we will move on to discussion and possible action for agenda item number 8. Everyone, all the directors should have received a one-page summary. I believe this was provided by the Port of Houston. It summarizes the Port Road grade separation initiative. It's a very tight timeline, which will lead us to discussion and possible action, but I will open up the floor for a brief comment or two. Director Mann, would you like to do the timeline and the proposed project timeline and project cost?

Director Mann: Yes. So, the grant deadline I think is October 3rd. This project would really do the design and environmental for a grade separation for a rail crossing, and it's in the picture below. I think we'd probably have to scroll up a little bit. It's a rail crossing on Port Road, which is the road that leads to Bayport Container Terminal. So, this is really planning the grade separation on that road, designing it, do the environmental work. So, when we need to separate it, that's already done. We're taking a look at this opportunity to have the Rail District submit the grant application. The Port would pay the cost share, and we can work out some details on how the Port pays the Rail District for managing the grant. I think it's a good opportunity to have a grant that... a rail crossing that needs to be eliminated in the future designed and environmentally cleared. It's an opportunity for the Rail District to have a grant application and hopefully get it approved and completed. It's relatively a short timeline. It's a little over a million dollars, and it's a 75/25—a 25% percent cost share that the Port would pay. That's pretty much high level overview of it.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay. Director Mann, can you comment on the grant contribution, where those funds will be coming from?

Director Mann: From the Port.

Vice Chair Beeson: Alright. Any questions from our directors?

Director Gorczynski: This is Veronica and I have two questions. So, Bruce, as a clarification, is this for a planning grant?

Director Mann: Yes, it's doing design and environmental, so it's planning. It's not construction.

Director Gorczynski: And between you and Katherine, what has been the discussion about either an administrative fee or a management fee to reimburse GCRD or pay GCRD for the management work?

Director Mann: So, I think approving this today allows us to get into those conversations and work all that out. So, coming up with a MOU that really delineates who's going to be responsible for what, how the fee is paid, whether we pay it through the dues or we just write a check or how that works out. We need to have those discussions. This is really, philosophically, are we okay

with this and do we want the Rail District and the Port to work together to figure out how to do it.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Yes, we did discuss how we would partner, but those details I'm hoping that for the September meeting we will have either a MOU or an ILA detailing that out. But because of the timeframe to submit, we're really just asking that we can start to negotiate and begin the process. But yes, we did talk about all of those aspects of it as well.

Director Gorczynski: I understand the time crunch, but I really want to make sure that we have those conversations in September, and that we're very clear about what the expectations are because it's just going to be easier from a grant administration perspective, and it's easier to have those conversations on the forefront than it is to clean it up on the back.

Director Mann: That's the intention.

Chairperson Lewis: Mr. Chair.

Vice Chair Beeson: Yes, Dr. Lewis.

Chairperson Lewis: Thank you, thank you. I think the questions that Director Chapa Gorczynski asked are spot on. I think what we wanted today was to, again, as Director Mann has said, speak conceptually about is this something that we think GCRD would be interested in. So, from a planning perspective, my questions were about the need for this, what we would be preparing for long term. So, if we look at freight movement to the Port and the anticipated traversings, there is a possibility that this could end up being a great hindrance in the future in terms of blockage. And so, I think from my perspective, it's an opportunity for us to get ahead of something in the game before it becomes a problem as opposed to waiting as so often the case in our region. And so, I thought it was, again, quite an opportunity that I think would make sense for us to think about. But as Ms. Parker said, we didn't want to go down the road and spend a lot of her hours or Director Mann's or anyone else's if this wasn't something that GCRD felt was in line with our mission. So, that's the question, I think the first one on the table is does everyone think, or in terms of the vote today, whether this is in line with our mission. And then indeed we would come back to GCRD board next month with all the particulars iterated, and then that Memorandum of Understanding would be the document that would take us forward.

Director Ross: This is Director Ross..

Vice Chair Beeson: I have a few hands up. Let's see. Director Muller, I'll get you. Director Ross next. Director Muller?

Director Muller: Yes, thank you. I guess my question is... This seems like exactly the kind of project we would do, is there a question about whether this is within our scope? This seems like a slam-dunk; this is what we do. Maybe I'm missing something?

Chairperson Lewis: No, there's not a question as to whether it's within our scope.

Director Muller: Okay. And then do we know, the road, is it a City road or a County road, Bruce?

Director Mann: So, just to go backwards. So, the Port... This goes back a long way. So, the Port has a road development agreement to develop Port Road from the initial two-lane road. We're widening Port Road right now to three lanes each way as part of that road development agreement. So, we believe that that road development agreement can also be used for this grade separation. So, it's not like we have to go out and get another agreement. We already have one in place.

Director Muller: And that's with the City?

Director Mann: That's with, I think it's the County, but I'm not sure. I haven't looked at it in a couple years.

Director Muller: Yes, no worry.

Director Mann: Yes, it's the City or the County. It's one or the other.

Director Muller: We can get the grant but at the end of the day, we've got to get the City or the County to sign off on the improvements. But you're saying you think your road development agreement already does that. I can't imagine why there'd be any objection to it. Would there be any controversy about this or no?

Director Mann: No.

Director Muller: Okay. And then do we have a rough cost and schedule for project delivery?

Director Mann: So, we think it's about \$1.2 million give or take, probably less than three months to do the design and environmental. And then if you go to the next step, it's probably about \$12 million to do the grade separation which would be the follow-on. So, if we get this grant, we design it, do the environmental, we turn right around and go ask for a grant to construct it.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay. Next, Director Ross, did you have a comment?

Director Ross: I did but Director Muller covered it all for me. Thank you.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay, thank you. Director Winkler, comment?

Director Winkler: Chair, thank you. Yes, I just want to remind people that I am appointed by the Harris County Mayors and Councils Association, and as Mayor Fry can attest to, it's heavily influenced by many of the cities on the far east side. And I will tell you that the people who I represent will support this very well. I do not see any issue with the County or the City, whoever it is, and I believe it is the county, Bruce. We will stand up and applaud this because I cannot think of any area on the far east side that is any more congested than the particular area we're talking about. It impacts a lot more than Port Houston. It impacts the petrochemical facilities; it impacts the workers who drive in and out of that area as well as the residents. So, I applaud it, and I think it's about time that we have a project on the far east side, so thank you for bringing it forward, Bruce.

Director Mann: And just for the record, so it's a 2005 agreement between Harris County and the Port.

Director Muller: Is there anything else we could be doing? Oh, I'm sorry. You've got other people waiting to talk. I'll wait. Sorry, Tina.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay. Director Peterman, comments?

Director Peterman: Yes, Chair. Thank you. First of all, I think this is exactly the kind of thing that we should be doing. We had in our conversations earlier this year that we need some wins, we need some projects that we can point to, particularly from the Rail District's perspective. And Director Mann, I seem to recall you saying that the Port in particular needed to see value-add that the Rail District brings, and I think this is a big one. These are exactly the kind of partnerships that we should be doing. That said, I will be a strong proponent of negotiating the management fee agreement that Director Gorczynski talked to as an addition to and not as an offset of the annual dues, but I'm onboard with this project. I think it's fantastic.

Vice Chair Beeson: Alright. I don't see anyone else, I will share and confirm my comments are very consistent with Director Winkler regarding support from East Harris County Manufacturer's Association and other industry along the ship channel that utilize the Port facility, so thank you, Bruce. I will at this time ask for a motion from the floor to authorize the executive director to negotiate an agreement to partner with the Port of Houston in the railroad crossing elimination grant submission of the Port Road grade separation project.

Director Winkler: Director Winkler, I'm happy to make that motion, Chair.

Vice Chair Beeson: Thank you. Do I have a second?

Chairperson Lewis: Lewis will offer second.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay. Dr. Lewis, second. All in favor?

Board: Aye.

Vice Chair Beeson: Is anyone opposed? Okay, passes unanimously. Thank you, Bruce. Thank you, Director Winkler. Thank you, Director Lewis.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay. We will move on to agenda item 9, and that is a Rail Safety Updates presentation from Jack Hanagriff who's managing consultant, City of Houston Smart City Program and the Mayor's Office of Innovation. With that, I will turn it over to you, Jack.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Hi, good afternoon. Can you hear me okay?

Vice Chair Beeson: I can hear you.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Okay, perfect. So, welcome. Thank you for having me. Like was said, I work out of the Mayor's Office of Innovation. I actually wear two hats in the rail industry. I also work out of the East End District. I'm Veronica's Rail Safety Mobility Coordinator, retired from the City, over 40 years of experience. I've also worked with Carol Lewis back in the day when we did the Mayor Brown's Children's Safety Zone in the East End, so I've done work with Lewis and then I've done work with Katherine for many, many years. So, thank you for having me. If we would go to the next slide, please.

So, I always like to start this out as kind of show what is occurring with railroad operations and the hot topic for the last several years has been blocked crossings. So, railroads are very part of our life and sometimes good, sometimes bad. It's very frustrating to people. If you would pay attention on the map, the yellow is the hottest areas of town for blocked crossing occurrences or reporting, and that's pretty much the East End and it's Fifth Ward all the way down to the South Park or OST/South Union area. In rail perspective, that would be Englewood Yard all the way down to T&NO Junction. And the center, pretty much ground zero, is the East End District, and I think that's what prompted Veronica to have me come work with her.

So, what I'd like to show, especially with the railroad, is these blockages are more than just a nuisance. They are creating a public safety concern because they are causing Houston Police Department to have to run calls and investigate blocked crossing calls at least 36 times a month. That's approximately 19 minutes per call to investigate these blocked crossings, which as we all know in this group, railroads are regulated by the federal government, so HPD is very limited in what they can do. But however, that's 36 times a month a first responder's taken out of service for 20 minutes to go investigate a blocked crossing. HFD reports about a thousand delays. These delays can be a slow-moving train, a stopped train, a train, just congestion. Anything near the railroad tracks, they report it as a delay where they have to reroute or try to get another responding station. Again, that is a public safety impact because that's another example of first responders not able to get from point A to point B. Next slide, please.

Looking at the concentrated area, and Katherine, you can go ahead and tap it like three times, those little slides will come up. Looking at the concentrated area where your heat balloon is, there are three major junctions in the East End. There's T&NO Junction at Griggs and Mykawa, which I know you are very familiar with. I'm sure you have studied it, talked about it, looked at it. That is a heavy point of congestion. You also have the Katy Neck which is over there at Lawndale and Evergreen, and you have Tower 85 which is Harrisburg and Hughes. Tower 85 at some point, at least a minimum of three railroads will meet there. You heard the gentleman earlier talk about KCS. You would have KCS, UP, BNSF, and sometimes Port Terminal all trying to get going from point A to point B. This is also the nexus of UP Railroad's commodity flow. The map indicates their commodity flow and how they're trying to bring trains in and out of the City of Houston. The City of Houston, as you know, is a hub for all UP traffic all the way down from Beaumont and Corpus Christi—all have to come here to be processed. All trains from those areas, Beaumont down, Corpus Christi down, all those interactions come here to be processed. So, we have a high rate of congestion predominantly in the East End. Next slide, please. Keeping with the heat balloon, the commodity flow, you can see where we should focus our efforts. This is the point of congestion. Working with the East End and working with the Mayor's Office of Innovation, there's two groups that I manage or coordinate. Katherine and I sit on the Rail Corridor Collaborative, and that is where we meet monthly with BNSF, Union Pacific, KCS—that should be KCS—and Port Terminal Railroad. We meet monthly with them. The railroad likes this. The railroad also likes the focus areas because they are aware this is a high point of contention for the citizens. This is from Fifth Ward, Denver Harbor, Pleasantville, all the way through the East End down to OST/South Union and South Park. All those little neighborhoods, we formed a Rail Safety Task Force, and we've asked council members and other leadership to have a representative of somebody that wants to work with us and try to reduce railroad operations that are impacting public safety or impacting mobility. So, these two groups both meet monthly. The railroad likes this because they cannot keep up with all the onesie and twosie requests from the different neighborhoods. So, working with the Rail Safety

Task Force, we are able to kind of focus efforts, focus the neighborhood need, and communicate those to the railroad. Next slide, please.

The City of Houston and the Mayor's Office of Innovation for the last two years has been testing equipment to try to detect anomalies at the grade crossings, and typically blocked crossings or railroad movement. We have three different types of technology that we're putting out there. One is a typical camera to look for visual detection, also to collect data and validate an event. Also, it tells the other stories going on at these crossings because blocked crossings are not always because the railroad wants to stop, it's because they have to stop. It could be some other event or anomaly was detected and the railroad has to stop. And we're capturing that. We're capturing the people playing beat the train, we're catching the people stopping on the tracks, and we're catching the trespassers or people walking down the tracks. And then we catch the trains stopping and causing people to climb through the trains. So, all that to try to collect good data because up to this point, a person calling in a blocked crossing is very subjective. Even from the fire department, it's subjective because you don't know if they're saying it's blocked because it's stopped or it's blocked because it's a slow-moving train. So, there's a lot of subjectiveness with this collection of data. Through the technology, it will absolutely, positively let us know what is occurring at these crossings and how long, how often, and try to work with the railroad to do some operational changes. Also, to escalate this to our federal congressional members, our state representatives, that railroad blocked crossings are not a nuisance, that they are a public safety matter. They are causing other concerns that impact life.

We also deployed what they call LIDAR which is basically a laser beam that measures items entering the beam, so it can tell us positively that that's a train. And then through the Federal Railroad Administration, hopefully in the next few weeks, we'll be putting up what we call acoustic/decibel testers or sensors. They can enable to listen. They will listen to the unique sounds associated with the railroad—the horn, the engine, the ringing of the bell at the grade crossing. You have a ringing bell at a grade crossing that pretty much tells you that crossing is either blocked or occupied so the gates are down with or without trains. So, we look for that type of validation. We're trying to automate this, so we get what they call two-factor validation. Cameras can kind of sort of detect a train but they're not always as accurate, so if you put another type of sensor with it... So, the camera sees what it thinks is a train, the audible decibel hears what it thinks is a train, pretty much you think it's a train. The goal is to get these real-time alerts into TranStar so not only the first responders can leverage it, but they know before they leave the station for better routing. Also, through TranStar, we get good data. You and the citizens can use your typical map apps to figure out which way I want to go. We're hoping to measure wait times. What is the average wait that a person has to wait at a crossing for just a typical train. Typically, on the East End, it's like 15 to 20 minutes. On the west side of town, it's 3 to 5, so it just depends on their velocity. We're looking at those wait times. We're trying to help manage motorists' expectations. Because when they get to these crossings, how long do I have to wait? I've seen people risk their lives for trains that are only there for two minutes because they played beat the train, went around the gates, went under the gates, and it was just a couple cars coming through. So, we're trying to reduce some of these other safety impacts while we're measuring the type of occurrences that are going on at these crossings. Next slide, please.

These are pretty much deployment areas. We started with six sensors. We kind of put them out citywide—we had four in the East End, two kind of to the west part of the city. We were trying to get kind of a balance and understand what was going on. We were doing this based on blocked crossing reporting. These were some of the heaviest areas: Washington and Durham, Braeswood

area, and then of course, several in the East End—Lawndale, Lockwood... two on Lawndale, one on Lockwood, one on Central Street which is a City solid waste facility. And then hopefully in the next few days, we're going to add some more sensors, and that's the heavy red dots coming up. We're going to start putting sensors up in Fifth Ward. We're going to add some more in the East End because I can pretty much tell if a train is blocking Lockwood or I can kind of sort of think it's going to be blocking other crossings, but we want to look, try to capture it on two ends of the train so we can get a better idea what are the impacts. Right now, if they're blocking one crossing, I can think they're blocking another crossing, and I can sometimes validate that with the camera but right now, it's guessing. The more sensors you put up, the more measuring you can see of what the trains are doing. You can also start doing predictability with the first responders. They know during this time on this day, there's most likely going to be a train in this area. We all know freight trains don't run on schedule—they run on jobs, but they have peak times that they have a lot of trains. Even the fire department has a peak time that they run a lot of emergency calls. So, if I can create windows of opportunity, yet work with the railroad not to do certain jobs during certain times of the day, that will help a fire department, give them that window of opportunity. Next slide, please.

So, identify impacts to the first responders. We are currently matching accumulated data from police and fire calls to service. If I find an incident that the fire department reported, I try to look at where that occurred and match up what was occurring at the crossing. This is a picture at 5200 Lawndale. Those that are familiar with the area, if Lawndale is blocked, pretty much Telephone Road will be blocked. And what we're discovering is kind of correct is that one neighborhood blockage can affect another neighborhood. That's why we kind of created that whole focus area, taking in like 12 neighborhoods, because one blockage in one neighborhood to cut off services to another neighborhood. And this is a prime example. This happened this month. Two trains were blocking 5200 Lawndale, and in effect, also blocking 1500 Telephone for over two hours. And the fire department was trying to get an ambulance from East End District to go service the OST area, and they were cut off. So, they had to take a reroute which took longer time to get that service from the East End District into OST area and South Park. That happened twice. So, that's kind of showing us that these critical crossings identified by the fire department are not only important to that neighborhood, they're also important to other services in other parts of the city. And these are things that we want to escalate to the federal government. We also want to escalate to the railroad that you're just not blocking a citizen or a car, you're blocking life safety services in other neighborhoods as well. Next slide, please.

We're asking the railroad, we did this several years ago, and we're asking to reinstate this. It's a rail event notification. So, working with the Houston Police Department and Houston Fire Department, we've identified right now 35 critical crossings. These are crossings like Lawndale, Lockwood, Telephone Road, and some other crossings that the fire department typically takes as their route getting from point A to point B. Those of you in these neighborhoods, police cars can maneuver, the fire trucks cannot maneuver. They need to know right away if they go out of the station, should I go left or should I go right because they can't make U-turns. So, we want the railroad, that if they block a critical crossing that's on the list for more than... it should be 30 minutes, not one hour, it should be 30 minutes (on the slide). If they block a crossing for more than 30 minutes, that they need to notify Houston Emergency Services and tell them what's going on, where it is, and how long it's going to be. We're also asking them that if they block any crossing for more than three hours, they need to notify Houston Emergency Services that this area is blocked. And these are non-emergency blockages—train derailment, hazmat, as the police and fire are already aware, they're already headed that way. These are just other operational

concerns that cause these blockages. Then we're asking finally any railroad operation that will impact quality of life and mobility for an extended period of time—special train order, maintenance, construction, etc., they need to notify, again, Houston Emergency Services because the noise, the congestion, the traffic caused by these special conditions impact mobility, and typically the police or the fire are the ones that get called on this. I've had reports where citizens go and visit the fire station concerned and want to know how can the fire department get to them if they're trapped by a train. So, the fire department has to reassure the citizen that there's other methods for them to get to them, other routes they can take. That they're physically at least once or twice a month going to their fire stations concerned that they're going to be trapped by a train and how can the fire department get to them. Next slide, please.

We want to collect data from all sources. I'm working closely with 311 to kind of simplify their reporting process. Right now, there's four ways to report a blocked crossing from the federal government, the TxDOT, to the railroad, to 311. It's very confusing to the citizen, so I want to simplify it. I wanted everybody to go to 311, but then they gave me this reaction, and then I got into 311 and I saw how convoluted it was to try to report a blocked crossing. So, I'm trying and they're willing and changing in the 311 process to create its own railroad service request, so you go and do one-stop shopping. You don't have to go to five different places in 311 to report a blocked crossing, rough crossing, or train noise. You can do it in one source, and you enter the same requirement for each whatever you're trying to report. And then the little slides to the right of all the different emblems, we're asking the software to escalate this appropriately. So, once a month, 311 will dump their data into the FRA database, so now the citizens don't have to report it to 311 and then to report it to the FRA database. So, we're trying to clean up 311 to make it easier for the citizen, and then we're trying to get one-stop reporting. They were hoping to have that released about a week ago, but they ran into a bug. So, I don't know what the end date is on that, but I'm at least happy that they're willing to do this and that the FRA is willing to accept it in lieu of somebody actually reporting. Next slide, please.

This is a multi-faceted program. Right now, we're working off of in-kind resources to deploy these sensors—in-kind time, people, and efforts to go out there and put up these sensors, monitor these sensors, and this is working with manufacturers, all the City departments you see down there are part of this. And also, CenterPoint because we have to leverage their poles because at the time, the railroad does not want anything on their property. So, we have to use adjacent utility poles and right-of-way to put up this equipment so we can monitor what's going on on the track. The railroads do see this now as a positive because right away, they saw the success that we can get live video feeds of the crossing's condition to the first responders before they leave the station. And that's in the works as well, to give certain fire stations live video feeds in their firehouse. Before they leave, they can check their crossing. And then again, hopefully if we get the good data coming in, we get the cameras and the other sensors to do their job correctly, that you the motorist will also get real-time indication of what crossing is occupied or is not so you can plan your route accordingly. Next slide, please.

And that's my information if you need to contact me. I'm pretty easy to get ahold of. You can get me through the East End, or you can get me through this number. Katherine knows how to get me. That's all I have.

Vice Chair Beeson: Alright. Thank you, Jack. I do have one question. Is there any effort underway to link it to Google Maps or Waze or anything like that where the emergency vehicles could use those apps to tag blocked crossings?

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: So, are you talking about for the reporting or the detecting?

Vice Chair Beeson: Well, it would be probably begin with the Class Is initiating some means to show the period of time in which a crossing's going to be blocked based on train travel.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Yes, that would have to come from the railroad itself. So, right now, the goal is to get all the data to TranStar, and then TranStar typically shares their data with the Google Maps and the Apple Maps. They've discovered that those platforms ingest directly from TranStar and get the data from there. As far as predictability data, right now the railroads are not... They're considering sharing some of that. They're just looking at the liability of it because they can't always predict when they're going to do something. They can't predict the unscheduled events because they think they have so many jobs coming out today, and then conditions change, and then now the train's late by three hours which causes other trains to be late by four hours. So, it's very difficult for them to predict. We are working with a company that does the acoustic sensors, and what they'll do is they want to study our police calls for service, number of trains, number of times the train's occupied a crossing, then try to get some kind of risk analysis on a crossing and predictability that way, but it's not bulletproof. So, the best way would be to actually get access to the train's location either through their positive train control or the GPS, but that becomes difficult because as you all know, the railroads don't own the commodity. They don't own the rail cars. They just transport. So, they have to deal with their customers. So, that's why they're very leery about sharing exactly where their trains are because everybody's always, "Well, you do it with airplanes. Why can't you do it with trains?" Well, the commercial flights are owned by that company so they can share that, where all the little pieces of the train are not owned by the railroad. They just own the locomotive and the tracks, so it gets very gray area. Does that answer your question, sir?

Vice Chair Beeson: Yes. I would think though when the grade crossing goes down, it could trigger something and when the grade crossing arm goes up for those that actually have signal, that could feed something without compromising the confidentiality of the rail cars and the contents and all that.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Absolutely. That's something that Sugar Land does. That's something we're looking into, again, that requires the cooperation of the railroad. We're also looking at advance warning. We're doing some studies now. When the signal is triggered, it triggers preemption which you can actually have it trigger an advance warning sign several blocks away, like, "Don't go down this street." The grade crossing has been triggered. Yes, you can measure, if you can get the amount of time that that signal, that crossing is occupied either through the grade crossing signal, which one of the audible sensors actually listens for the bells dinging, that knows the signal's triggered. You can start getting some predictability. You can definitely get when the peak times are and then where your average wait time is. You can get that kind of predictability.

Vice Chair Beeson: Director Mann has his hand up. Would you like to comment?

Director Mann: No, so I just had a couple of questions actually. So, on the second slide, I think it was the second slide, you said there were 36 blocked crossings a month and there are 1100 delays. So, for that 36 number, I'm wondering what the definition is for a blocked crossing on the 36?

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Exactly. Exactly. So, the HPD has their own data. Those are 36 times somebody has called the police. That's not counting the 120 times somebody reported it to the FRA or the thousand times the fire department said it was delayed. And again, it's very subjective. There is no... What a citizen thinks is a blocked crossing could actually be a slow-moving train. There used to be definition by state law until they removed it, and it was actually no movement whatsoever for over 15 minutes, and that's kind of what I used as a basis when I worked with the railroad. But right now, there is no measurement for a blocked crossing, so it's up to perception. That's why we need these cameras. Because even the fire department can tell me, "I got delayed 15 times," and really, they never even saw the train because in some crossings, you can't even get to the crossing because there's 100 cars in your way and you have no idea what the train is doing. It could be a malfunctioning signal.

Director Mann: Yes.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: So, we get some calls like that where people don't even see the crossing, they just assume it's a blocked crossing because traffic's backed up.

Director Mann: Right.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: That's why the cameras are very important to validate what's really occurring.

Director Mann: No, and the reason I ask is because one of your data points was Washington and Durham. So, I go down Washington and T.C. Jester every day. So, whatever train is going to be blocking Durham is going to be blocking T.C. Jester, and it's never blocked. I have never run across it...

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Slow-moving train, yes.

Director Mann: Yes. I have never come to a blocked crossing. I've come to a slow-moving train but never a blocked crossing. So, that's part of why I'm asking the question.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Yes, Durham we have two cameras. We have one watching the crossing, and we have one watching Durham down the street. We want to see what the effects. The fire department are also interested in Durham because even when the train is clear, that route's not clear because it's going to take extra minutes to get all those cars off of Durham. So, that was one of the reasons why we were studying Durham is because just a slow-moving train will back traffic up all the way to I-10. So, everybody on I-10 thinks it's a blocked crossing, and they report it. They start calling 311 and everybody else. And it's not, it's just a slow-moving train.

Director Mann: So, then I have a second question which is, so you guys want people to call 311 but is there a connection between 311 and the railroad then? Because it would seem like somebody needs to call the railroad and tell them, "Hey, you're blocking the crossing." Because that's the whole point behind having the crossing number on the box that's there, so somebody

can call and report it. But if there's no connection between 311 and the railroad, then I'm not sure how that helps the railroad know that their crossing is blocked.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Yes, so that was the whole purpose of why we were working with 311. So, there is a path of escalation. You report it to 311, and it escalates to the proper entity. So, Union Pacific will get the data or any of the railroads can pull the data. As a City, we're leery of just the railroad getting the data. Now, one side of the coin is it's the railroad's business, it's their problem, they should manage it, it's not a City thing to manage. However, are they sharing their data? And then now, look where we are today. It's at epidemic proportion for the last two years. It's gotten epidemic because the City had no way of measuring it. So, we want to start with the City even though we can't do anything, but at least we can start measuring where these hot spots can be. And then the data will appropriately, either through automation or monthly reports, be escalated to the appropriate entity, such as the railroad, and also the FRA. The FRA even says they can't do anything, but this data can help us and others start moving to some type of congressional act to reduce some of this behavior.

Director Mann: So, just one follow-up question then. So, on the 311 call, when somebody calls to say, "Hey, there's a train in this crossing." Are they asking them, "Is it moving? Is it parked?" Because if it's just a slow-moving train, by the time it goes through and you guys report it to the railroad, the railroad looks at it and say the crossing's cleared. I mean, at that point, we're just creating work for people.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Well, that's what's occurring now. That's what occurring now. I mean, they're calling and giving their perception. We just want to collect the data. We don't know what the railroad is going to do with it. In fact, the railroad, a lot of their calls, it's a recording. It just goes to a recording, and they put it in their database. They're not necessarily moving quickly on it either, but that would be the goal. We strive to get some type of reaction quicker, but the main thing right now is just getting all the data collected in one central location so it can be appropriately measured. Because if you're reporting four different places, one, that's going to deter people wanting to report because they're tired of reporting four different places, and then two, we're going to get a lot of duplication of what's occurring.

Director Mann: Thanks.

Vice Chair Beeson: Thank you, Director Mann. A question from Director Lewis.

Chairperson Lewis: Hi, everyone again. Thank you so much for that report. It was quite interesting. And as you say, this is something that has been facing the City in terms of what to do for not just a couple years, it's probably, as you say, become exacerbated. But I remember in 2005 when I was on the Planning Commission, we were talking about it. So, it's been far more than two years. Here's what's occurring to me. As you talk about the data you're collecting, one of the shortcomings that I've seen from the other sides of the hats I wear is that the calculations for measuring the strength, the productivity, the value of a grade separation, is done by some machination of benefit-cost analysis. For the longest time, and I'm doing my hands, right? What they're doing in this calculation is they're counting vehicle delays. Well, the Mykawa/Griggs fell from the most important in the state the last time TxDOT did the study to ninth when they did the study earlier this year. And if you go into why did its rankings fall, it was because the number of vehicles crossing fell. I remember telling that to Judge Emmett, and he says the obvious. People realized the crossing is going to be potentially delayed—I see Director

Winkler's laughing and smiling—so they don't go that way anymore. So, this cost-benefit calculation needs tweaking. And so, as you talk about the data you're gathering, I'm wondering how we can take that data and put it into some stream. We need to get someone thinking about how what you're pulling, in terms of emergency vehicle prohibitions and the fact that it doesn't just affect this street. Because when they're counting, for instance, Commerce/Navigation... when they're counting, they're only counting the vehicles at Commerce/Navigation; they're not counting the ripple effect systemwide.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Correct.

Chairperson Lewis: So, with the data you're pulling and because I know you understand that hat, we need to start thinking about how we and who we talk to about changing how that benefit-cost calculation is done for grade separations. So, that's really sort of an action item for all of us, but that's sort of my thought and response as I look at what you're doing. And the other one, and I'm sorry, I know we've got several of our railroad friends on, but I'm going to say it because I know others are thinking about it. Why is this just our problem? Alright. Thank you.

Vice Chair Beeson: Thank you for your feedback, Chairman Lewis.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Absolutely. Those are good points. I'm also looking at a risk and disruption calculator because when they assess the risk of a crossing, they're assessing how many cars, how many trains, and what's the likelihood of a crash. Well, also a blockage contributes to that risk at that crossing because people do creative driving as soon as they see a train. And like you said, they start either avoiding that crossing, or they change their behavior. Streets become a speedway because they look up ahead, they see the crossing's clear, now they're driving 90 miles an hour to race that crossing because there's some kind of PTSD moment that they're going to get stuck by the train. So, they just start flying down the street because the crossing is clear, or they run a red light because the crossing is clear, "Let me run it, let me get over there." I've seen people do what they call bumper suck, when everybody's all lined up, they will suck up on the bumper ahead of them. They're more worried about being stuck by the gate than they are a train hitting them. So, we need to look at the risk. Not only the normal risk but also factor in the disruption, and then like you said, calculate the ripple effect that they're causing. Where are all these other cars going that they're avoiding this? That's one thing I'm looking at in my work in the East End is I am not going to be able to stop the blockages if they're going to happen, but how do I get relief. And that's wayfinding and giving people better routes. But then what does that happen, can those streets handle those routes? There's a lot of communities, they don't want those cars coming down their street. They just let them sit out there in traffic. They don't want the extra traffic coming down their street. So, these are other things we have to look at. But right now, grade crossing separations are going to take time. Griggs and Mykawa have been on the books for over 20 years. So, I'm trying to get other, what I call treatments, to help manage the expectations, give the people some relief. I'm working with the railroads to do things in parallel. It's great that they're doing all these infrastructure improvements that are going to trickle down and improve velocity down in these communities, but the communities need something now. They need to help manage their routing and just understand how to get around these trains better.

Chairperson Lewis: And the thing about it is if you really look at it from a system aspect, if you think about it sort of like rivers and tributaries, whenever we can't use our whole system fully and comprehensively, it's got to have negative impacts on other parts of the system. Unfortunately, now, we don't have any way of knowing what that is. I actually asked H-GAC if there's some way we can model that, and it would be too difficult, quite frankly, is the answer. But we know that we're having system inefficiency because of this with our travel movements.

Mr. Jack Hanagriff: Absolutely. Impacts the first responders. Impacts the businesses. I'm also looking at environmental impacts. When there's 100 cars on Durham sitting in traffic for three hours, what does that do? Just any kind of impacts we can grab.

Vice Chair Beeson: Okay. Any further questions for Jack? Hearing none, we will move to agenda item number 10, which is a report from Executive Director Parker.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much for your time. I'll run through this very quickly. Just an update on our UPWP request for US 90A. We met with Thomas Gray earlier this week. On August 16th, the H-GAC board will approve the ILA for all proposed projects for that program, and our project is one of those. Early September, there'll be a Request for Proposal and possible release for procurement that will go out. Mid-October/November committee evaluation and selection of the consultants that will do the work. And January, tentative January start of the study. Some of the highlights are that there will be a Steering Committee and Advisory Board, various stakeholders. Of course, some of our board members or of those that you represent, of course, we will be asked to be a part of these groups. The Steering Committee will have an opportunity to meet before the end of the year, so they will not have to wait until January or the start of the study. There'll be one public meeting, also online engagement via survey or interactive mapping. And if you've worked with H-GAC in these past few years, you probably are familiar with that, they'll have an opportunity to comment.

Next and last, we have completed so far our meeting with our member entities concerning GCRD updates and METRO addition. In June, we met with Harris County Mayors Council Association, Judge George Fort Bend County, Harris County Precinct 3 Tom Ramsey. In July, we met with Harris County Precinct 2 Garcia and Fort Bend County Commissioners Morales and Prestage. Our upcoming meetings for August, we will meet with Cagle's office and also Judge Lina Hidalgo's office this month as well. To be scheduled is Waller County, Galveston, Montgomery, Harris County Commissioner Ellis; and the City of Houston.

The ordinance that is being put together by the City of Houston pretty much is ready. I asked that they hold it until we had had an opportunity to meet with the majority of our member entities, so that when that shows up on their docket or desk, they have been briefed accordingly. So, that portion of our process is moving along. That's it, short and sweet.

Vice Chair Beeson: Alright. Well, thank you. Onto agenda item number 11 which is announcement from the acting chair. Our next meeting will be Tuesday, September 13th. It sounds like we will have an update from Executive Director Parker on the item number 8 that we talked about this meeting regarding the railroad crossing on Port Road. With that, I will entertain a motion to adjourn, if there are no further comments.

Director Mann: So moved, Bruce Mann.

Chairperson Lewis: Second, Lewis.

Vice Chair Beeson: Thank you, Chair Lewis. Alright. Have a good week and month. See you all in September. Thank you. (Adjourned at 3:07 p.m.)

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