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Minutes of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board Meeting – June 8, 2021

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A meeting of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board of Directors was held on Tuesday, June 8, 2021 at Houston TranStar and via the BlueJeans web-based platform due to the disruption of normal business during the COVID-19 pandemic. In attendance at the meeting were Directors Ronald A. Beeson, Trey Duhon, Abigail M. Gonzalez, Carol Abel Lewis, Bruce Mann, Richard L. Muller, Jr., Tina Arias Peterman, Allen Owen, Jim Robinson, and Jeff E. Ross. Absent were Directors Michael Dyll and Dennis Winkler. 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.

Chairperson Lewis: There. So, a few of us are in person, and then others are on the computer. We've gotten quite comfortable with our remote communication. I'm calling the meeting to order (2:15 p.m.), and I would ask... I don't believe I saw Director Winkler, so Director Duhon... I don't know if you have your list of folks in front of you.

Director Duhon: I do have a list. Do you want me to do a roll call?

Chairperson Lewis: Please.

Director Duhon: Alright. I'll go ahead and call the roll. Jim Robinson?

Director Robinson: Here.

Director Duhon: Dr. Lewis, you're here.

Chairperson Lewis: Yes.

Director Duhon: Bill Jameson?

Mr. Bill Jameson: I'm here.

Chairperson Lewis: You have an old list.

Mr. Bill Jameson: I'm here, but it's an old list.

Director Duhon: I do.

Chairperson Lewis: Just substitute Rich Muller for Jameson and...

Director Duhon: Okay. Well, I know Rich is on. Bruce Mann... Is that an old one?

Chairperson Lewis: No, that's fine.

Director Mann: Yes.

Director Duhon: Okay. Jeff Ross, I see him. Tina Peterman?

Director Peterman: Here.

Director Duhon: There she is. Allen Owen?

Director Owen: Here.

Director Duhon: I see him. Michael Dyll? No. Abigail Gonzalez?

Director Gonzalez: I'm here.

Director Duhon: Okay. Dennis Winkler? And then Ron Beeson. Is that it?

Director Beeson: I'm here.

Director Duhon: Okay. Alright. Is there anyone I missed?

Chairperson Lewis: No.

Director Duhon: Okay. So, it looks like, Madam Chairman, we do have a quorum.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay, perfect. Thank you. The next item we have is confirming the meeting posting in compliance with open meetings. Ms. Patke? Yes, that was completed, so confirm that. The next item is the item of discussion of the minutes. Judge Duhon, please.

Director Duhon: Okay, before you... I think we have a copy of the minutes from the meeting on May 11th, 2021. I was not present at that meeting, but the meeting... If everyone has had a chance to review the minutes, then we'll entertain a motion to approve.

Director Mann: So, moved, Bruce Mann.

Director Beeson: Director Beeson will second.

Chairperson Lewis: So, let me say that I think there are a couple of grammatical things we want to go back and clean up. Not big, but a D here and there. So, as long as you all accept that, I think we're in good shape.

Director Mann: I'll make the motion with grammatical corrections to approve the minutes.

Director Beeson: And I will second, Director Beeson.

Director Duhon: Okay, we have a motion and a second. Any other discussion, any other corrections other than grammatical? Alright. All in favor, say aye.

Board: Aye.

Director Duhon: All opposed, say aye, and state your name. Alright, motion passes. Back to you, Ms. Chairman.

Chairperson Lewis: Thank you. Item number five, report from the treasurer. Director Owen, please.

Director Owen: Madam, Chairman, I'll ask Cory Burton to give us our bookkeeping report for the month.

Mr. Cory Burton: Good afternoon everyone. Cory Burton with Municipal Accounts. Dr. Lewis, can you hear me alright?

Chairperson Lewis: Yes.

Director Owen: Yes.

Mr. Cory Burton: Okay, perfect. Thank you. Okay, if you scroll past the cover page of our report, you'll see your operating fund checking account. You had just a little bit of interest earned there, and expenses totaled \$7,500. There was a lot of legislative work done this past month. You had hired Trevanion Group, and then a couple of directors also participated in traveling back and forth in order to support District's goals. Other than that, everything else was pretty typical in your check stack this month. Next page is the detail of your investments. One new CD in your operating fund since you last met. Otherwise pretty quiet there. After that, you had the detail of your pledge securities. Everything is in good shape there. Next, starting on page five, is your budget, showing the detail for May as well as your fiscal year to date. We're five months into your fiscal year, and overall, you're doing great. Expenses have been much lighter than what we've originally budgeted. Other than that, you have your grant status report, which covers a few pages there, but there's been no activity in several months on that. And that's all we have for you today. I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Director Owen: Very good, thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: There are no questions. Item six, Director Owen, please.

Director Owen: Madam Chairman, I'd ask that resolution number 21-10, ratifying the Gulf Coast Rail District payments, be approved.

Director Duhon: So, moved, Duhon.

Chairperson Lewis: Motion Duhon. Is there a second?

Director Muller: Second by Muller.

Chairperson Lewis: And Muller.

Director Owen: Very good, thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: I think Mr. Ross and I are recusing on that one because our names in there.

Director Owen: That's alright. Money well spent.

[Crosstalk 00:05:36]

Director Owen: Yes, all those were money well spent. Thank you, all.

Chairperson Lewis: Alright, all in favor there?

Board: Aye.

Chairperson Lewis: Is there any opposed? Alright, thank you. Alright, thank you, Director Owen.

Chairperson Lewis: Item seven is public comments. Is there anyone on the phone who would like to make a comment or have any suggestions or thoughts for the board? [Pause] Alright, thank you.

Item number eight, a resolution and a letter presented in honor of Maureen Crocker. So, as you all know, Maureen Crocker served as executive director here at Gulf Coast Rail District from its inception until two years ago. As I always said about Maureen is that Maureen did the best job of getting something out of nothing of anyone I've ever seen. We got a lot done to have had absolutely no funding source. And so, we want to acknowledge her time here. She is retiring. She left the Gulf Coast Rail District and began working with the City of Houston in the Public Works Department. And when she told me she was retiring, I asked her why. Her answer to me was she could, and my response was, "Well, so could I. I could have retired five years ago, but I didn't. I don't understand." So, anyway. But she didn't pay me a lot of attention. She's retiring anyway. But we do want to acknowledge her time with us here and have a letter that we will give her in that regard. We actually have cupcakes... Pardon me? Okay. So, we want to wrap the letter for signature for our board members to sign, so we won't actually give it to her today. But to let you know what's on it, I will read it to you.

In recognition, Ms. Crocker, of extraordinary service and leadership, the Gulf Coast Rail District presents this resolution in honor of Maureen Crocker, Gulf Coast Rail District past executive director. Whereas, through her career Maureen Crocker earned the utmost respect of leading policy makers and citizens across the greater Houston area and beyond. Ms. Crocker crafted and shaped the District's initial policies and goals and served as an advocate for the Gulf Coast Rail District from its inception. We pause to recognize her many noteworthy contributions to the Gulf Coast Rail District and its board of directors. Whereas, Maureen Crocker served as the Gulf Coast Rail District's first executive director as recognized by meeting minutes from August 22nd, 2007. Ms. Crocker developed enduring partnerships between the Gulf Coast Rail District and numerous national, state, and local organizations to ensure the relevance and usefulness of the District's efforts. Whereas, the Gulf Coast District expresses its deepest appreciation for its outstanding contributions made by Maureen Crocker for her many years of public service on behalf of Gulf Coast Rail District and extends its best wishes as she approaches her well-earned retirement. On behalf of friends and colleagues at the Gulf Coast Rail District, we wish Maureen Crocker the very best in retirement. Now, therefore be it resolved, that the Gulf Coast Rail District recognizes Maureen Crocker for her exemplary service and contributions and appreciates her loyal and devoted service. That will be signed on the 8th day of June 2021.

We have a little something for you. And so, for those of you who are on the Zoom, you might kind of miss this. We're going to ask Maureen to come up, and we're going to give her a plaque in recognition of her service. Just something to put on her shelf and wall. When she thinks she wants to forget us, we won't let her.

Ms. Katherine Parker: We won't let her.

Director Ross: When is Maureen Crocker Day?

Ms. Maureen Crocker: Every day from now on.

Chairperson Lewis: You should know, Jeff.

Ms. Maureen Crocker: Okay, thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: So, Jeff thinks he's retired, too, Maureen. That's [Crosstalk 00:10:22]

Ms. Maureen Crocker: Thank you, all.

Chairperson Lewis: Alright. So, I would ask if any of you would like to have any... Maureen, would you like to have something to say?

Ms. Maureen Crocker: I will just say that I loved working... [Crosstalk 00:10:42]

Ms. Maureen Crocker: Thank you, all. I loved the time I spent working with and for the Rail District. The board of directors was the greatest group of people. I haven't worked with all of you, but the ones I have worked with... Ron has been there since day one. It's just been a committed group of individuals that really want to do what's best for the region. And there's still plenty to do, so, I hope you stick with it. But I thank you for the opportunity and enjoyed every moment of it, so thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: Thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: Dr. Jameson, any of you all want to have something that you'd like to say to Ms. Maureen?

Mr. Bill Jameson: Yes. Madam Chairman, this is Bill Jameson. I really enjoyed working with Maureen for the long time I was on the Rail board. She worked tirelessly. She worked with no help really. Just a board that was meeting kind of part time and really, really went after some great things for the region and for the Rail District and did an outstanding job. Not only that, her personality is so great to work with. I was a little concerned, Madam Chairman, when you said that she made something out of nothing. I thought maybe you were referring to the board... close to nothing. But I don't think Maureen really retires. She's just going to go do something else that's of value to the community, which she always has. So, congratulations, and it was a real pleasure to work with you on the board and to keep in contact even after you left the board. So, thank you very much from the community and from all the directors that served with you.

Ms. Maureen Crocker: Thank you, Bill. I appreciate that very much.

Chairperson Lewis: Thank you so much. And I should have said done much with other peoples' money... [Inaudible 00:12:46] for future. Alright, thank you, Maureen. Alright, thanks to all of you. Our next item is number nine, status report on legislative priorities for the 87th session of the Texas legislature. Director Ross, please.

Director Mann: Carol, just really quick, I just want to congratulate Maureen and thank her for her service on the board. I enjoyed working with you, Maureen, so best of luck as you retire. So, thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: You know that was Bruce Mann. You recognize voice, right?

Ms. Maureen Crocker: Yes.

Chairperson Lewis: Alright. Thank you, Director Mann. Anyone else? Alright. Thank you. Go ahead, Jeff.

Director Ross: Alright. Thank you. And Maureen, I'm sure we'll see you. You might even be appointed to this board. You got such glowing results. So, the legislature has now come to conclusion, as least as it regards our items. Our bill associated with the joint use of the CenterPoint easement died in the Senate Committee as we sort of anticipated it might. We didn't have CenterPoint's endorsement. They didn't have an active program to work against it, but I think their silence spoke a lot about it as well. But that just gives an opportunity to meet with them and talk with them about how we have success at the next session, if it proves that that route is the viable route to utilize [Inaudible 00:14:28]. The other piece of legislation, Senate Bill 1990, which expanded our capabilities from just commuter rail to advanced transportation systems did pass. It made through the Senate Committee unanimously. Made it through the Senate, the House. And I guess it's awaiting the governor's signature. So, that's really good news because now we're no longer beholden to a technology that was in existence in 2007 when we were created but limited from using any advances since that time. And so that should be a good thing for us. [Distortion 00:15:17] I'm going to report I guess on the conversation we had with [Distortion 00:15:21]

Chairperson Lewis: Is that a question, Jeff? You're kind of fading it.

Director Ross: The conference call we had with H-GAC... Do you want to talk about that now or under...?

Chairperson Lewis: No, we can talk about that now.

Director Ross: Okay, so Carol, Katherine, and I had a conference call with about a half a dozen people from H-GAC to talk about the grants application that we made. Basically, take the study that's already been done or studies [Distortion 00:15:54] and to update it. And in that conversation, we talked about the CenterPoint easement and that we wanted to have that looked at as well in an update to just see if it has any viability, what the positives are of it, what the negatives are of it [Distortion 00:16:15] if that work is done in a timely fashion, we could carry that forward if we choose to visit with CenterPoint [Distortion 00:16:23] have this documentation from H-GAC on the use of that corridor. So, they were going to take that under consideration. I've not heard anything back from them. I don't know if Carol or Katherine have about their decisions on going forward.

Chairperson Lewis: No, it has not gone forward yet to the... It has to go to the TAC and the TPC, and it has not done either of those at that point. Thomas is sitting here because he's going to talk to us today about high-capacity transit corridors, so we're happy... This is his first in person meeting, too, so we're delighted that he received approval to come. But any questions that we have we can probably ask him, too, at that time. But I think we talked about the fact that we did submit this request to H-GAC. We'll probably know by August, September about it. Would you like to...?

[Inaudible 00:17:21]

Director Muller: Dr. Lewis, we can't hear. If someone is speaking, we can't hear... Could we ask everybody who's not talking to mute their line? I think we're getting some road noise or something from a phone it sounds like.

Chairperson Lewis: I'll repeat what he said, too. We did some test with the microphones and thought it kind of worked, but I'll repeat what he said.

Director Muller: Thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: Oh, he could do that. He could do that and see. So, basically Thomas Gray from H-GAC is here, and what he said is that our submittal was received, along with many others, and they're being evaluated. They have to process and get flowed through finance, so he didn't want to commit on the timeline. I just proposed of August, September. So, officially he did not commit to my proposed timeline, but we should know something within this calendar year, and I suspect by fall. Normally those... We kind of find out about that time, right?

Mr. Thomas Gray: It's for the next fiscal year, so we have to get it done by September.

Chairperson Lewis: Alright, so that helped. It's for the next fiscal year, so it must be done by September. So, thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: Does anybody have any other questions? Yes, sure.

Director Ross: Madam Chair, one other thing. If a lawyer on our board would be willing to take a look at the Senate Bill 1990... When I read it, it seems to imply that we need to go get authorization to use advanced transportation from the entities that created us, but I'm just an engineer with a college degree, and I'm not a lawyer. So, if Rich or one of the other people can read this and make sure... if there's other things we need to do to be able to use advanced transportation systems, let's identify them so we can go do them.

Director Muller: I'll do that. I'm happy to do that.

Chairperson Lewis: Great, thank you. Anything else, Jeff?

Director Ross: That's all, ma'am.

Chairperson Lewis: Alright. Does anyone have any other questions about what was just reported by Director Ross? Alright. We're on to item number ten, which is presentation on high-capacity transit by Thomas Gray. Let's see how we're going to do this. So, I'm going to pull the presentation up, and then do you want to just advance it on this computer as you speak?

Mr. Thomas Gray: Sure.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay. This may be my imagination, but I feel like this works better when it's raised a little bit. So, I'm talking about the microphone. Which I am going to raise a bit because I think it seems to work a little better when it doesn't just lie down there.

Director Owen: Madam Director, this is Director Owen. Do we need to write a letter... some kind of a thank you letter for Rick Miller's work on this? I know we paid him, but I know he did a lot of work behind the scenes for us. And I just think we need to acknowledge him for doing that.

Director Ross: I think it's a good idea.

Chairperson Lewis: Yes, I think we're happy to write a letter to him in that regard. If you all saw my emails to him all along, you know I've been thanking him and telling him how much he helped all along, but I do concur that a formal letter from GCRD... he would probably appreciate receiving that. Katherine and I are both nodding for that. Alright, I'm going to share the screen. Absolutely. I'm going to share the screen. And then Thomas... Does that work for you?

Mr. Thomas Gray: I think so. As long as I can advance the slides.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay. Yes, you can advance right here.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Right here, okay.

Chairperson Lewis: Oh, I should introduce you. So, presenting is Thomas Gray. He's a principal planner with Houston-Galveston Area Council. I've worked with him a lot, so I will tell you all that he knows very much what he's doing. He led this high-capacity transit taskforce work that had contributions from really representatives of all the agencies in the region. He'll tell you a little bit more about its structure when he comes to us. But really, I'm thrilled that he was able to come and talk to us about this today, and I think you'll find that it really will bode well for us as we now have... presuming the governor will sign and whatever we have to do with our other entities, if anything, to move forward with the different modes and facilities that the corridor work that they've done really will help and sort of lay a foundation for what we want to do and build on the things we've done before. I talked about Maureen doing things with other peoples' money. So, Harris County paid for the Westpark study, and I think H-GAC actually paid for a previous version of the 90A and the 290. So, we've got some work done that needs to be updated. But I think as you see what Thomas will present, it will give us a little more field to work with as we think about these things. So, Thomas Gray.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Thank you very much. I hope everybody can hear me. As Dr. Lewis said, I am Thomas Gray, principal planner in the Transportation Department at the Houston-Galveston Area Council, and Dr. Lewis asked me to brief this board on the high-capacity transit taskforce. Just some background—this was an effort that the Transportation Policy Council began in 2017 as we began work on the 2045 RTP. One of the reasons we did this is because our eight-county region anticipates 4.2 million more people and 1.6 million more jobs by 2045 with an intended increase in regional miles traveled. And we just don't think that expanded highways alone will be able to carry this increase in travel of people and work.

Another trend that the region is facing is that the existing transit network is not keeping up with growth. Population and employment growth is occurring in areas of the region not served or with limited access to transit. And the region's network still favors traditional commutes as opposed to... even though a growing number of regional workers engaged in so called reverse or suburb to suburb commutes. And of course, this graph goes only to 2017. Obviously, we've had a significant change in that transit growth metric since 2020, and we're only beginning to see signs of recovery from the downturn caused by COVID.

So, as I said, the High-Capacity Transit Taskforce was created by the Policy Council in 2017 to look at the implications of expanding regional high-capacity transit options. And it went on for about two years. It developed an unconstrained vision network, which is the kitchen sink kind of fiscally unconstrained if money were no object, what should we build. And then we also came up

with a financially constrained priority network that was eventually included by the TPC in the 2045 RTP as its transit element.

So, what is high-capacity transit? Well, it's basically any form of public transportation that can move large volumes of people. It can do this through a combination of larger vehicles, shorter frequencies, and higher speeds. It can be any technology, but it generally has some sort of exclusive guideway that is separated from other traffic, allowing it to operate unimpeded by normal congestion.

And this is the makeup of the taskforce. It included a variety of people from all parts of the region, from elected officials to agency staff to private citizens. It had the main taskforce. It also had three work groups looking at the economic impact, service concepts, and funding opportunities. Maureen Crocker and Elijah Williams were representatives of the Gulf Coast Rail District on the taskforce and its work groups. And as you can see, the taskforce was chaired by the former Chambers County Commissioner Rusty Senac, and METRO Board of Directors Chair Karen Patman and former City Council Member Amanda Edwards were also vice chairs.

So, just going through some general findings of the three workgroups. The economic impact workgroup found that a better transit network can provide a variety of personal benefits in terms of safety or travel time savings, as well as regional economic benefits in terms of better access to markets and labor force. These are just very high-level findings that we use to formulate our recommendations. The service concept work group noted that there's going to be demand in all eight counties. We can't focus just on the urban core. It has to be everywhere. And don't focus only on high-capacity service. We need to consider the entire network that the service connects to including local bus, demand response, everything. And then finally that equity is a critical consideration in whatever we do. And then the finance work group... Of importance to this work group other than the fact that any significant expansion of high-capacity transit in the region will require revenues that just do not currently exist... We just need to be aware of that. And one of the ways we can kind of pool our efforts together to look for new revenue sources is to speak with one voice to decision makers at both the state and federal levels. All areas of the H-GAC region, whether they be rural, suburban, or urban, have unmet transit need, and all areas of the region will be affected by coming growth. So, basically if we are going to seek assistance in expanding our transit network through new funding, we cannot be divided.

So, here's the vision network. Like I said, this is the unconstrained kitchen sink kind of network with high-capacity transit going everywhere, from Galveston to Conroe, and from Mont Belvieu to Katy. It extends to all eight counties in the region, and it provides a full range of transit services to ensure both adequate access and effective transit capacity. So, if money were no object, and we could build out the elements of this network as say grade separated rail, our travel demand model indicated that it could carry as many as 852 million boardings per year. That is a tenfold increase over the region's transit patronage in 2017, and it would make the H-GAC region second only to the New York City Metro in terms of the number of people using transit to get to work. However, money is an object, and the map you see here came with a price tag of over 100 billion dollars in capital costs alone. I can have the priority network...

So, the vision network represents the desired level of investment at high capacity and local transit service, but implementation will require obviously more revenue sources that do not currently exist. So, we selected elements of the vision network and put them into the financially constrained priority network for the 2045 RTP. We selected these elements based on factors such

as travel demand modeling, and inclusion in other regional plans such as METRONext which we kind of summarize here. And here are just some of the elements that we looked at. High-capacity services on high demand corridors. Dr. Lewis has asked that when I get to the map I point these out, which I will. Expansions of commuter services. For example, turning our HOV facilities from one way reversible to two-way all-day service. New facilities to commuter corridors that aren't developed yet, and then suburb to suburb service. We're beginning to see some interest in this actually. The Woodlands and the Energy Corridor have put together a CMAQ application for a service between those two suburbs simply because a large number of workers who live in the Woodlands work in the Energy Corridor. That service is on hold because of the pandemic, but we're already seeing demand for these kinds of nontraditional suburban commuting patterns.

We also are looking at bus priority treatments. The METRO calls it the BOOST, which I don't think I remember what BOOST stands for Bus Optimized Operations. But these would be bus priority treatments around major thoroughfares, new local and regional services, and then allowances for universal accessibility, which is the ability to get to the bus stop as well as state of good repair. And then we have some general principles and supporting concepts that can support high-capacity transit. For example, a regional fare network or system. METRO, H-GAC, and the other regional transit agencies are currently working on this as we speak. We're currently working on a memorandum of understanding regarding regional fare and regional connectivity.

Universal accessibility. This is a major... METRO is actually spearheading this. It reflects the idea that people can't use transit if they can't get to it. This means ADA accessible paths, ramps, lighting, bike facilities. And then transit friendly design, better parking, and automated vehicles. Automation will make it cheaper to provide transit and expand access to it. And of course, TSU has already experimented with an automated vehicle on campus and is looking to work with METRO to expand it to light rail station at the U of H campus. So, these are already concepts that we think will support the high-capacity transit network, and in many cases they're already in the works.

So, I'm just going to show you some conceptual examples of these supporting services. Obviously, bus priority infrastructure is something we could look at. Complete streets like this one in Toronto where you see everybody from the street cars, to the private automobiles, to the bicyclists, to the pedestrians using the same right of way. This is an automated bus platoon where you can link automated busses together and make a virtual train. Different busses can exit the platoon at different locations. This would be an interesting kind of technology to implement. And then the online bus station there. This is an example from Minneapolis where the bus in the HOV lane stops. People can go to the street level to transfer to a local bus or even walk home. And something like this could expand the type of trips that our HOV network currently serves. That instead of just going from the urban core to the suburbs they can make some intermediate stops along the way.

Here is the priority network. It expands all service types—whether they be high capacity, local, personal, and express, or even flex zones. It provides services to all eight counties of the region, and sometimes this being the first kind of service of its kind. Our estimated capital cost is just under 22 billion, so it's something the region can probably afford to build between now and 2045. It would carry an estimated 277 million boardings per year at full buildout, and our economic analysis that we did using the REMI economic analysis tool, it suggested that it could provide 520 billion dollars of cumulative benefits including travel time savings, value of reduced vehicle crashes, and increases in personal income. I'll just use the little hand here if everybody

can see it. A lot of this inside the METRO service area is based on METRONext. We do kind of expand it out a little bit. These blue lines would be your HCT... these high-capacity peak lines, which could be commuter rail or bus rapid transit that operates mainly during peak periods. Whereas the red lines would operate more on an all-day basis. And then we have services like... We envision an express bus running between Houston and Galveston. We envision new express services maybe going to Crosby and Dayton. Here is the suburb-to-suburb service I talked about between the Woodlands and the Energy Corridor. We also have another one between Sugarland and the Energy Corridor. So, just a variety of new services that we looked at and that we thought might be viable.

So, that was the first phase of the high-capacity transit taskforce. Basically, just coming up with a concept that we can include in the 2045 RTP. But one of the recommendations was that we do a phase two effort to continue examining in further detail issues related to regional transit priorities, implementation, and funding. In other words, the next step. Of course, we've had some mitigating circumstances. For example, ridership changes resulting from COVID. It would create a challenge right now to do a comprehensive phase two effort because we don't know what the new normal is going to be yet in terms of commute. More people might work from home. We don't know how that transit will be affected, so we wanted to kind of wait and see what the new normal will look like. There are also other planning efforts in the region such as at TxDOT's REAL plan, which is I think Regional Express Access Lanes or something like that. They are taking a look at all of their corridors right now. We'd like to see what comes out of that effort before we jump in with a comprehensive effort of our own.

So, what we've decided to do in the short-term is go a little bit small core with feasibility studies on selected corridors and services, emphasizing projects that promote connectivity to METRO. We think we have things pretty well covered with METRO's plans within their service area. The question is how do we expand those services out into the counties, out into the places that don't have a dedicated funding source right now? We'll continue working on supporting concepts, just regional fare and automation. And then we will reevaluate our path forward once we know better what commuting looks like post COVID and what transit usage will look like post COVID. Are people going to be comfortable riding busses with other people again? Those kinds of issues.

So, I'm just going to show you a handful of these studies that we may embark upon in the next couple of years. Outer Westpark for example – this is a candidate for study because the right of way we know already exists. The METRONext plan extends the bus rapid corridor as far west as Westchase. The question is what does it look like if we extend that out to the Grand Parkway or even all the way to Fulshear. What kind of service could we provide? How many people could we carry? So, this is something we're considering. Another one that I need to mention to the Rail District because it was discussed earlier in this meeting is a study of the US 90A corridor. The Rail District has submitted a UPWP application for this corridor and perhaps alternatives to it. This corridor has been... it was studied several times, but I think one of the last major studies occurred in 2004, so it might be time to update this study and see what our options for high-capacity transit in this corridor might be.

Other studies we may be looking at in the coming months... Right now, we have two subregional studies under way. One of which is the Liberty County Mobility Study. It could make recommendations regarding expanded transit services in the county including new park and rides to like Cleveland and Dayton, which currently don't exist. We are also working on a Southeast Harris County Study. These could make recommendations related to transit, high-

capacity transit as well, deserving a further study. And finally, a study that it's not high-capacity transit itself, but it is one of those kinds of background connector services is a study of regional connector bus network. This would connect outlying communities to each other, as well as to the METRO service area. It will feed into high-capacity services and provide a type of service that doesn't really exist right now. I don't know how many people might be familiar with the CARTS network in suburban Austin which connects these suburban counties to the Capitol Metro Service Area. But this could be similar. Just a kind of rural sort of bus network so people who live in one part of the county could get to the courthouse. People who live in Alvin can get to UTMB. Just a variety of trip types that might not be work trips but still provide access and connectivity throughout the region. This list is not comprehensive. There are other planning efforts underway. Obviously, we're wanting to see what TxDOT does with the REAL plan. But in the short-term, there are some of the things that we at H-GAC could be looking at over the next couple of years.

So, the next step obviously is to complete the unified planning work program process for the next fiscal year, which we discussed earlier. We will continue to coordinate with regional partners. METRO, Fort Bend County Transit, TxDOT, and of course this body, the Gulf Coast Rail District. As we select these projects, we will create scopes. We will go through our budget and procurement process, and then we will continue to monitor other agency efforts. I mentioned the TxDOT REAL plan. We're continuing watching and seeing how METRO is rolling out their METRONext plan. I understand that there's kind of an effort to kind of accelerate the university line bus rapid transit. And then also of course look at post COVID ridership patterns to see what that new normal might be. So, there's my email, and here is the... That's the link to the high-capacity transit summary report that we put out in 2019. Like I said, it was included in the 2045 RTP, which was approved by the Transportation Policy Council. And we're eager to see what comes next. And so, with that, I guess I can take any questions and see what I can answer for you, if there are any questions related to this effort.

Director Peterman: Mr. Gray, I do have a question. This is Tina Peterman. I'm looking at your map, and the flex zone, the green shaded... what are those?

Mr. Thomas Gray: Okay, those are... And METRO actually has a couple of these operating right now. They're called community connectors. Basically, they are geographically defined on demand response areas. Like if you live in a certain neighborhood, you can either call the METRO lift number or use the METRO's app and request a bus to come pick you up and take you... They can take you anywhere within that zone or they can take you to a central location like a park and ride or transit center that connects to the rest of the network. These have met with some success in other parts of the country, especially in neighborhoods that might be lower density or have a street network that is difficult to serve with traditional fixed route transit. So, it's a kind of flexible on demand service. The technology exists now where it can kind of line up the pickups and drop offs for the busses and kind of route the busses. Like I said, METRO has a couple of these operating in Acres Homes and in Missouri City right now. And then Fort Bend County Transit, they recently transitioned their fixed routes in Richmond and Rosenberg to the same kind of flex zone response. And Perry D'Armond at Fort Bend County Transit, she's been very happy with them. She says that the ridership has actually increased since these flex zones were put into effect.

Director Robinson: And I can make a comment on that, too. This is Jim Robinson. In fact, we did a noon hearing today on METRO service expansion for August, and we'll be rolling out in the

Gulfton area a community connector. We really see that the METRO board... we really see these community connectors as a means of providing service to people that desperately need transit, but there's not enough capacity to justify additional bus routes. But I think you will see us roll out more and more of these as time goes on.

Director Peterman: Thank you.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Well, thank you very much for having me come to speak to you today. I appreciate it, and we will continue to work with you as we move forward. Thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: Perfect. Alright, thank you. Alright, thank you, Thomas, very much for coming and sharing that with us. It gives us some background as to what's being thought of by H-GAC in terms of how we proceed as a region. There is still much to do and much to think about. And so, again, this gives us a little bit more background and backdrop to what's being considered. Alright, so thank you very much, again. We appreciate it. We're onto item 11, report from Ms. Parker. So, you all tell us if you can hear her. And if not, she might need to come to the seat, too.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Hello, everyone. Can you hear me?

Chairperson Lewis: Can you all hear Ms. Parker?

Chairperson Lewis: They said yes. Yes.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Alright. Good to see you all virtually. Hopefully, our next meeting, we can see you in person. But just a few items... I attended our RTP meeting on May 12 and we talked about the RTP amendments process, comments received, and the next steps, which Thomas talked a little bit about in his presentation as well. Also, the Greater Houston Partnership Transportation Infrastructure Advisory Committee meeting, we talked about Greater Houston Partnership's alignment with federal priorities and progress on what they're calling community impact circles, which are basically subcommittees through that transportation infrastructure committee. As we've discussed in length, our request for UPWP, we met with H-GAC to talk about it. In our presentation, they had the opportunity to ask us questions about what we were really trying to get out of this study, and how we could move forward with the US 90A corridor. I also attended the TAG State of Mobility with Mayor Turner virtually where our chair was recognized, and our District was as well for their Legislative victory for Senate Bill 1990.

Also, we are working on a pilot with the City of Houston for train info. Two locations that have been identified as blockages, we hope to put up equipment within the next month or two to find out the data for those areas that have been identified as issues within the East End.

The Railway and Roadway Committees, as you all know... I sent an email earlier today. We are asking that July would be the month that our committees would meet. So, in lieu of our board meeting in July, we will meet via committee during that same time. It's up to the committee chairs what day, whether you want to be in person or virtual, and I can help you coordinate that effort. But I would ask that you would please put that on your calendars so that we can have those meetings in July. And we will begin back with our board meetings in person in August, unless you all prefer virtually. And we'll work on that communication for next time, and we will specifically ask each board member whether you will be present in person or not. And thank you

so much for your patience working with us for this first hybrid meeting. Thank you to Mr. Gray for coming out on today. We appreciate it. And I want to personally thank Maureen for all of her encouragement and guidance. Even before the Rail District, we worked together for a number of years. And it really speaks to how many years we've been at the City. I guess when I look back at some of the emails on projects we've worked on in the past. But thank you for the opportunity, all of your guidance, the frantic emails and calls when I said, "Can you help me do this?" And even asking for her personal home email for after the fact. I thank you so much and thank you for being with us here today.

Chairperson Lewis: Alright, thank you, Ms. Parker. Item 12 is announcements by me. Ms. Parker mentioned that we're asking each of the committees to meet next month, so I'd like for you to think about it in terms of preparing your agenda for fiscal year '22. And so, give a little thought to direction. We've had a great success with our Senate Bill 1990, and so with that I think we have an opportunity to kind of stretch out a little bit. And with some of the information that Mr. Gray mentioned about Westpark and some of the other corridors. So, I want us to do some thinking about that. And then what I just mentioned would be Passenger Rail. On the Roadway/Railway side, we'd like to ask you all to think a bit about how we could expand what we're doing from the freight perspective. I think Ms. Parker sent you all a letter that folks are asking if we would submit a letter of recommendation in support for Kansas City Central and Canada Pacific. CP... Whatever...

Ms. Katherine Parker: Canadian National.

Chairperson Lewis: Canadian National...

Ms. Katherine Parker: Canadian National and Kansas City Southern (KCS), their merger.

Chairperson Lewis: Yes, for them to merge.

Ms. Katherine Parker: And how it will affect Texas freight operations. So, I'm asking that the committee come together and review that information that I've been sent and then what our response from the District would be.

Chairperson Lewis: And I would really like to ask Director Mann, I don't know if you've thought about it, but one of the background pieces we have is the support letter from the Port of...

Ms. Katherine Parker: Brownsville and Corpus Christi.

Chairperson Lewis: Corpus Christi and where else?

Ms. Katherine Parker: Brownsville.

Chairperson Lewis: Brownsville, yes. Brownsville and Corpus Christi. So, really want to know what Port Houston thinks about that. So, we'll ask you all to give some thought to that. That will come maybe perhaps before you have a chance to meet as a committee, but still, I want you all to kind of process that and advise as to what you'd like to see the District do in that vein. And August, I'd like for us to do another half day workshop. So, we start about noon. I would ask as many of you as possible to come in person. We can do a virtual workshop, because I've done

two this year, but it would be great if some of you would try to make that in August in person so that we could kind of work through, again, that fiscal year '22 agenda. And so, we want you to bring to the full board what your committee discussed in July as we chart our direction over the next year. And I think we've got some things we can think about on the freight side, and we're really going to be emphasizing that side fiscal year '22.

In that vein, I'll tell you, you all know that we have been for more years and time than we want to think about working on this West Belt Corridor and our two grade separations at Commerce and Navigation. The good news is that they are still alive. And so, it's sort of like glacial progress in terms of just inching, inching, inching towards getting that additional four million dollars, and who's going to take the lead, whether it's going to be the City or whether it's going to be Harris County Toll Road. Right now, we're at exactly how that partnership would happen, and so we are getting there. So, that's the news of at least this month, that we are getting there. So hopefully throughout August, September for H-GAC on US 90A... I'm going to throw out August or September for us to finally consummate a deal on those two grade separations. So, we'll see if we can make that. And then we've learned that... I think we already knew this, but we got a little more confirmation that at least a couple of the grade separations that would be in that West Belt Corridor are going to be covered by the NHHIP project. So, once we get Commerce and Navigation done, and then get the couple of grade separations from NHHIP, that doesn't give us... At least it shortens the list of what we would have to have to do the entire corridor. So, those are things on our mind and things that we want to see if we can do some advancement on. That's the last thing that I had.

Let me ask if anyone has any... Oh, you know what? I want to make another point. I know many of you are not transportation in your day-to-day business, and so the thing about us that do transportation all the time is we've got a lot of acronyms. And so let me just go through a couple of them that I know you've heard today more than once. So, this RTP is Regional Transportation Plan. That is the plan that H-GAC does for I think now we're on 2045, and any project in the region that receives federal money must be in that plan. So, the reason we talk about getting it in the RTP is that if it's not in the RTP we cannot accept federal money for it. So, that's the reason that you hear that. The other initial I know you heard was CMAQ, which is Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality. It's a specific pot of money. Another initial you heard, TPC. Well, Houston Galveston Area Council, the decision-making body for the transportation arm, is the TPC. So, anything that comes out of H-GAC has to be approved by that Transportation Policy Council. So, those are just some of the acronyms I know that you've heard today that we just kind of... they roll off of our tongue and, if you don't really think about it and you ask us about it, we don't realize that we're speaking in another language unless you kind of remind us. So, just wanted to kind of put that there also for you. So, with that, does anyone have any other questions or thoughts?

Director Robinson: Dr. Lewis, I'll mention one thing that would be perhaps of general interest. Our Commissioners Court today is considering a proposal from the Toll Road Authority and from METRO to waive tolls for METRO busses on all of the HCTRA system in Harris County. If they do that... Basically we don't run busses on those because we're really not budgeted to pay the tolls. But if they approve it, it would be... it would give us the ability to make some significant routing improvements that would actually save about \$650,000 a year in operating costs that could be used for further system improvements. One thing that I'm really excited about... We've had lots of requests from Exxon employees who live in the central core of Houston, but they now have to commute out to the campus. And plus, HP has approached us

saying the majority of their service employees... this is also true for Exxon... the majority of their service employees live in the greater Greenspoint area. And if Commissioners Court will do that... and I certainly hope they will [Audio cuts out 00:57:44]

Chairperson Lewis: I think Director...

Director Owen: We lost him.

Chairperson Lewis: Yes, we lost your... Robinson, Yes, can you...? We heard that if Commissioners Court will do that... I think we lost you at that point.

Director Robinson: Okay. Can you hear me now?

Chairperson Lewis: Yes, we can. Can you pick up with if Commissioners Court would do that...

Director Robinson: Yes, if they do that, one of the projects that I think that would follow along pretty quickly... We've had requests from Exxon employees who... because of Exxon used to be downtown, there's many of them that still live in the central core of Houston. They would like to see outbound park and ride service from downtown out to Exxon. Plus, we've had meetings... I think four different meetings that we've had with HP and with Exxon as well, and hundreds of service employees out in that Springwood development actually live around/in the greater Greenspoint area. And if we could have toll free access for outbound busses on the Hardy Toll Road, we could put a terminal somewhere close to International Airport and could I think really begin serving literally hundreds and hundreds of people that badly want public transit because right now they have no access to it. So, I'm keeping my fingers crossed that the court members will look with favor on this today.

Chairperson Lewis: That does sound good, and that two-directional service is one of the things that Thomas almost mentioned when he said in the high-capacity transit study one of the pieces they wanted was to ensure two-directional service on every HOV. So, what you're talking about, even though it's on the toll road, it would serve the same purpose going outbound, and the money you would save, that's real money. Exactly. Alright. Anything else?

Chairperson Lewis: Yes?

Director Ross: Director Ross, I've been hearing some news about people on the east side of Houston, downtown Houston, and trains backing up the roads again. Is that something that Gulf Coast Rail District should be engaged with? Do we have a role, or do we just watch it?

Chairperson Lewis: No, I think it is absolutely something we can be engaged with, and that's one of the things that we wanted to bring to that Roadway/Railway committee. UP and Tyson participates in that committee, so I think we want to absolutely have that conversation and see if there's something we can do to assist with that. So, yes, and I would really like for Roadway/Railway to have that conversation.

Director Mann: Yes, if you can send me that information... Basically what we really need is what days, what trains, how much it's blocked, what time it's blocked. If we can get that information, then we can do something with it. It needs to be more than anecdotal. And I would just say we're getting pretty close to TxDOT's report on the rail study, so we should have a

regional approach to rail here pretty quick. At least from the rail, H-GAC, and TxDOT perspective. So, that'll be one of the things that we're looking at as we go forward, too.

Chairperson Lewis: So, from what I understand, that's one of the things that Roadway/Railway can talk about. From what I understand is there's no entity that's recording those delays. It's being recorded by the railroads themselves. Whether that's being transferred to any public body, the answer seems to be it's not. And so, one of the things that I would want Roadway/Railway to talk about is if we want to engage in trying to get those counts done. So, that would be something that you all would talk about because I understand that they're only available from the railroads.

Director Mann: Yes. No, I think that's a good thing. And like I said, if we can quantify information, not just it be anecdotal then we can absolutely try to do something about it.

Chairperson Lewis: Perfect.

Director Mann: We just need actual data.

Chairperson Lewis: Right, alright. Sounds good. Ms. Parker?

Ms. Katherine Parker: I spoke earlier about the pilot project. There were ten locations originally on our list. We'll work with two simply because of costs right now. But they will provide the data that we need. The devices that we can put up will be in the City's right of way. But of course, we're working with the railroads as well, so everything is transparent as far as what we're collecting and how it will be used. It is our hope that we will be able to capture blockages, length of train, any trespassing issues. Some of the things that particularly Council Member Gallegos' office has expressed a concern over recently and in past years and also Council Member Cisneros. So, we are a part of those conversations. We would love for Roadway/Railway to provide input as well. So, I'll definitely send you the information that I have currently on that, and I think you have the recent email about the merger.

Chairperson Lewis: So, Ms. Parker, what you're saying is that the City is going to start doing those delay studies or count studies.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Right, just for two locations off 10.

Chairperson Lewis: For two of the locations, okay.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Yes, and one of those will be in the East End area. We're hoping to expand. We were approached about partnering cost wise with that, but we'll have to work on that. Maybe after these first two locations, we will be able to partner with that because it's data not just for the City of Houston to use but it's something we could use as well.

Director Ross: Well, I would say if the City... This is Director Ross. If the City is collecting data, let's be sure that they're collecting the data that is most needed in order to be affective in this public discourse. And so, if this committee, the Railway Committee, has certain information that they'd like to have, and the City is willing to collect, I'd be sure they were collecting what we needed.

Chairperson Lewis: And I concur. That's what I think we'd like to see is Ms. Parker to work with that committee to make sure that we're getting... what the City needs and what we would like to have also to see, as you say, that we can partner to alleviate some of the disadvantages, discomforts, and angst that's occurring over there on the east side because of the train blockages. Anything else?

Director Ross: I need to sign off.

Chairperson Lewis: So, if we all sign off... I think we're all about to sign off. Alright. Does anybody have anything else?

Director Owen: Judge Duhon, I see you have my friend, Larry Callies' picture behind your head.

Director Duhon: You know Larry?

Director Owen: I do. Very well. That's the picture that the girl did that won the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's art contest with him.

Director Duhon: Yes, Larry Callies also played at my first wedding, by the way.

Director Owen: Did he really?

Director Duhon: Yes. That's too funny.

Director Owen: Have you been to his museum?

Director Duhon: I have not. I just found out the other day that he is running that museum. I saw him on TV. I'll have to go check it out.

Director Owen: Yes, he kind of lost his voice a little bit. He's had some issues with that, but he's a great guy.

Director Duhon: Well, thank you for noticing. I like those prints. They're pretty cool.

Director Owen: Yes, they are.

Chairperson Lewis: Alright. Well, if there's nothing else. I think we're ready to adjourn. So, I'd entertain a motion.

Director Mann: So moved, Bruce Mann.

Director Duhon: Second, Duhon.

Chairperson Lewis: Mann and Duhon. So, I'm going to say all in favor, everybody saying aye I'm certain.

Board: Aye.

Chairperson Lewis: We'll look forward to communicating through the month of July. Thanks again to Thomas Gray. Sorry you all aren't here to get your cupcakes. I don't think we can mail them.

Director Duhon: Uber works. Uber is fine.

Chairperson Lewis: Uber Eats, right. Alright, take care, everybody (adjourned at 3:00 p.m.).

ATTEST:

DocuSigned by:

*Dennis Winkler*

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Dennis Winkler, Secretary  
Trey Duhon, Vice Secretary  
Gulf Coast Rail District

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