



Minutes of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board Meeting – May 9, 2023

A meeting of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board of Directors was held on Tuesday, May 9, 2023 at Houston TranStar and via video conference. In attendance at the meeting were Directors Ronald A. Beeson, Robert A. Fry, Jr., Stephen Gilbreath, Veronica Chapa Gorczynski, Kendric Jones, Jon Keeney, Carol Abel Lewis, Robert Maldonado, Jr., Bruce Mann, Jean Mann, Allen Owen, Tina Arias Peterman, and Jeff E. Ross. 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.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I am Dr. Carol Lewis, presiding officer of the Gulf Coast Rail District. I'm going to call our meeting of the Gulf Coast Rail District to order (2:00 p.m.). Today is May 9th, 2023. I almost said 1923. I just said that to Mayor Keeney a few minutes ago. I don't know why I want to be in the 1900s, but it's 2023. Today's meeting is being conducted with options to participate in person or by video conference. Our public meeting location is Houston TranStar, 6922 Katy Road, Houston, Texas. We're in Conference Room 120A. This video conference is conducted through Microsoft Teams. That link can be found in the meeting invitation, the agenda, and the public postings. The meeting is open to the public. The public will have the opportunity to address the board during public comments with a limit of three minutes per speaker. If you wish to address the board, please approach the podium if you're in the room or raise your hand if you're online during our public comments period. Our board members may participate by video conference in accordance with the provisions of Section 551.127 of the Texas Government Code applicable to a governmental body that extends into three or more counties. Based on the Open Meetings Act requirements, the Gulf Coast Rail District board members participating in the Microsoft Teams will need to be seen and heard throughout the meeting for attendance and to record voting; therefore, members calling in via telephone will not count for the quorum or for voting. As required, I am physically present for the board meeting and now ask that the secretary conduct the roll call, and we'll appreciate you being audible when your name is called. Thank you.

Director Jon Keeney: Alright, Madam Chair. Well, I know Mr. Beeson is here.

Director Ronald Beeson: Yes.

Director Jon Keeney: Robert Maldonado?

Director Robert Maldonado, Jr.: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Veronica Chapa Gorczynski? Not here. Stephen Gilbreath?

Director Stephen Gilbreath: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you, sir. Jeff E. Ross?
Director Jeff Ross: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you, sir. Tina Peterman?
Director Tina Peterman: Yes, here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you, ma'am. Dr. Lewis?
Chairperson Carol Lewis: I am here.

Director Jon Keeney: Excellent. I think I'm here. Bruce Mann? Not here.
Ms. Lisa Patke: He is on.
Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, he is.
Director Bruce Mann: Yes, I'm here.
Director Jeff Ross: Yes, he's here.
Director Bruce Mann: Thank you.

Director Jeff Ross: And Gorczynski is here as well.
Director Jon Keeney: Yes, I got her.
Director Veronica Chapa Gorczynski: Good afternoon, y'all.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Allen Owen?
Director Allen Owen: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you, Kendric Jones?
Director Kendric Jones: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Christopher Lane? Jean Mann?
Director Jean Mann: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Robert A. Fry?
Director Robert Fry: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Excellent. Madam Chair, we do in fact have a quorum.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Wonderful. Thank you so much. I want to confirm that the meeting was posted via the Open Meetings Act, correct, Ms. Patke?

Ms. Lisa Patke: Correct. Yes.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: That is correct. So, we will move on to item number four, discussion and possible action on the minutes for April 11th. Director Keeney, please.

Director Jon Keeney: Do we have any additions or corrections to the minutes from anyone?
Hearing none, I need a motion to approve.

Director Ronald Beeson: Director Beeson will motion to approve.

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

Director Allen Owen: Director Owen will second.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you, Director Owen. Hearing no questions, all those in favor?
Board: Aye.

Director Jon Keeney: Any opposed? It is unanimous.

Director Veronica Chapa Gorczynski: Director Gorczynski, abstain. I wasn't present so I can't vote on them.

Director Jon Keeney: Okay.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you. Director Mann, I have to ask you to put your camera on. I don't know if you're able to find that little cross mark across your camera to get your camera on when we vote so that we can see you. That is required. Sometimes on my computer...

Ms. Lisa Patke: She doesn't have a camera.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: She doesn't have a camera. Okay, never mind. Thank you. Alright. I was going to say the other thing, sometimes on my computer that camera thing slides. It's hard to get it unhooked.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. We're on to item five, report from the treasurer. Director Owen, please.

Director Allen Owen: Madam Chairman, Chris Palis is not there today but David Banos is so he will give the report.

Mr. David Banos: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm David Banos and I'm here on behalf of Municipal Accounts and Consulting giving you the bookkeeper's report. As you pass the cover page, you have the cash flow for your checking account. You have five checks for your approval, 2062 to 2066. Total disbursements of just under \$8900 leaves you with an ending balance in this account of \$131,439. Next page, the account balances for the District. The total for the District is \$1,479,982. Following are pages four and five, the actual versus budget comparison is for the month of April 2023 and your total for your fiscal year. Page six is the grant status report for the District. Grant total dollars remaining is \$3,934,105. And the balance of my report is the West Belt Project details. And that's all I have. Let me know if you have any questions.

Director Jeff Ross: This is Director Ross. It's good to see that next month we'll get rid of our last sub-2% CD. The ladder is working for us.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes. Mayor Owen, your mic has got a cross in it so we can't hear you.

Director Allen Owen: Got it, okay. Are there any other questions for David? If not, then I will entertain a motion to approve Resolution 23-12 ratifying our payments. Is there a motion?

Director Jeff Ross: Motion, Ross.

Director Veronica Chapa Gorczynski: Second, Gorczynski.

Director Allen Owen: There's been a motion and a second. All those in favor?

Board: Aye.

Director Allen Owen: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. Thank you very much.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: We're on to item seven, public comments. There wasn't anyone signed in the back. Is there anyone on the web who would like to make a statement? Thomas Gray, we'd like to acknowledge you.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Good afternoon, members of the board. I'm Thomas Gray, principal transportation planner at the Houston-Galveston Area Council. I'm invited today just to let everybody know that the RFP for the US 90A Transit Corridor Study was released this morning.

I apologize. Yes, on behalf of H-GAC, I apologize it's taken so long but our procurement department did get it done. It had been released this morning. If you want to see it, it's on our procurement page. If you go to www.h-gac.com/procurement, you'll scroll down and see it. And it's accessible through our OpenGov procurement portal. Just to give you some dates, it was issued today. We will be having a pre-proposal conference for interested bidders on Wednesday, May 17th, at 2:00 p.m. And all these dates are in the procurement that's available on our website. The submission deadline for potential bidders is going to be June 22nd because we hold these things open for about six weeks, and we expect to have a shortlist of potential consultants in late June and going to the H-GAC board of directors for approval on July 18th. So, it has been released this morning finally. We're getting the procurement process started, so hopefully we will have somebody under contract later this summer and can get this project started.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Wonderful.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I have to tell you, Mr. Gray, that both Jeff Ross and Allen Owen had big smiles on their faces when you started that report.

Director Allen Owen: It's only been 25 years, Thomas.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Yes, I know, I know.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, Director Ross has a question. Go ahead, Director Ross.

Director Jeff Ross: This is Director Ross. Thomas, you refer to this as bidders. Is this actually a priced submittal or is this a qualification submittal?

Mr. Thomas Gray: It's more of a qualification submittal. We do not have a price listed in the RFP. It's simply because when we developed the budget for this, it was a couple years ago when we put together our Unified Planning Work Program. Since then, there's been a lot of inflation and other factors. So, we're expecting the consultants who bid to come back with a price, and we can negotiate with them, if it's reasonable.

Director Jeff Ross: So, are you following the State Professional Procurement Practices Act? You keep talking about pricing competition here and that would preclude any engineering, lawyer.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Right. This is not an engineering study. This is a planning study.

Director Jeff Ross: Okay.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Our procurement department has had discussions with ACEC as to the language we used to make sure that this is not considered an engineering study.

Director Jeff Ross: So, is there a matrix of evaluation shown in the request?

Mr. Thomas Gray: I don't think so. There is evaluation criteria.

Director Jeff Ross: Okay.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Yes. There are responsiveness, qualifications, experience, past performance. We do have that but that's standard.

Director Jeff Ross: But not a price.

Mr. Thomas Gray: No, there's no price.

Director Jeff Ross: Okay.

Director Allen Owen: Thomas, this is Director Owen. I assume they would go back and look at previous studies that have been done and...

Mr. Thomas Gray: Absolutely.

Director Allen Owen: ...update that, right?

Mr. Thomas Gray: Yes.

Director Allen Owen: I hope we're not trying to reinvent the wheel here is what I'm saying because a lot of work's already been done on this study.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Understood. Yes, we actually reference a lot of the previous studies going back to the study that H-GAC did back in 2004, and since then there's been several additional studies. And we do reference those in our additional resources page on the website.

Director Allen Owen: Very good. And does this study take it all the way into Fort Bend County or how far does it go?

Mr. Thomas Gray: The study area is just a big kind of ellipse, but it includes everything basically from the Fannin South Park & Ride to Rosenberg.

Director Allen Owen: Very good. That's where the other study did too.

Mr. Thomas Gray: You're right. We are not trying to reinvent the wheel. This is just a high-level kind of what makes sense for this corridor kind of study.

Director Jeff Ross: Yes, you're changing the mode. You're opening up to a different mode than we've studied before.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Right.

Director Allen Owen: The other one was a rail study. This one has other modes...

Mr. Thomas Gray: Right. It could be bus rapid transit, for example, could be.

Director Allen Owen: Which is probably what it's going to be.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, it's 18 months. Am I correct, Thomas?

Mr. Thomas Gray: I think it's a 12-month study.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Twelve, okay. We went to 12, right. I wanted to confirm the timing on that.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Yes. Just because of the budget considerations, we want to keep it... Plus it's a high-level study so we don't expect it to last too long.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Wonderful. Alright, thank you. Anyone else? Thank you so much, Mr. Gray. We will look forward to I guess in the next week you're sending information about the stakeholder groups.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Right.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright.

Mr. Thomas Gray: Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you so much. Is there anyone else?

Director Jeff Ross: Yay.

Director Allen Owen: Yay.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Is there anyone else online who would like to make comment? Or in the room? Alright. Seeing no one, we'll move on to item eight.

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: Hello? Hello? Can you hear me?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, yes, we can. Is it Dominic?

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: Okay, sorry. It is Dominic, yes. Thanks, Doctor. This is Dominic Mazoch. I know I have my three minutes. And my thing is... And I'm glad the gentleman who spoke ahead of me because what I'm going to say is I want to piggyback on something he was talking about, the 90A corridor. Not necessarily the 90A corridor but I think between Gulf Coast and within the Gulf Coast, the proposed HART improvements, I think I know we need rail improvement and transit improvements in the area. And my thing is... I'm going to use an example of ... that could happen. And this is for the University Line, METRO University Line. There is talk about, and I think the proposed idea is to put the BRT lanes under the Galveston Subdivision of Union Pacific at Lockwood. However, from a meeting that I was talking to with Councilmember Gallegos, there is a proposal for the FTA to have a grade separation at York Street which is west of the Coffee Plant versus Lockwood which is east of the Coffee Plant. And I think with this, with H-GAC, with HART, with transit studies, I think the thing is we need to work together as a team. And remember, team means together everybody accomplishes more. In other words, I'll use the Lockwood thing or the University Line example. Maybe if there was a little bit more openness on everybody's part and make that one part go down York Street and then put a super nice grade separation at York Street. Yes, you got to get the FTA involved, you got to get the FRA involved, the State..., Union Pacific, and everybody else. I think we need to start breaking down silos and working together, even within HART, within this group, within

H-GAC, within ... TranStar, with everybody because we can't be fighting anymore. We got to be working together to solve our problems. And with that, Dr. Lewis, I'm going to send it back to you. Thank you for your time.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. Thank you, Mr. Mazoch, appreciate your comments. Anyone else? Alright. So, we are on to item eight, just announcements from me. I am unhappy to announce that the Rail Relocation Fund seems to have ended with no money in this last legislative packet. It was disappointing because it started off the session with \$200 million in there. What happened to it we have no idea. A different legislator put in 75 million and the same happened, it went away. And so anything I say after this will be speculation, but I will say that I think it didn't have a champion. So, when the budget negotiations and whatever started happening, when people weren't in the room, it came off the table and there was no one really paying attention to say, "Put that \$200 million back." So, we are past the point at which we think we can get it in there. There was a last-ditch effort to reach out to committee chairs and so forth, people on the committees, to try to get that back in but it does not seem to have happened. So, if we look up and see the budget later and it's there, we can all be thrilled, but at this moment it doesn't look like it's there.

So, what we now have planned is honestly to start working this very summer to get money in that line item. Back to the speculation, the other sort of attendant piece to it is that it did not require a bill. It's already a line item so all it required was somebody to just drop the money in there. So, I think it got less attention. If it had actually been a bill, then it would have had a sponsor. It did not have a sponsor per se. So, that said, this summer we're planning to start again getting ready for the 2025 legislative session to get money put in that line item. And trustfully we will be more successful. I will say I moved to Houston in 1976 and way back then, went to a luncheon where it was said by a legislator that it's easier to kill something in the Texas legislative session than it is to get something through, and it generally takes two or three cycles to get it through. Gulf Coast Rail District is very sort of beyond a very wonderful position to have gotten our BRT and our automated technologies through in the first go, which we were able to do. This time we were not able, but we will begin again this summer and have what we're talking about, really having a statewide... It really was a statewide effort, but I think we can do more from the statewide perspective to try to work from all corners of the state to make sure that in the 2025 cycle we get some money in that line item.

The sort of sidebar to that is that it won't be quite as exciting because the money that was put in the IJA bill for matching rail-related projects will undoubtedly be well-shrunk in two years. So, there won't be as much federal money available for us to reach out for and nor will there probably be a \$33 billion surplus in the Texas budget, so we won't have as much to work from. But we will still be working to get something allocated in that particular line item. So, that's kind of the story as it stands, and if anyone would like to make comment they can. I'm smiling at Veronica because she and I had had a plan to go up one day and kind of volley and ask for support and we were thwarted by one of us—me—getting COVID and being unable to go, so I guess all things are as they should be. Does anyone have any comments? I wonder if we had made it would that have helped, Veronica, if we had actually been able to go up there but we have no knowledge.

Director Veronica Chapa Gorczynski: I wouldn't blame yourself and I wouldn't blame the circumstances. I think that we as a group probably have a responsibility to educate. That we don't have a champion in an area this large... I mean a member in the Texas House or the Texas

Senate... may actually reflect on us and our leadership a little bit because we need to have those champions, given the importance that freight brings to the economy and this mode of transportation brings to the region. It also should be an easier win, and I don't know what the solution is, but I would encourage us to probably have a deeper conversation on identifying the changes in leadership because this is what we're appointed to do.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I like that idea about identifying who our leadership could be and kind of exactly was said was no one in the sort of... the way that he sort of explained things, there was no one really carrying our water, and so there we ended. Anyone else?

Director Jeff Ross: Yes. I mean, I agree with Veronica. We got to find a champion and with all the noise about rail problems, particularly on the East End. I was surprised that we didn't have one, but they're balancing against other things. We also may want to consider also having a lobbyist again because that's what kept us in touch with the action on the success we had on the last session.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes. You are absolutely correct about that so we will... you know as we talk over the months. And again, like I said, we're going to start this summer so those are things we can actually make sure we have on the table. Director Mann?

Director Jean Mann: Yes. We work a lot with the Legislature, and I think if we... I know a lot of them, but I think if we look into their backgrounds, there might be some that have like railroad ties or a railroad type of background and understand this. And one thing that I've learned over the years of working in the Legislature is it's not so much what they're championing, it's who is championing. It's not what's in a bill, it's who's carrying it. So, we need to get that right person that can move and shake in the capital and get the support that we need.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Appreciate that comment. I am taking notes and you did get some head nods with your comment there. Thank you. Director Peterman?

Director Tina Peterman: Yes. Hi, Dr. Lewis. So, my comments would be given that we are about both the movement of goods and people, those seem to be very nonpartisan topics, and so I would encourage our outreach to be on a bipartisan basis. And then secondly, if we work with the group Statehouse Consultants in the public finance and infrastructure industry, and so, Dr. Lewis, if I could put you in touch with Colin Parrish, I'd be more than happy to do that, and we can at least start having some preliminary conversations about getting some assistance so we don't have to do all the heavy lifting ourselves.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Wonderful. Thank you for that. Director Mann 2? You know we have two Director Manns so Director Mann B?

Director Bruce Mann: Yes, thanks. TxDOT has a Rail Division. I think we need to try to get them to carry some of the water on this because they can put it in their budget that goes before the Legislature. So, I think we need to really engage them as part of this too. And we ought to try to see if we can get the Transportation Chair to be a sponsor of the bill because if they are, then we know the bill's going to get introduced.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, appreciate that. You're 100% correct. I actually have hopes that there will be somewhere in TxDOT's budget where they can still find a little bit that we could

use for match maybe on a project or two, even though it's not the whole of what we asked for. So, that point is well taken as well, thank you. Director J. Mann, is your hand still up or did you not lower it?

Director Jean Mann: Yes. I agree with Director Mann 1 that TxDOT definitely could help push this through the Legislature. And I'm going to have lunch after a ... meeting with someone from TxDOT and I'll bring this up to them and see how they can help.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay, wonderful. Thank you. Alright, is this any other director that has a comment? Alright. Thank you. That's kind of our story on that, so good learning experience. I think we have lots of wonderful suggestions here that we're going to put in a structure and begin following through just as soon as we kind of take two breaths. Once you kind of get to the end of the legislative session, you have to have a month to recover and then start again in July. Alright, thank you.

Alright, the other thing we have is The HART web page, so I'm happy to say that we now have our HART web page up. It will grow over time as the activities and all the decisions and energies and items evolve around The HART, and so we're happy about that. I will also sort of as a liaison piece too say that TAG released its Motion Map last Thursday at the State of Mobility by Mayor Turner. And on that TAG Motion Map, Gulf Coast Rail District has a line, a link, and a section about The HART. So, that should indeed get us more exposure around the region, where Ms. Parker and Tyson Moeller have an opportunity in many of their national forums to mention that, and so they are getting national attention about The HART. And there's a lot of positive response from the federal government in particular about how we're going forward with this. So, just happy to say that we now have the web page. And I've got on my notes here to make sure that we get The HART to us for a presentation probably the July board meeting. So, any comments about that? Alright. Well, that takes us to the end of the agenda. June 13th, our next meeting. Is there a motion to adjourn?

Director Allen Owen: Madam Chair, Director Owen here. Again, I want to ask has Fort Bend done anything with their representative?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Not at this time. We will do another reach out.

Director Jean Mann: Madam Chair, I'd like to commend you on your HART website. It looks fabulous.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Oh, wonderful. Thank you. Great. So, look, I'm saying thank you, it looks great, but I have to baton hand to Ms. Patke and Katherine Parker and there's one other person.

Ms. Lisa Patke: Sarah.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Sarah. What's Sarah's last name? We can't remember.

Director Jean Mann: There's a lot of work that goes into those so there's enough for everyone to take credit because it looks really nice.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Good, good. Thank you on behalf of them as well, thank you very much. Director Beeson, your square is lit. Alright. If there are no other comments, I would entertain a motion to adjourn.


Director Bruce Mann: So moved, Bruce Mann.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay, got Mann. Is there a second?

Director Jon Keeney: I'll second it.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright, Keeney in the room. Alright. Thank you all. Look forward to seeing everybody next month. Thanks so much. (Adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

ATTEST:

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Jon Keeney, Secretary
Gulf Coast Rail District

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