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Minutes of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board Meeting – February 9, 2021

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A meeting of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board of Directors was held on Tuesday, February 9, 2021 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, Michael Dyll, Pablo Escamilla, Abigail M. Gonzalez, Carol Abel Lewis, Bruce Mann, Richard L. Muller, Jr., Allen Owen, Jeff E. Ross, and Dennis Winkler. Absent was Director Jim Robinson. 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: Calling the meeting to order (2:00 p.m.). It's February 9th, 2021, Gulf Coast Rail District. I would like to have certification of the quorum. I don't see Director Winkler, so Judge Duhon, would you do that for us? Certify quorum, please?

Director Duhon: Okay, let's see. We got Jeff, Richard, Carol. Quorum is how many, five?

Chairperson Lewis: Seven.

Director Duhon: Oh, seven.

Chairperson Lewis: Right.

Director Duhon: Who else? Let's see. Okay, there's one, two, three, four, five with Rich. Who am I missing?

Chairperson Lewis: I think just if we look at the list, Judge. I'm just looking... [Crosstalk 00:00:56]

Chairperson Lewis: Pardon me?

Ms. Katherine Parker: Call the roll or...?

Chairperson Lewis: Judge Duhon, would you like Katherine to call the roll for you?

Director Duhon: Yes, please.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Alright. Director Beeson?

Director Beeson: Yes, I'm on.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Thank you very much. Director Dyll? No. [Crosstalk 00:01:15] Did I hear Director Dyll?

Director Dyll: You did. I'm here.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Director Gonzalez?

Director Gonzalez: I'm here.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Alright, Director Ross?

Director Ross: Present.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Director Escamilla?

Director Escamilla: Present.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Alright. Director Lewis?

Chairperson Lewis: Present.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Director Winkler? Alright. Director Mann?

Director Mann: I'm here, thank you.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Okay. Director Muller?

Director Muller: Present.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Director Owen?

Director Owen: Present.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Director Duhon?

Director Duhon: Present.

Ms. Katherine Parker: And Director Robinson? Alright.

Director Duhon: Alright, Madam Chair, I do certify we have a quorum.

Chairperson Lewis: Perfect, thank you so much. I'd like to ask about the posting and compliance myself, so I will ask Ms. Parker. Will you verify that for us, please?

Ms. Katherine Parker: Yes. All postings were made in a timely manner.

Chairperson Lewis: Alright. Move to item four, discussion and possible action on the minutes. Again, Judge Duhon, would you manage that for us, please?

Director Duhon: Sure, I'd be happy to. What you have before you are the minutes from the January 12th, 2021, meeting. I guess at this time I will go ahead and make the motion to approve the minutes.

Director Ross: Second.

Director Owen: I'll second.

Chairperson Lewis: All in favor?

Board: Aye.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay. Any opposed? Alright, thank you. Alright, thank you for that.

Chairperson Lewis: Moving on to our report from the treasurer. Director Escamilla, if you would address numbers five and six please for us?

Director Escamilla: Yes, item five is a report that Mr. Cory Burton will deliver.

Mr. Cory Burton: Good afternoon, everybody. Cory Burton with Municipal Accounts here. If you turn past the cover page, you see your operating fund checking account had received the \$1,358. Expenses this month totaled \$4,804. Nothing out of the ordinary this month. Left you with an ending balance in your checking account of \$43,997. The next page is the detail of your investments. We did purchase one new CD in your operating fund there since last month, and we have another one on order that you'll see in next month's bookkeeping report. After that, you have your detail of pledged securities, everything is fine there. Your budget follows on the next few pages. You are a December year-end, so January's the first month of your new fiscal year. So, as expected, you're running pretty close to budget. You're off to a good start, doing just fine there. Then the last several pages cover your grant status report and there weren't any changes there from last month's report. That's all I have for you today. Be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Director Escamilla: If there are no questions, we can move on to the next item, Madam Chair.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay. Alright, thank you.

Director Escamilla: Item six, discussion and possible action, Resolution 21-04, ratifying payments. And there are the payments there. I would move approval of Resolution 21-04 ratifying payments.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay, is there a second?

Director Duhon: I'll second the motion.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay, that was Judge Duhon. Any discussion? All in favor?

Board: Aye.

Chairperson Lewis: Opposed? Alright, thank you. Got that handled for us.

Chairperson Lewis: The next item on the agenda for us is public comments. Is there anybody on the platform or on the phone who would like to make a comment to Gulf Coast Rail District Board?

Mr. Tyson Moeller: Good afternoon, Tyson Moeller is on from Union Pacific. No items to address formally.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay. Good afternoon, Tyson. Delighted to have you.

Mr. Tyson Moeller: Thank you.

Chairperson Lewis: Alright, if there's no one else, we'd be ready to move on to item eight, which is the status report on our legislative priorities for this session of the Texas Legislature. Director Ross, would you like to lead us in that conversation?

Director Ross: Sure, thank you, Carol. The committee that Pablo chairs, I guess it's Fiscal and Legislative Affairs, went through a selection process of folks who could help us out tracking and promoting the two issues that we'd like to see adopted in this legislative session. Those two issues are, in short order, to expand the definition of what we can do from commuter rail to a broader definition of a kind of passenger rail or passenger transportation services, because we really don't know if it's going to be rail, particularly as the industry seems to be changing so fast.

And then the second item is to work out something so that CenterPoint could be indemnified and that would allow us the opportunity to negotiate with them later on the use of a right-of-way, 300-foot wide right-of-way, and we would only use part of it. But to use that right-of-way to get from Hiram Clarke near Highway 90, near Main Street, all the way out to the Fort Bend County municipalities. And so, this follows along with the Hike and Bike Trail legislation that was adopted by the legislature two sessions ago, and the committee selected Rick Miller to be our consultant to help us get through this. Rick is a former legislator elected primarily out of Fort Bend County. I'm not sure how many terms he's served in the House. I thought he said about four, but I could be corrected on that. He's excited.

We had a Zoom conference with him earlier this week, I guess it was yesterday, and then there's a meeting being set up for Friday to talk further about the strategy moving forward. And hopefully between now and Friday, Katherine and Carol will have worked out any issues there are in the contract with Rick, so that he can start running. At that, I'll stop and let us enter any discussions we may have.

Chairperson Lewis: Questions, comments from anyone? Okay, hearing none. Thank you, Director Ross. We would move on to item nine, Ms. Parker?

Ms. Katherine Parker: Good afternoon, everyone. Just a few things on my list. Yes, we have worked out all the issues with the agreement and it's being routed for signature. Lisa and I are working on that, actually as we speak. And also working on our meeting time and location for Friday. So, I need to, I guess, speak with Director Muller to see if it's possible to meet in person or not. Some directors are meeting in person, others may want to still be remote. So, we will have that figured out, hopefully by in the morning.

I attended Planning Commission this past week to discuss a property located near our West Belt Project, and basically a variance request from a resident who wants to do a single-family residential home, but our project would not affect them building on their lot. In fact, they'd probably be more affected by the proximity of the track than our project there at York Street.

Also, I attended the Southeast Harris Subregional Committee meeting and submitted comments for that for this past deadline. On the 21st of January, we met with HCTRA in Harris County, Commissioner Garcia, Aaron Dunn, Peter Key. Dr. Lewis and I were in attendance to discuss the West Belt Project as well and trying to get gap funding for that.

On the 20th of January, I also attended the Southwestern Rail Conference. I had an opportunity... It was a series of webinars, an opportunity to hear from different professionals and legislators about rail and how it's being done here in Texas. And so that was informative as well. That's all I have.

Chairperson Lewis: Thank you. Any questions for Ms. Parker about any of the things that she made comment? Alright, just saying that the meeting with HCTRA I think went very well. We are proceeding with those grade separations at Commerce and Navigation. We'll look forward to the point at which we can tell you we've got something actually ratified. For now, we are continuing, I think, to make progress, so that is good news for us.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Dr. Lewis?

Chairperson Lewis: Yes.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Director Winkler has joined us as well.

Chairperson Lewis: Okay, great. Great to have you. Okay, so now we're on to item 10, anything from me. I guess, first of all, I'd like to thank everyone who adjusted their calendars to be with us last Tuesday when we had our special meeting to approve our legislative consultant. It's the first time I think we had done that, and I was very happy that you all accommodated us so that we could get moving on that. So, it really shows your commitment to GCRD and the agency is important to you. I know everybody probably had to do some calendar adjustments to do that, because we all pretty much fill our calendars when there's nothing there. Not necessarily something we try to do but it happens. So, I really want to thank all of you for adjusting and for making a way for that meeting to occur.

And we are very happy, as has been reported both by Director Ross and Ms. Parker. Things are moving well with Mr. Miller. I think we're going to be real happy with his helping us. I'll tell you, there's no question in my mind that we will be far farther down the road with his hand in this than we ever would have been without. And so, we will appreciate having him to be a part of helping us to get through this, so it'll be a big step forward for us in what we're trying to accomplish.

The second thing I'd want to say is that you'll recall, for those of you who were on the board last year, you'll recall that in January we had a workshop, a half-day workshop, where we really kind of plowed through our mission, and actually revised our mission statement a little bit as a result of that workshop, and we set out our agenda for the year. We weren't able to actually do that this year but I kind of want folks to start thinking about maybe having a similar workshop, a half-day, that we'll do I'm thinking maybe June or July. We kind of want to keep our antenna up as to when we might be able to get together at TranStar, what their requirements are right now, and how they're establishing and setting protocol for anything that might go on in that space. But just kind of think about and we'll kind of check calendars and maybe plan way ahead to do that half-day. And at that point, we'll be halfway through the year, but I think it'll give us an opportunity

to look back, and we'll know at that point whether we were successful with these two legislative items. That will give us a foundation for where we go from there on that side.

I'm really wanting us to, over the next couple of years, to be able to do a real monumental increase in what we're doing on the freight side. And so, want to be able to set some goals and some sort of 2022-2023 items that we're really shooting for in that regard. So, we would use that opportunity to talk about that as well and find out things that we've learned. Director Mann has talked a lot about what TxDOT and H-GAC are doing in terms of the rail report, to know there are other initiatives underway regarding freight. And then I think our own board of directors' members have freight knowledge that we haven't had an opportunity to really tap and take advantage of. We want to do that and then that will help us to set our agenda for 2022. And so just kind of want you all to start thinking about that. Then, I guess that's the last sort of item that I had that I wanted to get us to think about. I'm open for questions about anything that I may have just mentioned if anyone has any questions or comments about any of those items.

Alright. If not, our next meeting is set for March 9th, 2021. It's 2:17. We're about to be finished, but what we can say for the month of February is that we had two sessions and made up our basic hour because we're very short. It did not take us long to get through our agenda today, but again, thanks all. If anyone had anything they wanted to say before we adjourn, I'll just pause again and offer that opportunity. I can't see if anyone has their hand raised, so just unmute your mic and speak up if anyone would like to say anything before we adjourn. Alright, hearing no one, we will adjourn. I look forward to seeing you all on March 9th unless you hear from us in between. There might be some reach-out that we do regarding the items we've got on the legislative agenda. So, with that, we are adjourned. Thank you all very much and see you next month. (Adjourned at 2:17 p.m.)

ATTEST:

DocuSigned by:  
*Dennis Winkler*  
74AA347369BF440...  
Dennis Winkler, Secretary  
Trey Duhon, Vice Secretary  
Gulf Coast Rail District

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The disruption of normal business due to the COVID-19 prompted the use of electronic signatures.