



Minutes of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board Meeting – May 14, 2024

A meeting of the Gulf Coast Rail District Board of Directors was held on Tuesday, May 14, 2024 at Houston TranStar and-via video conference. In attendance at the meeting were Directors Angelique Bartholomew, Ronald A. Beeson, Robert A. Fry, Jr., Stephen Gilbreath, Veronica Chapa Gorczynski, Kendric Jones, Jon Keeney, Carol Abel Lewis, Bruce Mann, Jean Mann, and Allen Owen. Absent were Directors Robert Maldonado, Jr. and Jeff E. Ross. Written notices of the meeting including the date, hour, place and agenda for the meeting were posted with Harris County, with the Secretary of State, and at the Gulf Coast Rail District office located at Houston TranStar in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act. The inaudible portions of the recording were removed from these minutes.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Hello, everyone. I'm so delighted to see so many in person at the table. We're thrilled. We have our quorum. I'm about ready to call the meeting to order for the Gulf Coast Rail District. Today is May 14, 2024. We are called to order. It is 2:03 p.m. Today's meeting is conducted with opportunity to participate in person or by video conference. The public meeting location is Houston TranStar, 6922 Katy Road, Conference Center Room 120A. Video conference is conducted through Microsoft Teams, and that link can be found in the meeting invitations, the agenda, and the public postings. The meeting is open to the public. The public will have an opportunity to address the board during our public comments section with a limit of three minutes per speaker. If you wish to address the board, please approach the podium, or raise your hand if you're online during the public comments period. Board members may participate by video conference in accordance with provisions of Section 551.127 of the Texas Government Code applicable to a governmental body that extends into three or more counties. Based on Open Meetings Act requirements, Gulf Coast Rail District board members participating in the Microsoft Teams will need to be seen and heard throughout the meeting for attendance and to record our voting. Therefore, a member calling in by telephone will not be able to be counted in the quorum. As required, I'm physically present for the board meeting and ask that the secretary conduct the roll call. Please respond audibly once your name is called. Director Keeney, if you would take that for us.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Director Beeson?

Director Ronald Beeson: I am on virtually. Thank you.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you, sir. Robert Maldonado? No. Veronica Chapa Gorczynski?

Director Veronica Chapa Gorczynski: Present. Good afternoon.

Director Jon Keeney: Steven Gilbreath?

Director Stephen Gilbreath: I'm here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Jeff Ross? No. Carol Lewis?
Chairperson Carol Lewis: I'm here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. I'm here. Bruce Mann?
Director Bruce Mann: Present. Thank you.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Angelique Bartholomew?
Director Angelique Bartholomew: Present virtually.

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

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Hold on. Allen Owen is here. He just hasn't gotten his mic on yet.
Director Jon Keeney: Oh, okay, I'm sorry. I'm looking down.
Chairperson Carol Lewis: Director Owen? Your name was called.
Director Allen Owen: Director who? Director Owen is here virtually.
Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. And Jean Mann? Don't see her. Robert Fry?
Director Robert Fry: Here.

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. We have a quorum, Madam Chair.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Awesome. Thank you so much. We're on to item three, confirmation that our meeting was posted in compliance with the Open Meetings Act.

Ms. Lisa Patke: Yes, it was.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: It was indeed. That was 2 o'clock last Friday at the latest. Item four, discussion and possible action on the minutes for our April 19th meeting, Director Keeney?

Director Jon Keeney: Thank you. Are there any corrections or additions to our minutes? Hearing none, all those in favor?

Board: Aye.

Director Jon Keeney: Any opposed? It's unanimous. Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Wonderful. Thank you. Report from the treasurer, Director Owen, please.

Director Allen Owen: Madam Chairman, I think David Hawthorne is on virtually, is he not, or is he there?

Director Kendric Jones: Darrell is on.

Director Allen Owen: Oh, Darrell's on. Okay. Alright, Darrell. Do you have a report? Can't hear you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes. Use your microphone if you can.

Director Allen Owen: I think you're muted.

Director Kendric Jones: It shows that it's been unmuted.

Director Allen Owen: Darrell, are you muted? Okay. He's going to call in.

Mr. Darrell Hawthorne: Can you hear me?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: We can hear you. Thank you.

Director Allen Owen: Yes, we can.

Mr. Darrell Hawthorne: Alright, sorry. I should have known that once I came to the Arizona office, it would mess up on me. Okay. So, your report starts on page number 20 in your packet. Since the last meeting, you've disbursed a total of \$15,075, leaving an ending balance in your operating checking, \$34,345. Next page is your account balances showing your CDs, money market, and your checking account. The next couple of pages in your packet is your actual versus budget comparison through April. The next few pages are your grant status report. And that actually completes your report unless anyone has questions.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: No questions? Okay.

Ms. Katherine Parker: So, Mr. Hawthorne, we have here two... Are these two certificates in the packet that we received?

Mr. Darrell Hawthorne: Are they for CDs?

Ms. Katherine Parker: Yes. So, the "signed by the secretary," is that correct? I just want to make sure.

Mr. Darrell Hawthorne: Okay. Those you just need two signatures on the bottom, one with the secretary, and then just one to attest to the secretary's signature.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Okay. Alright. Thank you so much.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. If there are no other questions, is there a motion?

Director Jon Keeney: Motion to approve.

Director Bruce Mann: I'll second.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay, Keeney and Bruce Mann. All in favor?

Board: Aye.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Any opposed? Alright. Thank you.

Mr. Darrell Hawthorne: Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. The next item that we have on the agenda is item seven, on discussion and possible action on Resolution 24-12, accepting the 2023 financial report, which also includes our audit report. So, if you go to page 31, you'll see that it begins there. And we have, to enlighten us and provide us additional background conversation, Suzanne Villarreal.

Ms. Suzanne Villarreal: Thank you. We'll start on page 36 of the report. It's the independent auditor's report. Under the second paragraph in our opinion and it ends in United States of America, that's our paragraph for our clean opinion, so everything was good. And then we'll go to page 39 of the report. This is the Management's Discussion and Analysis report or MD&A. It's a condensed version of the report. It has a lot of information if you need a quick answer. Page 41 has a comparison of the current year to the prior year. Sometimes that's good information, hopefully all the time. Then we will go to page 45. This is your statement of activities and governmental fund statement of revenues, expenditures, and changes in fund balances. Your revenues were greater than expenditures by \$97,274. So, you now have a fund balance of \$1,527,488, which is more than eight years in reserve. So, that's very healthy. Then we'll go to page 47. These are the rest of your financial statements. They're required by our professional standards. So, a lot of detailed information, the creation of the District January 23, 2007, as well as information on your deposits and investments and other agreements that you have. Then we'll go to page 55. This is your schedule of budget versus actual for the general fund. Your actual revenues and expenditures were less than budget due to the grant income and expenditures. But if you remove those two lines, your budget is to have an increase in your fund balance of about \$16,195. So, your actual increase was more. And part of that is due to your interest revenue being \$60,000 more than you budgeted. And then you also kept your costs below budget on all your items. Then we'll go to page 56. This is the beginning of the other supplementary information. All the required schedules are included in this report. It's got expenditure details, five-year comparison of your revenues and expenditures, and your board and consultant information. On page 65 through 69 is the client rep letter, and that's your representation to us regarding all the audit information that we received for the audit and requires your signatures, whoever's here. And that's all I have unless you have questions for me.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you very much. Questions for the audit and financial report?

Director Jon Keeney: Just a comment. It's clean, that's good.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, if there's no other comment, is there a motion to accept?

Director Jon Keeney: So moved.

Director Kendrick Jones: Second.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay. We've got Keeney and Jones. All in favor?

Board: Aye.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Is there any opposition? Wonderful. Thank you, Ms. Villarreal.

Ms. Suzanne Villarreal: Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Appreciate your presence today.

Ms. Suzanne Villarreal: Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: We're now on to item eight, public comments. Is there anyone who would like to speak?

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: Yes.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Mr. Dominic Mazoch?

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: Okay, you said turn this thing on. This is Dominic. Can you hear me?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, we can.

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: My name's Dominic Mazoch. I am in the conference room at TranStar. I'm going to comment on something that's on the agenda ahead of me, but I'm going to go ahead and give my ideas about it. I'll be frank and honest. I did not know about this group except when I was going to METRO board meetings. That's how I found out about this group. And I first started speaking at this group because board member Jim Robinson told me to come here and start speaking. That's how I got signed up into this. I don't know what type of advertising you want to do. I think down the road, once we get this HART operation going, I think the more the public knows about it, the more the public has a buy-in on it, I think that's a good thing. My thing would be maybe having a representative from this group, number one, speak to the various government agencies that are related to this group. Maybe have a once a quarter, once a half a year thing, say at METRO or City of Houston Council, the various county courts, Commissioners Court here in Harris County. And lastly, how do we get to the public? I mean, I don't think we're ready for that sort of thing. But I think as time goes on, I will tell you what one group METRO has done a good job with is there's a model railroad club in Memorial City Mall. And we hand out paper trains, paper light rail trains that turn into a bank. And every six months, I have to go to METRO and get a big box of these. And we've been doing this for eight years. I mean, maybe that might be the thing. Go to the model railroad clubs. Go to Papa Ben's Train store on Bellaire Boulevard. And once this thing gets going, have a little pamphlet just for public information. I think the public wants grade separation. I think it's good... or variations thereof. And I think that might be it, is to get this thing open. Again, when everything is ready to go. With that, I have no other comments. I'm sending it back to you, Chair. Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Mazoch. Is there anyone else online who has raised a hand? Seeing none, we will close out item eight, our public comment section. We'll go to number nine, media strategy. Director Bartholomew, would you lead our conversation here, please? I don't see her anymore. Is she there? I know she was. I don't know if she got bumped.

Ms. Lisa Patke: Erika's online.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Do you see Director Bartholomew in the backdrop?

Ms. Lisa Patke: No, I don't.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay. Alright. Well, I don't know exactly what she would have said, but Ms. Johnson is on. Would you provide us a few comments and an update on how we're doing, please, Ms. Johnson?

Ms. Erika Johnson: Absolutely. I'm going to share my screen. I have a short presentation. Can you all see my screen?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Not yet.

Ms. Erika Johnson: What about now?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Not yet.

Ms. Erika Johnson: Okay.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: The same thing you do every time. It just didn't work sometimes. Something, Director Bartholomew... and things happen. She's back.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: Is it still pending?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: We don't see it yet. Director Bartholomew, in your absence, I went ahead and asked Erika Johnson to present. So, she's trying for pull her PowerPoint...

Director Angelique Bartholomew: I'm here. I'm not sure what happened just then. It disconnected. I apologize. I'm trying to get the camera back on.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Your camera is on.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: It says that it's on.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, we knew you were here, and we also knew that you disappeared, so...

Director Angelique Bartholomew: Uh-oh, you're cutting out.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Technology.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: Can you hear me?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: We can hear you. Do you want to say anything while Ms. Johnson is trying to pull her screen up?

Director Angelique Bartholomew: There's a lot of feedback, yes. I'm not sure what's happening here.

Director Allen Owen: You're back on, Angelique.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: Alright. You can both see and hear me?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: We can see and hear you, yes.

Ms. Lisa Patke: Yes.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: Okay, great. Okay, Director Lewis, I'm sorry. I must have missed what you were asking. We're at the social media at the point of introducing what's been done from a marketing standpoint.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, that's where we are. So, I had basically cued Ms. Johnson up, but her screen is not showing her PowerPoint yet. So, if you had some comments, now would be a great time.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: I'm not sure if it's just me, but you're completely cutting out.

Director Allen Owen: It's not just you. No, it's not just you.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: Okay. Okay. We're catching every other word. It's not coming through. I was trying to fix that when I lost the connection. I thought it was my computer.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I'm trying another microphone. Is that any better? Is that better?

Ms. Lisa Patke: We're getting a lot of feedback noise, so I'm muting people.

Ms. Suzanne Villareal: Is that microphone still on?

Ms. Lisa Patke: Yes.

Mr. Dominic Mazoch: Sorry about that.

Ms. Lisa Patke: I think it's Angelique's. We're getting a lot of feedback.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: I'm here.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Well, apparently there may be feedback from your microphone. I don't know if that's impacting. So, let me see just right quick if we're going to be able to get... Ms. Johnson, were you ever able to get your PowerPoint to show, your screen to show? Okay. Can you unmute her? No. So, can you unmute yourself, Ms. Johnson? You're muted.

Ms. Erika Johnson: I'll share my screen now.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay. So, we'll go ahead with that. And then, Ms. Mann, if we can hold your question until we finish this cycle, unless you want to say that you can't hear.

Ms. Erika Johnson: I don't know what's going on. Is it okay if I just go through the updates?

Ms. Lisa Patke: I can share it.

Ms. Erika Johnson: Where I can share my screen.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay. Hold just a second, Ms. Johnson. Can you send it to...

Ms. Lisa Patke: I have it.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Oh, Ms. Patke will show it for you. Hold just a second. Hold just a second though. Director Mann, on screen, you needed to make a comment? So, since your mic is not on, Jean Mann, we'll wait until the presentation is over. Unless you want to...

Director Jean Mann: Can you hear me?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, we can hear you.

Director Jean Mann: Okay. Alright. I'm good because I was having technical difficulties.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay. Yes, we can hear you now.

Director Jean Mann: Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you.

Director Jean Mann: And if you'll mark me here, I'm sorry I'm late. It's been a little crazy.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay. Understand. We'll definitely mark you here. Alright. Thank you. Alright.

Ms. Erika Johnson: This is the previous presentation.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay.

Ms. Lisa Patke: Sorry. Hold on.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: Erika, is it the last one that you just sent to both Katherine and I?

Ms. Erika Johnson: Yes, it is.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: Thank you. I apologize.

Ms. Erika Johnson: Thank you so much. If we can put it in presentation mode, it'll guide us through the next steps.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: We have it up in presentation mode.

Ms. Erika Johnson: Awesome, thank you. Okay, we can continue on. So, right now where we are, as far as with an update, we are at our Rails for Safety campaign. We have now reached a point where we've transitioned from an organic reach to now a paid campaign reach, which is a part of our contract. And so now we'll see more, a boost within the social media as it relates to impressions and engagement. We can hit the next slide. [Embedded video begins playing.]

This is an example of what our team has caught as far as capturing footage in the field so the public can see the projects in motion. And it's a part of the visual storytelling that we are promoting to connect the public with the overall mission of GCRD.

[Embedded Video continues to play.] Hello. My name is Angelique Bartholomew, serving on the GCRD Board. Our mission...

Ms. Erika Johnson: Hit the next slide. The current campaign that we're running this month is Community Rails, and so this will focus on GCRD's partnerships and initiatives and primarily really focusing on THE HART initiative. We can progress to the next slide. And following that, the next campaign will be the Innovate GCRD campaign. Next slide. So, I know we talked about benchmarks in the last meeting, so when we kicked off this, again, this is purely organic reach,

and so the impressions were 362 and the reach was 182. So, that's without any paid content, any bots, just purely organic outreach. Next slide. And as you see, as we've continued to promote more content, the impressions and reach have increased significantly. So, now we're at over 3,000 impressions and at 4,000. And what I anticipate now that we've entered into the paid campaign is that we will triple those numbers. And so what I anticipate is a 50% increase in impressions and reach and a 50% increase also in followers as well. Next slide. And this will give you some key insight on some of the hashtags. The hashtags are performing well. You'll see the Rails for Safety performed quite well, and I anticipate that the community engagement hashtags will perform quite well as well. Next slide. Any questions?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, I have a question because I'm not a social media person. I've seen hashtags. How does that work exactly?

Ms. Erika Johnson: So, there's two ways it works. So, we have a hashtag like GCRD. If I'm the general public and I want to know more about the organization, I will look up the GCRD hashtag, and then I will find all the content that's relevant to GCRD. If there's a hashtag for Mother's Day, for example, if you look up a hashtag, a popular hashtag for Mother's Day, you would enter in the hashtag and then see GCRD's post associated with that. So, it can be either specific to the organization or it can be based on an observance or a popular hashtag that's trending.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Okay.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: I will add that, thanks to Bruce, we are also tagging a number of the board members with regard to the post, which has helped increase the attraction and the hashtag volume as well. So, thank you to each of you who are sharing that or resharing that information. And Erika's done an amazing job keeping both Executive Director Katherine and I informed.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Director Mann, Bruce, has a question/comment.

Director Bruce Mann: So, can you tell where the impressions are coming from? Because I'm just going to be straightforward here. I'm trying to see how much I have biased that because on a couple of my posts, I have like 300 or 600 impressions. So, I want to see that we're actually getting something from what we're doing and not just what I'm doing.

Ms. Erika Johnson: Oh, absolutely. So, in the detailed social media report, I have a hyperlink and it details where all the impressions are coming from in the audience right now, and I can share that with you.

Director Bruce Mann: Okay. Yes, I don't want my sharing to skew our statistics.

Ms. Erika Johnson: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. There's a lot of impressions coming from LinkedIn, but they're also coming from Instagram as well.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: But I think the point is, Director Mann, we do want what we put out there to add to the count.

Director Bruce Mann: Yes. No, for sure.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I just want to make sure that we weren't misunderstanding that point because we want all of us to be doing that.

Ms. Erika Johnson: And the impressions are driven by audience base, especially with LinkedIn. So, that's why it was so important for all the directors to like the page because it's really pulling from your ecosystem. So, when I build an audience to advertise on LinkedIn, it's pulling from your friend groups and who you're connected to. So, you have to engage for the algorithm to understand how to engage the audience. Did that make sense?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I actually understood that. When we're off camera, I'm going to turn to Ms. Parker and tell her to tell me more about this hashtag business because I... but I don't want to take everybody's time with that. So, any other questions or comments for Director Bartholomew and Ms. Johnson?

Director Jon Keeney: Well, I can just tell you it's great to see all the information flow through my Facebook and I share it. And so it was very heartwarming to actually see it and it made me proud of what we do as a result of the scripts that you put together and the marketing campaign. So keep it going.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. Thank you for that comment. Anyone else?

Ms. Erika Johnson: Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. Well, thank you very much. We'll look forward to more. And I'm going to get with it this month. Classes are over, so I'll have a little bit of time.

Director Angelique Bartholomew: I'm going to tag you and make sure that you're with it.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I'm going to be looking forward to that. Alright. We're on to item number 10, project manager update. I thought I saw Ms. Koslov walk in.

Ms. Barbara Koslov: I'm here. I'm on this far side.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Great. Alright. Ms. Koslov, I'm going to baton hand to you.

Ms. Barbara Koslov: Okay. Okay, now I'm on. A couple things. I've been doing my research on both Gulf Coast Rail District, but in particular THE HART and some of the funding opportunities. And I've been going back and forth with Judge Emmett to talk to him about getting some advice from him on how we pursue funding at the state level, maybe through the Texas Freight Advisory Committee. Maybe a good option is going through the county infrastructure fund. So, I've been doing my research in it and talking. I did put together for, I guess, our media approach, about 10 frequently asked questions. They're fairly generic, but it just kind of describes what THE HART is and if people see them, well, who's involved in it?... where does the money come from and that sort of thing?... how do we decide what improvements we're going after? So, hopefully those comments will be useful. I've also been communicating with Thomas Gray at the H-GAC there. They've got their project management plan developed and they're about to kick off the steering committee. Unfortunately, I think it's later this month and I'll be out of town. But they are going to have their first steering committee kickoff meeting for the 90A study, where we're looking at some sort of commuter improvement,

BRT, or whatever comes out of the study. So, those are the things I've been working on. I'm putting together some sort of legislative appropriation, like resolution for you to review. I'm just trying to continue to gather information to make sure it's coherent and it's consistent with where the state is. They're going to come out with a new list of priorities also, so hopefully all this will dovetail together. And that's pretty much what I've been working on these days. Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Great, thank you. Thank you. Questions for Ms. Koslov?

Director Jon Keeney: Just a comment. She took the time to come down and sit down and talk with me about HART and interest and funding and whatever, and we had an excellent conversation. I really do appreciate the time you took to do that.

Ms. Barbara Koslov: And I enjoyed visiting with you and hearing what you had to say and your thoughts, so I thought it was a very productive meeting.

Director Jon Keeney: Yes. Well, same here.

Ms. Barbara Koslov: Thank you for taking the time.

Director Jon Keeney: Same here. I had a conversation with Dennis Paul yesterday. And he thinks very highly of you, and he was thrilled that you had joined our organization. And just to build on that conversation briefly, he's very much interested in region solutions, and he has filed some bills multiple times, and we're going to work together to enhance what we can do as a region. And this organization was one of the first regional organizations really, followed by the Gulf Coast Protection District. So, we need to build on our strength as best we can and thank you for your work.

Ms. Barbara Koslov: Thank you.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you. Anything else for Ms. Koslov? Alright, thank you very much, Barbara. We appreciate what you're doing here helping us to move this particular initiative down the road and look forward to our outcomes. Alright, item 11, report from the Executive Director, Ms. Parker.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Thank you so much. Good to see everyone this month. Next slide. So, meetings attended. Of course, our monthly meetings—TAC, RTP, and TPC. But of note is the Southwest Rail Conference, which was held in Hurst, Texas, April 15th through the 16th. There were nearly 300 attendees. Speakers included Andy Byford with Amtrak; Travis County Judge Andy Brown spoke on high-speed rail. Representative Terry Canales was there virtually. As the chair of the Texas House Transportation Committee, he spoke about the rider for the Rail Relocation Fund and some of the challenges as to why it failed when the Senate and House couldn't reach an agreement. He talks about we also have a lot of work to do to convince our Senate friends that rail relocation and rail in general should be a priority. Also, FRA Administrator Bose, Amit Bose was there in person. He encouraged Texas to be ready when the NOFOs are released. He spoke about passenger rail and the recently awarded RCE grants for the state of Texas. Congressman Troy Nehls was there virtually as the chair of the House Transportation Infrastructure Subcommittee. He talked about his support of high-speed rail in America where it makes sense, and as our states grow, that infrastructure evolution, there should be a variety of transportation options that are preferable. Lastly, these are just a few highlights.

There were quite a few speakers, but Jeff Davis, who's the director of the Rail Division of TxDOT, talked about their conventional passenger rail service for the Texas Triangle, and how Texas has received two of the corridor ID planning grants that were recently awarded. The next thing was the Infrastructure Summit hosted by BayTran. Kudos to Amy Skicki for an informative conference that focused on flooding, drainage, and transportation. And some of the topics included grants for transportation, a presentation by the Army Corps of Engineers on water and environment, H-GAC, Houston Wilderness Environmental talked about environmental strategic partners, and the Department of Transportation talked about the port grant program, FEMA. And then lastly, Texas General Land Office talked about environmental restoration. Mayor Kevin Cole of Pearland was our keynote speaker and talked to us about highway and municipal partnerships. Next slide.

Our upcoming presentations are tomorrow, BayTran Transportation Committee meeting at 9 a.m., and then the Transportation Policy Council will be this Friday at 9:30. We'll have an opportunity to talk about HART and touch a little bit on Gulf Coast Rail District as well. We are preparing for our Rail Grants 101 workshop, which will be June 11th, which is the same day as our board meeting, but it's just going to be an extended meeting from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. It will be here at TranStar, and that is a recent change, literally minutes ago before our meeting started. Because our numbers are growing, so we need a little bit more space than what H-GAC could offer us this time. They only had a smaller room that held 32 people, and since our TAC presentation about the workshop, I've had people who are wanting to sign up, I just want us to be more comfortable. So, TranStar came through, and we will have our workshop here. We will send out an updated flyer, which has a QR code that will gather some information from each of our participants. We're hoping that each of our board members will be in attendance. If not, representatives from your entity that you represent to be a part of this informative workshop. The FRA will open up the workshop for us. We'll have virtual representatives and in-person representatives from the FRA. We'll have a talk about railroad advocacy. Right now, I have representatives from Texas Rail Associates. Some of the Class Is have agreed to be a part of that conversation panel. And then lastly, we'll talk about lessons learned. So, some of our past RCE or CRISI grant recipients, I have a call out to the City of Laredo and the City of San Antonio, who both received past grants, to give us kind of updates about their experience with the grant process with FRA. There'll be quite a bit of information in this short amount of time, so hopefully we'll be able to answer as many questions as possible and provide some resources to all those who are participating. I think that's all I have on my list. Have any question?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, I think the workshop is exciting. I'm sorry? I think the workshop is exciting and it's a feather for us to sponsor this, and especially at the end of the day, if we can see ourselves getting some successful grants come through the process. So, I was just kind of curious, you presented to TAC last Wednesday.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Yes.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, you said people signed up for the workshop because of it. What was the other sort of response from folks on... and I guess Ms. Chapa Gorczynski was there as well, so she can speak to that as well. Just kind of give us a general impression of how the presentation was received and what the TAC folks thought.

Director Veronica Chapa Gorczynski: Sure. Katherine always does an exceptional job at the presentation. I think that too, some of the comments earlier, people want more education as to

the breadth of what GCRD does, and so it was just a really great opportunity to also plug in a workshop. One of the things that we were reminded, I think both Katherine and I did, is that you can send people from the teams at any level, if you're learning about grants and opportunities, but you can't apply for money if you don't have people showing up and going through the process of educating themselves. So, I'm really grateful to GCRD, and Katherine, your presentation to the TAC, and... to H-GAC that day. And to think that we walked away with a different cross-section of partners from probably, and you were there with us as well, like smaller and mid-sized cities were also interested, which I think is going to be key for problems that we have in town, all around Texas, but it may just be one crossing, not 144 or whatever the number is.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Wonderful. Alright. Thank you. Anything else for Ms. Parker?

Director Angelique Bartholomew: I just want to thank Ms. Parker for her interaction with the marketing and communications. Erika has really been engaged over the last several days updating information, and I hope that the registration for the workshop can be attributable to some of the efforts for pushing out so much social media. So, thank you so much.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Yes, I would like to thank her and Lisa. I'm always kind of last minute, "Ladies, can you help me get this together?" So, Erika put together the flyer, Lisa did the QR code and the form. Right before we went on for TAC, so that we're prepared for these upcoming meetings. So, I appreciate that, and then we will get some information out. And as Director Chapa Gorczynski spoke about the presentation, yes, there were smaller cities, like the mayor of the City of Pattison, he talked about a new council member, Brazoria, Galveston County, all came on to say that they would be sending people to be a part of this. And of course, the City of Houston, so quite a bit of interest, so we're happy about that.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Wonderful. Alright, that takes us to item 12, announcements by the chair. We mentioned to everyone that we did have an opportunity to sit down with Commissioner Ramsey representing that fourth quadrant in Harris County. A very productive meeting. And one of the things we talked about, I'm kind of going to roll that into THE HART legislative efforts. One of the priorities that we're talking about with everyone around the state is trying to get money from the State of Texas that we can use for grade separations. And I'm saying other safety improvements, it doesn't just have to be a grade separation. But Commissioner Ramsey was very positive about the kinds of things we're talking about with the state, and so just so that all of us as GCRD board members are kind of understanding what we're pursuing. We're pursuing two avenues. One is with TxDOT, and we may have mentioned last month that TxDOT does provide some funding for grade separations, but their focus has always been on system. It doesn't mean that they've never done anything off system. They have, but that's not the focus of their portfolio. The focus of their portfolio has always been on system. So, we're actually doing some behind-the-scenes work to talk to them about expanding that a little bit and including more on off system, as well as increasing the dollar value that they put in for grade separations. So that's one avenue.

The other avenue is what we can do with the state legislature next time to put money into grade separations. So, these are the things that we've heard, and anyone who's got contacts, and surely Mayor Keeney, the one that you mentioned with Representative Paul, would be in that list, of how to work with the state to get money for grade separations and other safety improvements. And the thing we're talking about now, so this is in process, everyone, and I know that this is

going to go out because our meetings are public and we have minutes, but we are talking about a fund that was set up for counties, and Director J. Mann—I just decided that B. Mann and J. Mann. Director J. Mann, I think we talked about that with Judge Keough maybe before. And he may have been the one who mentioned to me that there is a county fund that was set up when he was in the legislature for the state to give money to counties for infrastructure. And so what we would need to do to decide whether that's something that we should put energy into is, number one, because what we know from rail relocation before, that we tried to do in the last session, was that part of the failure was that no one knew how it would be implemented. No one knew what would happen. We asked for these dollars to be put in there, but there was no attendant guidance as to how it would be disbursed. So, we would have to figure out how that would happen if we are able to get money into this county infrastructure fund.

The second thing that we've been told is that if we're able to get money into it, we probably need to come forward with a list, sort of, of ready projects because people want to see what we're talking about funding, just not sort of nebulous railroad and safety improvements. So, we're working now to get a list together, statewide really, of potential projects. And then the other piece that's attended to that is that we would need to be at the point where, when the state comes back in 2027, the money has been spent. They will not be happy if they assign money to this county infrastructure pool, they come back in 2027, and we haven't done these projects. So, that's all the thinking that's going into where we are right now. And as you can imagine, we're in the throes of just trying to figure it out and decide exactly how to proceed. It's not just us. And so the hard legislative efforts, it really is a big group of people statewide at the table talking about this. So, that's kind of a summary of A and B, where we are, and I'm happy and would love to talk to board members individually if you have any ideas about any of this or have any strong relationships with any of the folks in the legislature for us to kind of talk through. And again, the big piece, honestly, is how we would set it up so that the counties would know what to do to get the money if we're able to be successful. So, that's kind of a summary of sort of A and B. And Executive Director Parker and Director B. Mann, they've kind of all been at the tables as this has been talked about, Ms. Koslov has been in one of the sessions. So, you all, if there's anything I didn't cover and you think it would be advantageous for everyone to know, please contribute conversationally. If you have money, we'll take that too.

Director Bruce Mann: I guess maybe just for everyone's edification because I know some of us have talked about this, but going through TxDOT isn't the worst idea just because there is a model out there for having done that. Port infrastructure was funded \$200 million last biennium through TxDOT in a legislative appropriation request. So, there is precedent for trying to do something like that. There's obviously the county infrastructure fund. And I'll just sarcastically say I'd really like to know how that works because is the governor going to send money to Harris County. I mean, there's a question. And I'm not trying to be a smart aleck. I'm just saying there's politics. So, we have to figure out how that works because that would be my concern is how the legislature would appropriate that money to the counties.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Any other comments? Barbara?

Ms. Barbara Koslov: I just want to add, I was actually—not related to what we're doing, but I was at a 36A coalition luncheon where the keynote speaker was Caroline Mays with TxDOT. And so I talked to her for a few minutes post that. She's very, or so she seems because Chad works for her, very aware of what we're trying to do. And she says, "I got Chad looking at things we're going to give you. In addition to what came out of the Houston-Beaumont study, we're

going to give you a list of who's working on it. But she said, "I am aware. We're trying to do more to help rural communities." So, TxDOT, I don't know what their next step is, but they're engaged. And so maybe it's incumbent upon us to reach out to Caroline and say, "Okay, let's wait and see what Chad gives us." Because she kind of made it sound like, "We don't even see what Chad's working on." But once we hear or have that meeting, we need to say, "Okay, we need to go." Because I think they're listening, but they're waiting for us to push a little bit. And that's kind of my take on that, from talking to her.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: And I appreciate that, and I think that's absolutely right. So, we're going to take that as the push in the back. Because when we met with Caroline before, she actually asked us to come back and meet with her quarterly. So, it's about, it hasn't come to time yet, but June/July, it will be time to go back to her. And so, yes, and thank you for that, so consider ourselves pushed in the back.

Ms. Katherine Parker: Yes, Chad is working on that list. I think it currently has over 300 locations on it. And Bruce, to your comment, that is the challenge that we have. Of course, the political side of it, but it's on us as a collaborative to make the argument that we need the rail funds for Texas. So, we'll do the best that we can with what we have and in the timeframe. January 2025 is when it's upon us, and so our work begins as far as those legislative efforts, but we appreciate everyone that has come to the table. They've all been open to the conversation. We really haven't been met with a lot of opposition. They all understand our concerns and what we're trying to do. So, I think that that's a plus because a lot of times we're not all speaking the same language or at least willing to listen to each other. So, we're getting there. Thank you all so much for the efforts. And for those who have connections, we will definitely be calling or asking for your help.

Director Jon Keeney: Just a thought, which everybody can boo or throw me out, but do we need to actually sit down with Commissioners Court and sort of lay the groundwork for what we were trying to achieve to get some consensus around these funds possibly flowing in? I'm just concerned that it's sort of hit or miss right now.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, I appreciate that. And I would say I started this off with we met with Commissioner Ramsey. So, what I'm going to take your statement as is that we need to meet with each county commissioner, not just in Harris, but all of our counties. And I will say yes.

Director Jon Keeney: Yes, okay.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: And so what we can do is... There are going to be a lot of them. We can spread ourselves out. And Director J. Mann, she's there in Montgomery. And so we can spread ourselves out. Director Bartholomew is in Fort Bend. And make sure that we get around the table.

Director Kendrick Jones: I can help you out a little bit.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes. We've got one of the commissioners sitting here at the table. Awesome. Alright. So, well taken. So, Director Jones, because you're sitting on the other side, I can't see you. I know you're here. But please always come. Don't think, "Oh, let me get on the screen so she can see me better." I didn't mean that.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Alright. So, that takes us through our agenda. Does anyone have anything else today for the good of the order?

Director Bruce Mann: Just one quick follow-up question. Where are we with the current resolution and METRO?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: We are at... Go ahead and answer. You want me to? So, the short version of it is we are wanting Montgomery County to sign. I've talked to Judge Keough and given him information in writing. I have not circled back. But I will say that's on my list of things to do, to circle back with him. Director J. Mann, do you want to say anything in addition to that?

Director Jean Mann: I'm sorry. I was reading the chat. I'm sorry. I didn't hear what you were talking about. Were you talking about METRO?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, that's exactly, about the concurrent order to add METRO as a voting member. That was the question.

Director Jean Mann: Yes.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: And so my response was, just so you know what you didn't hear when I was speaking, that I had given Judge Keough information in writing and talked to him, and that I think the ball is in my court to circle back with him about the information I've given. That was what I had said.

Director Jean Mann: Yes. And I think you need to circle back with him again. My take was that he is not willing to do that, to sign that, or put that back in court.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: And you're closer to it than I am.

Director Jean Mann: And I don't know, there could be a stipulation that he can't put it back through the court or what, but he pretty much stands on that the commissioners rejected it, and so he's not going to poke the bear.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Let me just put this little piece on there too. So, the other piece, as we spoke, that somehow the conference, and, again, it's on us to have...

Director Jean Mann: No, I know what you're talking about. Yes, the misinterpretation that it was about high-speed rail and not that.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, exactly, exactly. So, that was on us to have inappropriately given information. So, basically the conversation...

Director Jean Mann: Yes. I don't think he wants to put it back on the court. Not him, but he just... I didn't say anything to the commissioners, but he put it through as it was. They voted it down. The commissioners were not aware of any projects that we're doing here or what we're trying to do. They saw the request. Judge Keough, I had briefed him a little bit on it, and he can't talk to the commissioners because it's an Open Meetings violation thing, so these guys

essentially work without talking to each other. But he put it before the court, and they voted it down.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: I think I understand. So, just so that everybody knows what you're talking about, there was a misunderstanding when it went to Montgomery County that it was related to high-speed rail. And so now, here the issue of circling back would be complicated, and that's my interpretation. So, now Commissioner Jones, do you want to say something?

Director Kendric Jones: Director Mann, I don't want to overstep your jurisdiction, but I do want to ask, do you mind me having a conversation with Commissioner Gray, who I have a pretty good relationship with, and Commissioner Raleigh, and as well as telling Judge Duhon to call you all's judge to just clear up any misinformation? Because my next question would be, I guess if they're not willing to approve it and each representation have a member part of the board, then does that mean that they forgo their position of the board? And the other side of that is Judge Duhon always talks about having a seat at the table so you can know what's coming or what direction things are going to come, which I think that's why they have a representative on the board. But if they, I guess, continue to go down this route, then where does that leave the board?

Chairperson Carol Lewis: That's a good question. It absolutely has nothing to do with their seat on GCRD. It's a totally separate issue. The thing that Ms. Parker and I have talked about that we've got to get clarification on is does the legislation require unanimity on our legislation, or can we go with majority? So, that would be in it. So, yes, to everything you said about talking to the folks that you know on Commissioners Court in Montgomery. And yes, we'll try. But then, as you said, the takeaway is what is, again, the next step? So, the next step would be for us to determine whether unanimity is required for passage.

Ms. Katherine Parker: It's being reviewed by the City of Houston legal department as to what the next steps are. Unfortunately, the attorney that has worked with me for these past few years passed away. So, all of her work is being reassigned. So, that's where we are right now. But we had long conversations about whether it has to be all or none or is there an opportunity to have a percentage. Not just for the concurrent ordinance, but if there's something else that comes up in the future that we would need to have it clarified. So, that's where we are right now. And as soon as they assign a new attorney, then we'll take it back.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Thank you for that question, Commissioner Jones. It was an important one. Not that all the questions aren't important, but I think that was something that everyone wanted to know.

Director Bruce Mann: Just one maybe... I've been here 23 years, but I'm not sure how Texas government works.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, let me say this. If this is something that will take us outside of what we posted, I want to put up a word of caution.

Director Bruce Mann: So, this is just...

Chairperson Carol Lewis: Yes, but that's not on our agenda. We didn't post talking about the concurrent ordinance. You asked the question, so we did answer it, but if we go too much beyond that, I'm going to feel...

Director Bruce Mann: That's fine.

Chairperson Carol Lewis: So, we'll put it on the agenda for next time. Plus by that time, maybe we might know a little bit more from the City. Alright. Is there anything else? Alright. If nothing, I'm going to call our meeting adjourned. Thank you, everyone, those who in the room and those who joined us online. Thank you so much. Appreciate you being here. Everybody have a good rest of the week, and we look forward to June to see how many of us come to learn how to submit a grant. Alright. Good day, everyone (adjourned at 3:06 p.m.).

ATTEST:

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Jon Keeney, Secretary
Gulf Coast Rail District

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