
Resolution of the Board of Directors In Support of METRO University Corridor Alignment

Improved mobility is critically important to the improved quality of life and continued economic vitality of the Greater Houston area. The Partnership's 10-year strategic plan identifies light rail expansion and mass transit improvements as key initiatives in improving mobility, building infrastructure that sets Houston apart from other communities, providing residents with alternative means of travel, achieving quality of life and air quality goals, and maintaining a vibrant business environment.

The Greater Houston Partnership has formally supported METRO in its endeavors to provide and improve regional transit with the METRO Solutions Phase 2 Implementation Plan. The Partnership has also supported METRO's use of the federally mandated Project Development Process as the primary means for evaluating and selecting/eliminating all alternative LRT/BRT and other transit route alignments which utilize federal funding for progression into preliminary engineering, final design and construction. The Partnership supported this process as the fairest and most comprehensive process for considering factual information, public input, and other federally defined evaluation factors.

THEREFORE, given the importance of mobility to the future of the Greater Houston area, the Partnership's support for improving mobility through implementation of the METRO Solutions Plan, and the fact that METRO has followed the federal analysis process to determine the best alignment for the next phase of its light rail plan (the "University Corridor"), the Greater Houston Partnership's Board of Directors supports METRO in its selection of the University Corridor route, and encourages METRO to expeditiously move the METRO Solutions project forward to improve mobility in the region.

The METRO Board of Directors adopted an alignment for the University Corridor that is comprised of two segments, east and west of Wheeler Station on the Main Street Line:


East

The eastern segment travels east on Wheeler, north on Ennis, east on Alabama, reaching the University of Houston at Scott. If technically and financially feasible, the line will continue north on Scott, turning east on Elgin and terminating at the Eastwood Transit Center.

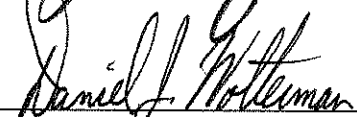
West

The western portion of the alignment runs west from Main on Richmond to Cummins in the Greenway Plaza area. The route travels south on Cummins, crossing over the Southwest Freeway, continuing west on Westpark and terminating at the Hillcroft Transit Center.

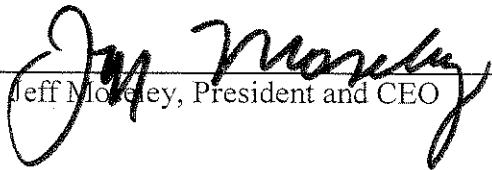
The Partnership has encouraged METRO to choose the alignment that is financially competitive, technically competent and maximizes ridership. METRO's preferred alignment meets these priorities and enables the University Corridor to qualify for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding.



John D. Hofmeister, Chairman



Daniel J. Wolterman, Secretary



Jeff Moseley, President and CEO

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 14, 2007

TO: Greater Houston Partnership Board of Directors

FROM: Jim Dannenbaum, Chairman
Transportation and Infrastructure Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: Resolution of the Board of Directors in Support of METRO University
Corridor Alignment

RECOMMENDATION

Improved mobility is critically important to the improved quality of life and continued economic vitality of the Greater Houston area. The Partnership's 10-year strategic plan identifies light rail expansion and mass transit improvements as key initiatives in improving mobility, building infrastructure that sets Houston apart from other communities, providing residents with alternative means of travel, achieving quality of life and air quality goals, and maintaining a vibrant business environment.

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The western portion of the alignment runs west from Main on Richmond to Cummins in the Greenway Plaza area. The route travels south on Cummins, crossing over the Southwest Freeway, continuing west on Westpark and terminating at the Hillcroft Transit Center.

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BACKGROUND

Beginning in 2006, METRO followed the federally mandated analysis process to evaluate all reasonable alternatives for the University Corridor. In August 2007, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was released for review and public comment.

Various alternatives were considered in the DEIS. In addition to a “no build” alternative, three alignments west of Wheeler Station and three alignments east of Wheeler Station were evaluated. The combined alignments resulted in nine alternatives.

The nine alignment alternatives were ranked according to capital cost and ridership to determine eligibility for federal funding. It was established that alignments using the US 59 alternative would not meet qualifications for FTA funding.

On October 18, 2007, the METRO board approved the Richmond/Cummins option as the alignment for the western segment of the corridor.

An amendment was made to the recommendation of alignment on the eastern segment of the corridor. The Wheeler (Ennis/Alabama) route was selected with a possible extension along Scott Street, utilizing rail infrastructure of the Southeast Corridor, connecting to Elgin and continuing to the Eastwood Transit Center.

FISCAL IMPACT

Fifty percent of the cost to build the University Corridor is derived from federal funding. To be eligible for federal funding, projects are ranked according to the FTA Cost Effectiveness Index (CEI) and must achieve at least a “medium” rating.

The chart below represents an approximation of the CEI required to meet FTA standards, using a threshold of \$22,000.

Alignment Combination	LRT Capital Cost	LRT Ridership Forecast	Federal Funding Ratio	Rank
Cummins-Wheeler (Ennis/Elgin/Eastwood TC)	\$753 M	43,600	\$17,271	1
Cummins- Wheeler (Ennis/Alabama)	\$715 M	40,800	\$17,525	2
Cummins- Alabama	\$715 M	40,200	\$17,786	3
Greenway-Wheeler (Ennis/Elgin/Eastwood TC)	\$786 M	43,400	\$18,111	4
Greenway-Wheeler (Ennis/Alabama)	\$748 M	40,700	\$18,378	5
Greenway- Alabama	\$748 M	40,000	\$18,700	6
			\$22,000	
US 59- Wheeler (Ennis/Elgin/Eastwood TC)	\$836 M	32,000	\$26,125	7
US 59- Wheeler	\$798 M	28,000	\$28,500	8
US 59- Alabama	\$798 M	27,100	\$29,446	9

IMPLEMENTATION

The Greater Houston Partnership will communicate its support of the University Corridor preferred alignment to elected officials on the local, state and federal levels. The Partnership will continue to advocate for maximum federal funding for implementation of light rail in the University Corridor.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

This recommendation can be implemented with available Greater Houston Partnership staff, and within the current operating budget.