



Press Release

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DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS PRESENT MASS TRANSIT PROPOSAL TO CITY COUNCIL

Oklahoma City, OK – Urban Neighbors (U.N.), downtown's residents association, presented a comprehensive 3-page report to the OKC City Council this morning requesting that the underutilized downtown trolley system (A MAPS I project) be reviewed and updated to meet modern demands. Presenting copies of the 3-page report to City Council were U.N. Board Members Mark Gibbs and Brian Hammond.

“We are very optimistic that Mayor Cornett and the City Council will recognize the need for a massive revamp of our mass transit system in this city, and be receptive to overhauling the system so that it might meet the needs of downtown residents, workers and visitors. We anticipate Mayor Cornett and the City Council will come up with a comprehensive plan and solution over the next few months and create a line in next year's operating budget for a more functional trolley system. The downtown transit system must also make sense for the future as well by being environmentally friendly,” said Urban Neighbors Board Member Jeff Bezdek. The most challenging aspect of the current system is that it does not efficiently serve the needs of the growing and diversified downtown community. “As an organization we are dedicated to bringing vital issues concerning downtown to the city. Urban Neighbors is proud to be a vital link between the City of OKC and downtown residents,” Bezdek further commented.

“Our hope is that this will be an important first step with the city in creating a modern mass transit system to meet downtown needs,” Bezdek added. On August 19th, Mayor Cornett and City Council is expected to attend a workshop with Metro Transit at the OKC Zoo's conference facilities. At the downtown transit workshop the city leaders are expected to learn about the current downtown trolley system, how it operates, its' problems as well as come to their own conclusions on how they might be able to tackle the issues. The workshop will be open to the public; however citizens will not be allowed to comment at the workshop. The public is encouraged to attend and show their support for a modern mass transit system for Oklahoma City.

On a related note, just before the U.N. Transportation Subcommittee presented the comprehensive downtown transit report to the Mayor and City Council, a Citizen Survey Report was submitted to the City Council. The Citizen Survey Report addresses issues such as perception of the city, quality of life, traffic, code enforcement and other issues. Interestingly enough, once again mass transportation was a high priority from citizens.

“The time is now for our great city to truly take a transformation in becoming a Big League City. The next logical step as a city is an efficient mass-transit system. Research over the last several years shows several health benefits in relation to mass transit systems. People have a tendency to walk more if they have access to an efficient mass transit system,” said U.N. Board Member Steven Newlon.

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People also have a propensity to visit local attractions more by foot and to bike to transit centers as well. This is perfect time to encourage the fitness benefits to mass transit while Mayor Cornett and the City are promoting the “This City is Going on a Diet” campaign, Newlon added.

Some of the highlights of the U.N.’s official report to the City of OKC include the following:

- Downtown’s area and use has changed dramatically over last decade
- The existing trolley system is poorly understood by public
- Low ridership on key routes
- Timings and actual arrivals at trolley stops are inconsistent
- Stops are poorly identified
- Stops feature limited information (route maps, schedule times, and actual arrivals)
- Hours of service are limited and poorly advertised
- Onboard stop information is inconsistent or not available
- Existing system is not configured for 2008 or future ridership demographics.

The U.N. Transportation Subcommittee recommends that a detailed analysis be conducted of potential new routes. Public and private input must be solicited from business, residential, development, entertainment, and tourism stakeholders. The input gathered should identify routes that service these various demographics, in order to maintain good ridership levels during all operational hours. Certain specific demographics may entice more direct routes, but stability and consistent ridership will help maintain the health of the system. Also, a diverse and eclectic ridership would justify a broadened daily operational period.

A comprehensive public information and marketing campaign must be implemented to increase awareness and ridership of the reprogrammed system. Such marketing will reinforce the accessibility and utility of the system to all potential user demographics. In addition, the ridership experience will be improved with vehicle operators that are trained in enhanced customer service. The personal interface between "trolley" operators and riders should follow the "Downtown Ambassador" model. Vehicle operators must be helpful in assisting customers with diverse knowledge of downtown, vehicle stops, points of interest and available amenities. They should also assist residents who have special needs including the proper stowage of physical items.

Data was collected by Urban Neighbors from downtown residents, workers and visitors over the course of several months. The Urban Neighbors Transportation Subcommittee noted in its initial surveys and interaction with potential users that increased fares to cover enhanced services would be acceptable. The subcommittee emphasizes that the existing "trolley like" bus vehicles have a limited life expectancy and encourages the benefits and experience of a reprogrammed system to be migrated over to permanent future solutions. There is a great desire for a modern transportation solution that can permanently service the downtown and central city where density levels are increasing significantly. The success of improvements to the existing system will assist in the future development of transportation in all areas of the Oklahoma City Metroplex.

Website: www.urbanneighbors.org

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