

Rail on track for 2008 arrival

MetroRail connects Northwest Austin to downtown

BY RACHEL YOUENS

Only about 2,000 votes kept a 52-mile light rail track out of Austin back in 2000. With half of voters feeling underserved by the project, Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority went back to the drawing board.

They started by listening, and in the end heard input from nearly 8,000 citizens.

Capital Metro returned in 2004 with a scaled-back plan of 32 miles of commuter rail, using existing track rather than new. They also took the starting point of the line and moved it from Howard Lane, in Northwest Austin, north to the city of Leander. This plan, known as All Systems Go, passed with nearly 62 percent voter approval.

"For the amount of money we could put down, this route made the most sense. It was economical since the line was there, and it also passed through some of the fastest growing areas," said Julie Martin, Capital Metro's Community Involvement Coordinator who was there in 2004 taking feedback from the public. She points out that while mov-

ing from light rail to commuter rail meant cutting out other areas of Austin, these areas are better served with other parts of the All Systems Go plan, such as street cars.

Today, Capital Metro has branded this commuter line the MetroRail, and beginning in 2008 it will be running Austinites from the downtown Convention Center to Leander in around 55 minutes.

Making the MetroRail

MetroRail and the All Systems Go plan do not employ any bonds, raise taxes or incur debt. The \$90 million MetroRail is funded from the existing one cent sales tax Capital Metro reaps from Austin and other areas that Capital Metro services, government grants and rider fares. Last year Capital Metro received more than \$135 million in tax revenue.

"MetroRail is one of the most [financially] efficient systems in the country because it's already paid and it runs on existing track," said Capital Metro spokesman Misty Whited. "Other cities that build from scratch pay much more, which is generally done with bonds or taxes."

The MetroRail does not have the visual impact of other transportation projects, such as the toll roads, because the construction is minimal and spread out over a large area.

"One of the big misconceptions is that people don't see anything being built, so they don't think Capital Metro is on track," Whited said. "Construction started in '06 and a good example is the Leander Park and Ride."

Construction has started on three projects along the rail line. Last July, Capital Metro approved a \$711,000 contract for the Leander rail station, which opened Monday.

They approved contracts for two more projects in October, including a 2,000 ft. \$5.5 million overpass on McNeil Road where MetroRail crosses the Union Pacific track, and the construction of the rail station at Lakeline Boulevard and Lyndhurst Street for \$914,000.

Projects down the line include eight more stations, but Capital Metro has not yet executed the contracts for these projects.

Work on the first six rail cars has also begun. Capital Metro signed an initial \$32.3 million contract with a Swiss rail manufacturer for six cars with an option of adding 12 more cars in the future. Each car is self-propelled by two diesel-electric engines.

"These particular cars are quieter than other commuter rail systems and are environmentally friendly, so noise and vibration shouldn't be a problem," Whited said.

The areas that the MetroRail cuts through are already crossed by freight trains carrying construction equipment and gravel, which will continue to run outside of peak commuter hours.

Rail as an investment

A major concern in 2004 was if ridership would justify the amount spent on commuter rail. Capital Metro's most recent numbers estimate there will be 1,700 to 2,000 trips taken per day on the MetroRail.

"We feel that even those who aren't ever going to ride the MetroRail are still going to benefit from less cars on the road and less air pollution," Whited said. "Over time, as the rail becomes more common, more people will ride. Regional population growth is going to double in the next 25 years, so this is a plan that will accommodate that future."

CONTINUED ON 14



COMMUNITY IMPACT
NEWSPAPER

LOCAL. USEFUL. EVERYONE GETS IT.

VALUABLE COUPONS INSIDE SEE PAGES 21-27

MARCH 2007 VOL. 1, ISSUE 2

The Road to the MetroRail

Special Election
Capital Metro Referendum

FOR	61.97% (161,843)
AGAINST	38.03% (99,512)

2004 Commuter rail referendum passes

2007 Overpass and station constructed

2008 MetroRail Service begins

Rail on track for 2008 arrival

MetroRail connects Northwest Austin to downtown

in River House

Only about 2,000 votes kept a 52-mile light rail track out of Austin back in 2000. With half of voters feeling underserved by the project, Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority went back to the drawing board.

They started by listening, and in the end heard input from nearly 8,000 citizens.

Capital Metro returned in 2004 with a scaled-back plan of 32 miles of commuter rail, using existing track rather than new. They also took the starting point of the line and moved it from Howard Lane, in Northwest Austin, north to the city of Leander. This plan, known as All Systems Go, passed with nearly 62 percent voter approval.

"For the amount of money we could put down, this route made the most sense. It was economical since the line was there, and it also passed through some of the fastest growing areas," said Julie Martin, Capital Metro's Community Involvement Coordinator who was there in 2004 taking feedback from the public. She points out that while mov-

School property tax relief causes confusion for business owners

in Capital News

The property tax relief provided last year by the 79th Texas Legislature may cause with a price tag for consumers.

At least that is what some local accountants begin to make projections for the fiscal year. A reconstructed business franchise tax was designed to fund the property tax relief. However, John Chastain, a certified public accountant with Greg Salley and Associates, believes the changes may cost smaller companies more than they can afford, which could translate into more expensive products and services.

"I have been in this business since 1997," he said. "The

Tax Facts

Most small business owners are unaware of the tax relief provided by the 79th Texas Legislature in 2005.

Small business owners are not aware of the tax relief provided by the 79th Texas Legislature in 2005. The relief is available to all small businesses, regardless of their size or industry.

Despite the fact that small businesses are not aware of the tax relief, many are still paying more in taxes than they need to.

Through the education of small business owners, we can help them take advantage of the tax relief and reduce their tax burden.

Contact Greg Salley at 512-798-8888 or visit our website at www.gregsalley.com

Inside This Issue:

Restaurant Review
Reale's Pizza and Cafe
Page 11

Closer look
Red Barn Garden Center
Page 7

PG 001 010
US POSTAGE PAID
EAGLE ROCK, TEXAS
PSN#01 NO. 2278