



Light Rail Position Statement, May 2007

This Memorandum was developed by the Downtown Council's Light Rail Task Force to support internal discussion to develop a public position for the DTC specific to upcoming discussions on establishing a light rail system in Kansas City.

This is a complex issue, and to aid in understanding the elements of the position have been organized in four inter-related categories: Benefits, Design, Governance and Economics.

At the outset, it may be helpful to outline certain key points why this issue is important to Downtown:

- Successful metropolitan areas have healthy, vibrant and growing downtowns.
- Kansas City is at an inflection point in its development and growth where it can employ an inclusive, urban vision to lead its growing metropolitan area.
- Continued economic development and increasing the daytime and nighttime populations of the urban city are necessary for an economically sustainable city.
- Because of the cost of parking and streets, both in dollars and land use, healthy density cannot be achieved when workers, visitors and residents rely exclusively on personal automobiles for transportation.
- Fixed guide transit – such as light rail – encourages, focuses and supports urban development in ways that bus systems do not.
- Investments in commuter and light rail are major decisions which have very long lives and potential long-term impact.

DTC and Light Rail. It is not our intent to critique existing plans and proposals but rather to develop general design criteria that define a successful public transit system.

The Task Force will work within the regional transit framework led through public authorities and other organizations such as Kansas City Area Transit Authority (KCATA), Regional Transit Association (RTA), Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), Greater Kansas City Area Chamber of Commerce, the Civic Council and others.

Benefits

- **Vitality.** Public transit is critically important to Downtown. The DTC believes that an effective public transit system is needed to sustain the positive momentum of Downtown development, and to grow a healthy, diverse Downtown economy responsive to business, workers, residents and visitors.

- **A primary goal of any proposal must be to enhance general mobility.** Rail system should be seen as basic element in an integrated, balanced and seamless total transportation system, which provides enhanced access and transportation alternatives for residents throughout the community.

Design

- **The design of the light rail system must be simple and intuitive.** Regional transit should meet the needs of the commuter by being safe, efficient, reliable and intuitive. The routes should be easily navigated, integrated, be as direct as possible and be integrated with feeder, circulator or destination connectors.
- **Multimodal.** Any proposal should identify opportunities to integrate with other modes of transportation on all system segments. Modes of transportation should include: light rail (including streetcars), suburban rail, transitional rail (DMP), bus rapid transit, “park and ride”, pedestrian and bicycles.
- **Connect key nodes.** Light rail should connect important nodes of urban development; employment and residential centers, entertainment, arts and cultural centers. Special attention should be given to connections with new venues, such as Power & Light District and the Sprint Center arena, and to the corridor between Downtown, Crossroads, Midtown and the Plaza.
- **Bridge the River.** In the phasing of a light rail project, an early spanning of the river must be taken into account to provide access to the growing Northland. North Kansas City represents both an opportunity and partner for Downtown: residents benefit from a healthy and vital downtown, while downtown residents benefit from the diverse range of eating, shopping, and recreation destinations North of the River.

Governance

- **Downtown stakeholders must be at the table when decisions are made.** It is imperative that the light rail planning process be inclusive, and that all relevant stakeholder groups have meaningful input into the process. A successful system must be the product of a well-conceived process of design and governance.
- **Regional considerations.** Suburban routes must be considered as essential elements in a regional transit system. The DTC supports a regional dialogue to plan, implement, and operate a successful regional transit system.
- **Rethinking Smart Moves.** An effective light rail system requires integration with other forms of public transit. The Smart Moves regional transit plan can serve as a framework for discussion, but we need fresh perspectives in the exploration of alternatives for light rail.
- **Political support.** It is critically important that the development and governance process be well understood and any proposed system has early and vocal support from elected officials, media, civic and business leadership.

Economics

- **Affordable.** The DTC believes healthy transit requires sustainable funding and long range planning. Enhancements cannot cannibalize the existing system. Light rail must move forward while enhancing the existing bus system. We must qualify for federal funds.
- **Strengthen economy and grow urban population.** The route should be selected, planned and developed in a manner that directs strategic development and redevelopment of underutilized properties creating increased population densities at key nodes and along the route. Development incentives should be utilized in a manner that truly creates long-term public economic benefits and grows the overall population and economy of the City.
- **Timing.** Some decisions relating to light rail are relatively urgent, and need to be placed into a clear and defined process. Funding for the current transit system expires in 2009. It is important not to lose momentum generated by positive vote outcome. The City should be encouraged to look at multiple sequencing opportunities, including a self-funded starter phase placed under construction before 2010. Construction (and additional Federal funding) can and should be done in stages.