

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION, TREASURY,
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SCIENCE, STATE, JUSTICE,
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ASSISTANT MAJORITY WHIP



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[Redacted]

Dear [Redacted]

Thank you for contacting me to express your opinion on Metro's plan to build a rail line on Richmond Avenue. I have received a large volume of correspondence on this important issue, and I appreciate your patience as I carefully weighed Metro's plans and community feedback. I have come to the conclusion that it would be wrong for Metro to build rail on Richmond, and I will oppose it. Let me explain why.

The ballot language which Metro wrote and voters narrowly approved in 2003 specified that this rail line would be built on "Westpark" and that it would end at the "Hillcroft Transit Center." Westpark begins at Kirby Drive. Only by navigating Metro's website at the time would a voter have found a map illustrating this "Westpark" rail line with a thick line extending east of Kirby along the Southwest Freeway. Metro also stated in its ballot resolution that the ballot language was a "contract between Metro and the voters" and Metro could not "alter or amend what the voters approved without another election." Richmond was not approved by voters in 2003, and was not even under consideration at the time. *- Resolution said final alignment could be adjusted.*

In 2005, Metro began discussing the possibility of building the Westpark rail line on Richmond, so it has had time to make its case to the public. In the spring of this year, I participated in a townhall meeting at St. Luke's Methodist Church on the issue, and I have also held my own townhall meetings to listen to my constituents' opinions about rail on Richmond. I asked Metro leadership how long they needed to make their case to the public, and they said they needed until August 1, 2006. I have received thousands of letters, emails and phone calls from constituents expressing their opinions, and have heard every argument from every angle.

Under the circumstances, I believe it is fair to give the greatest weight to the opinions of the people with the most at stake in this debate: the people who live, work or own property on Richmond. Of course I am listening to everyone who contacts me, but these people have the most to lose, so I think they deserve to be heard first. There are a finite number of street addresses on Richmond from Main Street to Post Oak, and I asked my staff to organize the letters, emails, petitions etc on a map by street address so I could see the percentage for and against.

From the massive amount of feedback I have received, 97% of the people who live, work or own property on Richmond are strongly opposed to Metro's plan, and over 90% of all the people who contacted me are opposed. I understand that with any large public works project, there will be some opposition. However, 97% opposition is as high a number as I have seen on any issue during my time in public service, and it clearly compels Metro to go back to the drawing board and design an improved route that can win public support. Metro's own Director of Government Affairs and Public Outreach, Karen Marshall, wrote in an April 25 email to Citizen's Transportation Coalition leader, Robin Holzer, that "when asked to name one business [on Richmond] that favored Richmond [rail]," she "could not come up with a name or at least not a small business."

My job description is representative, and it is not an exact science, but in these circumstances it would be wrong for me to stand idly by and not do anything to represent the nearly unanimous opinion of my constituents. I have always worked to protect the quality of life of neighborhoods in my district when the people who live there ask for my help, and any community anywhere in my district can count on me to fight for them in the same way. Therefore, I have asked Metro to take the Richmond alignments off the table. At the same time, I have encouraged Metro to

? No longer on committee

interesting point - The difference was thousands of people and Don't we often make decisions in this nation + in Congress on narrow margins?

- NOT TRUE - referred to it as west park Corridor - actually specified other corridors such as Post oak Blvd.

Is that who drove the decisions on the Katy freeway?

- Is that how all decisions are made - we don't keep the greater good in mind - only those most affected?

Is this the logic used on all of his decisions?

was ~~another~~ letter included in that calculation?

Is this of all of his constituents?

It would be interesting to hear more about what he heard at the town hall meetings.

Why doesn't he accept other evidence from groups like Richmond Railways

This is FY06
I would think that Sen. Hutchinson
didn't realize he got that amount
included in the Senate version
then ultimately in House Bill
had no amount for
Houston.

Did the Katy Freeway work that way?

find a way to build this rail line so it does not destroy homes or businesses. I am very encouraged to see Metro studying alternatives to Richmond, and I sincerely hope that the Metro board will adopt one of these alternatives. When Texas Southern University (TSU) officials objected to Metro's proposed Wheeler rail alignment because it would cut directly through the TSU campus, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee, representing her constituents, asked Metro to consider alternate routes, and Metro obliged.

The Congresswoman was not the driving force on that decision

I have done my best to work with Mayor White and the new leadership he has installed at Metro, and I believe they are doing their best to fix the serious problems they inherited from their predecessors. I have a responsibility to the Houston region to help improve our entire transportation network as the only Texan on the Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee. Although you will not read about my work in the Houston Chronicle, I did help secure \$12 million for preliminary engineering of Metro's first two planned light rail lines (the north line and the southeast line), and I also requested more money for Metro than I requested for any other project. The Chronicle portrays me the same way they portrayed former Majority Leader Tom DeLay, as blocking funding for Metro and working against the development of rail in our city, but that is completely false. Metro was created in 1977, and under the Houston City Charter, Metro is required to hold an election and win voter approval to build rail. The previous Metro board chose to wait until 2003 to hold that election, which put Houston years behind other cities in the development of our system. — This sounds like ~~he~~ he is an unbiased observer —

he had been off of that Subcommittee since Jan. 11th this letter is dated March 29, 07

I would certainly prefer not to be in the middle of this fight, but my job description and my committee assignment require my participation. Most of all, I have always believed in doing the right thing for the right reasons, and protecting Richmond is clearly the right thing to do. I hope this long letter helps you understand my decision, and I assure you that I will continue to work with Metro leadership as they work to meet the transit needs of our fast-growing city.

Didn't he Co-chair the illegally funded campaign to defeat the 2003 referendum? Didn't DeLay spend \$30,000 of his precious PAC money to defeat Metro's referendum?

Thank you for entrusting me to represent you in the United States Congress. Please visit my website at www.culberson.house.gov.

Sincerely,

John Culberson

John Culberson
Member of Congress

JC:te

I guess we should send it to him again - sounds more like a member of City Council than a member of Congress

He is working to kill transit not help

No longer on the Transportation Subcommittee