

— ★ —
St. George Place
Civic Association

August 1st, 2006

- TO: - Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson
- Congressman John Culberson
- State Representative Martha Wong
- Mayor Bill White
- All Houston City Council members
- METRO Board

St. George Place is a large, active neighborhood fronting Richmond in the Uptown/Galleria area, and after analyzing the preliminary routes and drawings that METRO has shared in the last couple weeks we have reached an obvious conclusion:

University Line should run only on Richmond all the way to Hillcroft

We believe and demand this to be the best solution for Houston as a whole for the following key reasons:

- **METRO has addressed all of the concerns of those opposed to rail on Richmond** (especially those in Afton Oaks). Any still opposed are being unreasonable.
 - No median **trees** will be lost. In fact, additional landscaping will improve the look of Richmond Avenue.
 - No existing vehicle **lanes** will be removed
 - No **left-turns** will be impeded
 - No increase in **congestion** or removal of neighborhood/business **access** will occur
 - No **private land** will be taken (public right-of-way is not private land, and only a small portion would be needed)
 - No “bulldozing” of homes or businesses. In fact, land values and tax base will increase as they have with other lines.
 - Minimal impact to businesses via quick, segmented **6 month construction periods**
 - Beautiful stations and train lanes designed to **blend with and enhance** the areas the will be located in.
- **Houston City Council’s “Criteria for Light Rail Construction” have also all been considered and met.**
- **Many citizens, businesses, and community groups have now finally spoken out in favor of Richmond.**
- **A diversion to Westpark serves little benefit and is bad use of transit funds:**
 - The Westpark right-of-way is not a good fit for light-rail since its suitability is to connect highly dense areas.
 - Using the ROW for light-rail would prevent it from being used for its intended better purpose of eventual **full-commuter rail** (connecting the suburbs to Houston through Westpark’s long stretches of vacant areas).
 - Westpark is not even a rationale choice, since **the line on Richmond would serve many more Houstonians.**
 - A diversion from Richmond would **not directly connect to the Galleria area**, Houston’s 2nd largest residential/employment/retail district (8th largest in all the U.S.). Line needs a direct route to Galleria, else it is hobbled.
- **The 2003 ballot wording most certainly did not restrict the line to Westpark Drive.** Just read it:
 - It noted Westpark (not the full street name) only as a generic title, along with 4 other lines that used generic titles: The federal funding process dictates that multiple alignments much be considered.
 - The specifics were unknown and not set in stone in 2003, except for the general corridor area of the line and its purpose compared to other approved transit options, and that Houstonians wanted and were willing to fund it.
 - It clearly stated “final scope ... and other details ... will be based upon demand and ... community input”. Also, the color exhibit showed a very thick route line that **covered completely both Richmond and Westpark.**
- Running along **Richmond to reach Hillcroft** also sets the stage years ahead for the line to **extend further to connect to the heart of Westchase business areas** and beyond. *A line on Westpark could never do that.*
- **The core issue is simply: what is best for the greater good of Houston as a whole;** it is not a matter of “which area wants it and which doesn’t”. **METRO should not piece-meal this solution together to appease a small group of naysers who don’t understand that Houston needs true urban mobility now.**

In 30 years we will not be concerned about the current debate; instead **we will have line that works because it directly connects major activity areas ... or doesn’t.** St. George Place arrived at its above conclusions openly and honestly (without fear and misinformation). The line would come directly in front of some of our homes, and yet we see the line as a positive by adding mobility and overall value to Houston. We demand that our leaders, especially Senator Hutchinson and Congressman Culberson, actively support and work to **ensure Houston gets federal funding for a light-rail alignment along Richmond Avenue all the way to Hillcroft.**

Sincerely,

Gary J. Baumgartner

President, Saint George Place Civic Association

email: president@stgeorgeplace.com cell: 713-459-5959