

COMMENTS TO THE INITIAL MEETING
OF THE
GULF COAST FREIGHT RAIL AUTHORITY

- MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE BOARD, CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES TO EACH OF YOU. I AM PLEASED THAT YOU ARE FINALLY ABLE TO MEET AS ONE BODY AND BEGIN THIS VITAL JOURNEY. I COMMEND TO YOU THE REPRESENTATIVES FROM FORT BEND COUNTY. BILL JAMESON IS A LONG-TIME RESIDENT OF SUGAR LAND AND A CIVIL ENGINEER WITH AN IMPRESSIVE RECORD OF PUBLIC SERVICE. LEONARD SCARCELLA IS THE LONG SERVING MAYOR OF STAFFORD, TEXAS AND A PRACTICING ATTORNEY. FORT BEND CITIZENS WILL BE WELL REPRESENTED IN YOUR DELIBERATIONS.

- FORT BEND COUNTY HAS BEEN AN ENTHUSIASTIC PARTICIPANT IN NUMEROUS PAST DISCUSSIONS REGARDING THE IMPROVEMENT OF FREIGHT RAIL MOVEMENT WITHIN THE REGION. WE HAVE OFTEN EXPRESSED OUR CONCERNS TO VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AND TASK FORCES REGARDING PUBLIC SAFETY, CONGESTION, NOISE, AND NUMEROUS TRAIN DELAYS THAT ARE EXPERIENCED ALONG THE US90A CORRIDOR, WHICH PASSES THRU FIVE OF OUR MAJOR CITIES AND THE HEART OF FORT BEND COUNTY.

- FOR THESE REASONS, THE COUNTY HAS PROPOSED AND SUPPORTS A FORT BEND BYPASS THAT WE BELIEVE CAN GREATLY IMPROVE FREIGHT MOVEMENT AND REDUCE PUBLIC SAFETY HAZARDS BY PROVIDING GRADE-SEPARATED INTERSECTIONS THROUGH MOST OF ITS LENGTH.

- ALTHOUGH A LARGE PORTION OF THIS OPTION WOULD BE NEW TRACK, AND THE ROUTE IS SOMEWHAT LONGER THAN THE CURRENT US90A TRACK, SUCH A BY-PASS WOULD PROVIDE RAILROADS WITH A PERMANENT, HIGH SPEED, FULLY GRADE-SEPARATED MULTI-LINE TRACK THROUGH OUR COUNTY THAT AVOIDS AREAS OF HIGH DENSITY AND ALLOWS FOR FUTURE GROWTH WITHOUT RAIL CONFLICTS.

- WE REALIZE THAT PLANNING FOR RAIL IS COMPLEX, AND THAT EXECUTING A RAIL SOLUTION IS EXPENSIVE. TO SUCCEED, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE OUTCOME OF THIS PROCESS MUST RESOLVE OR SIGNIFICANTLY MITIGATE COMMUNITY ISSUES WHILE ENHANCING THE ABILITY OF OUR RAILROADS TO COMPETE EFFECTIVELY WITH OTHER MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION BY OFFERING ATTRACTIVE DESTINATION OPTIONS AND TIMELY SERVICE AT COMPETITIVE PRICES.

- THAT'S EASY TO SAY, BUT WE REALIZE IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO ACCOMPLISH. REGIONAL PLANNING INVOLVING THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR IS ESSENTIAL WHEN IT COMES TO IMPROVING THE MOVEMENT OF FREIGHT BY RAIL WITHIN HARRIS AND FORT BEND COUNTIES.

- ULTIMATE SUCCESS OF THIS PROCESS WILL REQUIRE HONEST AND OPEN COMMUNICATION, A SPIRIT OF COOPERATION AND A SHARED WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE INVOLVING OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES, OUR REGIONAL

GOVERNMENTS, OUR RAILROADS, OUR STATE OF TEXAS, AND OUR
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

- THIS AUTHORITY CAN, AND I PRAY WILL BE, THE CATALYST TO INITIATE SUCH AN EFFORT, THE LYNCHPIN THAT HOLDS THE PROCESS TOGETHER AND THE INSTRUMENT FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF CRITICAL PARTS OF THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION, AND MUCH OF ITS POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESS RESTS WITH EACH OF YOU. I COMMEND YOU FOR MAKING A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO THIS VITAL PUBLIC SERVICE, AND I ASSURE YOU THAT WE IN FORT BEND STAND READY TO SUPPORT YOUR EFFORTS.

COUNTY JUDGE BOB HEBERT
AUGUST 22, 2007