



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Robert D. Goode, Assistant City Manager

CC: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Elaine Hart, CFO
Rob Spillar, Austin Transportation
Howard Lazarus, Public Works

DATE: December 5, 2014

SUBJECT: Quarter Cent Funds

You have an Item from Council coming forward for consideration at your December 11th Council meeting related to use of the Quarter Cent Funds. After speaking with the City Manager regarding this action, I wanted to express some concern with this proposal...mainly that **dedicating all remaining quarter cent funding to one project seems premature.**

Background

Capital Metro imposes a one cent sales tax on sales within the limits of the City of Austin. In the early 2000s, Capital Metro and the City entered into an agreement whereby Capital Metro would pay to the City its pro rata share of 25% of its sales tax to carry out various approved transportation projects. The payments applied to Fiscal Years 2001-2004. The total amount was \$139.4 Million, of which \$119 Million has been expended/allocated/encumbered, **leaving \$20.4 Million**. The agreement also established that each project be located in the Capital Metro service area and meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. Enhances regional mobility;
2. Supports public transit;
3. Provides leverage for federal or private funds;
4. Adds to an existing program; or,
5. Expedites a critical mobility project.

Item from Council

This “IFC” directs the City Manager to “dedicate \$24 million in funding from the Capital Metro quarter cent fund to pay for infrastructure improvements on Airport Boulevard”.

Evaluation

As you know, Council adopted a “2014 Austin Strategic Mobility Plan” (2014 ASMP) on June 26, 2014 that proposed \$1.0 billion for “Projects of Regional Significance”...a mix of major roadway projects and Urban Rail. The Council called for a Bond Referendum in November asking voters to consider funding the projects identified in the 2014 ASMP. As part of the financing plan, the quarter cent funds were proposed to be dedicated to operation of the Urban Rail project. The voters decided against that proposition.

I’m sure you have heard conversations and post-election analysis that seems to indicate that most citizens agree that Austin does indeed have a traffic/transportation mobility challenge, but that the plan proposed wasn’t the right solution in a majority of the voters’ minds.

The traffic/transportation mobility challenge is not going away. The voters decided that the project and funding plan proposed was not the solution they preferred so that means that we have to go back to the drawing board...not only in regards to the initial high capacity transit project, but the entire multi-modal system. We need to work diligently to develop that “next plan”.

Not knowing what the future plan will look like, not knowing what projects will become priorities resulting from that planning process, and not knowing what the new Council will set for Transportation Policy goals, **dedicating all remaining quarter cent funding to one project seems premature.**

Alternative Plans

There are a multitude of alternative proposals for this funding. For example, we could: 1) split the remaining funding amongst the corridor studies already completed (Airport Boulevard is just one of those corridors) or currently underway; 2) fund some of the projects that were previously in line for quarter cent funding (these projects were essentially put “on hold” in order to dedicate the funding for Urban Rail operations); 3) dedicate funding to improve the traffic signal System; 4) dedicate funding for new traffic signals and/or pedestrian beacons; 5) Develop a more comprehensive plan to focus on critical transportation mobility projects. I’ve given a little more detail to each of these alternatives below:

Corridor Studies

We have 4 completed corridor studies (funded from previous voter approved bond programs) that all recommend future capital improvements:

- Airport Boulevard (Lamar to US-183) ...the project proposed in the IFC for funding,
- Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard/FM 969 (US-183 to Webberville, TX)
- East Riverside Drive (IH-35 to SH-71)
- North Lamar/Burnet (Lamar from US-183 to IH-35 and Burnet from Koenig to MoPac/Loop 1)

We have ongoing studies on Guadalupe Street/West Campus (Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. to W. 29th St.) and South Lamar. The ongoing studies will also develop a list of potential future improvements.

Deferred Projects

The following projects were put “on hold” in order to dedicate funding for Urban Rail operations:

- Rundberg/Metric – Burnet
- Pleasant Valley/St Elmo to Button Bend
- S 1st @ Ben White Intersection Improvement
- Drag (Guadalupe) Project
- Upper Boggy Creek Trail
- Slaughter & Manchaca Intersection
- E 7th Street Improvements
- Ben White @ Congress Intersection
- Intermodal Transfer Station Planning/Implementation
- 4th and 5th Streets from IH35 to Pleasant Valley
- Shoal Creek Trail Improvements
- Rail/Street Crossing Supplemental Safety Projects

Fund traffic signal System improvements

The following traffic signal System projects could be funded:

- Signal Video Detection – The current system of detection within the system is only about 55% effective due to construction damage from paving and natural events. Replacement would provide greater flexibility and reliability to implement detection for transit, construction, adaptive control and bikes.
- Traffic Signal Controller Firmware – Our Existing controller firmware is no longer supported by the manufacturer and thus results in unreliable system-wide control. Replacing the firmware would provide the new features needed to provide transit signal priority throughout the system, advanced bicycle detection, and emergency vehicle preemption upgrades.
- Pedestrian Countdown Timers and Accessible Pedestrian Signals at all major intersections– Many of our older key arterial intersections are equipped with outdated pedestrian signal heads or none at all. Updating to the state-of-the-practice pedestrian countdown and ADA signals would greatly improve the safety and efficiency of the transportation system for pedestrians. This investment would support Imagine Austin by improving walkability. It enhances the ability of the visually impaired to cross streets and provides for improved access to transit stations.
- Advanced Transportation Management System (ATMS) Communications Network Expansion – This investment in the system that controls our overall signal network would provide the ability to monitor and control all field equipment from the TMC, providing improved response times and customer service. This investment would directly benefit transit by reducing unnecessary delays due to signal malfunctions.
- Additional Cameras – Additional traffic cameras would provide improved traveler mobility through situational awareness, incident response, traveler information, and signal timing adjustments. This in turn would increase the efficiency of the entire system without the need to send staff to individual field events to make repairs resulting in quicker repair times. This would indirectly benefit transit by increasing reliability.
- ATMS Software Enhancement to achieve Adaptive Signal Control – This software enhancement would reduce delays at individual signals, adapting the timing to meet the actual traffic conditions within the network on a more real-time basis.
- ATMS Software Enhancement to achieve Roadway Weather Information – This software enhancement would provide accurate roadway conditions (flooding, icing, etc.). This information

could be used by transit and the City's emergency management system to make improved predictions as to travel conditions.

- **ATMS Reporting Upgrade** – This software enhancement would provide improved system reporting and use of information such as vehicle detection, communication of errors within the system, signal performance, critical arterial reports, pedestrian phase activity, etc. Improved data handling would allow improved reliability for transit and other travel modes within the system

Fund new traffic signals and/or Pedestrian Beacons

We spend about \$1 million/year to construct about six traffic signals and two to three pedestrian hybrid beacons (PHB). **We currently have 81 requests for traffic signals and 91 requests for PHB's.** The identified budget could increase the delivery for traffic signal projects and reduce the backlog dramatically.

Develop a more comprehensive plan to focus on critical transportation mobility projects

The quarter cent funds have historically been used for a variety of transportation programs. A comprehensive mobility plan could be developed to focus on critical projects. This plan could include funding projects for Regional Mobility, Sidewalk/School Safety, Traffic Signals, Roadway Improvements, Intersections, Great Streets, Regional Safety and Mobility, Maintenance/Reconstruction.

Next Steps

As you can see, there are many alternative uses of these quarter cent funds. We are already working on the next steps in addressing our transportation challenges and how this funding works into that plan. The plan could incorporate many pieces of the alternatives listed above. In fact, funding for the "next plan" could be dedicated from this quarter cent fund. Of course, this plan would be developed with community involvement and will then ultimately be submitted for the new Council's consideration. A common theme on the campaign trail has been "transportation" and I'm assuming that the newly elected body will want to tackle this challenge as one of their top priorities.