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Lone Star Rail District announces next steps toward passenger rail service *Regional agency says 2010 will be a critical year after numerous milestones in 2009*

AUSTIN, Texas — Nov. 9, 2009 — The Lone Star Rail District — formerly the Austin-San Antonio Commuter Rail District — announced today the next series of steps toward bringing LSTAR regional passenger rail service linking the Austin and San Antonio metro areas. Beginning early 2010, dozens of public meetings will be held throughout the I-35 corridor to study the environmental impacts of the rail system and explore potential locations for up to 16 proposed stations from Georgetown to South San Antonio.

“We’re closer than we’ve ever been to offering travelers some independence from I-35 traffic,” said State Senator Jeff Wentworth, District 25, a member of the Lone Star Rail District board. “The pieces have been coming together in 2009, and we believe support from potential riders up and down the corridor is now critical to making passenger rail a reality for our region.”

In 2009, Lone Star Rail District met several milestones that have built momentum for a regional passenger rail system:

- **Legislative funding:** The Legislature allocated \$8.7 million specifically for the regional rail system between Georgetown and San Antonio. This funding will be used for the preliminary engineering and environmental studies.
- **Rail relocation funding:** The 2009 Texas Legislature appropriated \$182 million to the Texas Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund — the first funding since voters approved the fund four years ago. The money is intended to help move freight traffic out of urban areas.
- **Union Pacific agreement:** The Rail District reached an agreement with Union Pacific to study the feasibility of moving through-freight service to a new line to free up the tracks for passenger rail.
- **Federal funding:** The Rail District has submitted an application to receive a portion of the \$8 billion in federal stimulus funding for rail. The Obama administration identified Texas’ I-35 rail corridor as a priority area for future passenger rail.
- **Market research:** The Rail District launched an extensive market research program to gauge customer interest and perceptions of regional rail. At the conclusion of the market research, the agency officially changed its name to the Lone Star Rail District and adopted the new LSTAR branding to better reflect its mission: to offer Texans independence from the status quo.

The next step is for the Lone Star Rail District to secure federal approval for the project. The Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Impact Study (PE/EIS) will launch before the end of the year and will include extensive public outreach throughout the I-35 corridor to incorporate input from citizens and community organizations into the final report that will be submitted to the federal government. The PE/EIS will also explore the specific station locations for the LSTAR service. The 16 proposed stops currently include stations serving Georgetown, Round Rock, McNeil Junction, Braker/Mopac (at the Domain), 35th/Mopac (near Camp Mabry), Downtown Austin (near Seaholm), Slaughter Lane, Buda/Kyle and San Marcos.

“From the perspective of our students, faculty and staff, this corridor is one single region,” said Dr. Denise Trauth, president of Texas State University, with campuses in both San Marcos and Round Rock. “We have faculty coming from Georgetown and from Boerne and up to 10,000 students commuting up and down this corridor. Having rail gives them a safe and predictable travel option and will help shape the choices they make about where to work and live.”

Lone Star Rail District is working with Union Pacific to identify and implement the right funding mechanisms to relocate freight rail. UP currently owns and uses the rail line adjacent to I-35. Lone Star Rail District is seeking federal funding to conduct studies for alternative freight rail alignments that would move freight traffic away from urban areas. At the state level, lawmakers are expected to consider permanent, dedicated funding sources for the Texas Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund in the 2011 session. Locally, Lone Star Rail District is working with its member jurisdictions to identify appropriate funding options, including tax-increment financing districts in new station areas as well as traditional transportation funding sources.

“Regional rail service along MoPac has been part of our regional transportation plans for years,” said State Senator Kirk Watson, D-Austin. “Having that link for commuters, students and other travelers is a critical element of the comprehensive transportation system that Austinites have long sought.”

The comprehensive market research program launched by Lone Star Rail District in 2009 analyzed the broad spectrum of opinions and perceptions of the nearly 4 million potential customers throughout the I-35 corridor. The research found that many travelers are frustrated by the lack of transportation options and would embrace a passenger rail service. Components of the research program included:

- comprehensive review of the previous five years’ worth of regional transportation-related opinion research;
- benchmarking analysis of branding and communications from five established regional rail systems across the U.S.;
- in-depth interviews with more than three dozen key leaders and stakeholders along the service corridor;
- 11 focus groups from Georgetown to south San Antonio, including special-purpose groups for students, seniors, and Spanish speakers.

“People feel chained to their cars. We heard that message over and over again,” said Mary Briseño, a board member of San Antonio’s VIA Metropolitan Transit and chair of Lone Star Rail District’s Public Information Committee. “It was really amazing to hear the focus group participants discuss how passenger rail would improve their lives and expand their horizons. Rail will offer travelers independence from I-35 – freedom from the status quo.”

Those interested in learning more about LSTAR are encouraged to visit Lone Star Rail District’s new Web site, www.LoneStarRail.com.

About Lone Star Rail District

Lone Star Rail District is an independent public agency created to bring regional passenger rail service to the Austin-San Antonio corridor. Formed in 2003 with authorization from the State, Lone Star Rail District is led by a board of directors consisting of 20 representatives of cities, counties, transportation entities, business communities and the general public. Serving more than 3 million people in five counties, Lone Star Rail District is working hard to bring two great urban regions together to create convenient, cost-effective, and intelligent choices for travel.

About LSTAR

LSTAR regional passenger rail service will provide a wide of range of Texans with independence from congested highways by providing a convenient, cost-effective, and intelligent transportation choice. The 110-mile LSTAR service will offer up to 12 trains per day, seven days per week, including 90-minute express service from downtown San Antonio to downtown Austin and local service between up 16 stations from Georgetown to Texas A&M San Antonio. The service will include modern, safe, clean and comfortable cars with amenities such as wireless Internet access.

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