



RIDE NEW ORLEANS
504 345 8360
Po Box 19231
New Orleans LA 70179

May 9, 2017

Sharonda Williams
Chairwoman, RTA Board of Commissioners
2817 Canal Street
New Orleans, LA 70119

Dear Chairwoman Williams and members of the RTA Board:

Ride New Orleans continues to be a strong supporter of the strategic mobility planning process. The strategic mobility plan will be a valuable how-to guide to bring New Orleans transit to the service levels our riders need.

But there is still no guarantee that the current planning process will ultimately result in a community-supported plan. The process must win that support. The RTA must prioritize widespread and meaningful community engagement and transparent communication.

Two phases, the “Visioning” and “Evaluating Options” phases, are especially critical because they are where the primary parts of the plan – the goals, objectives, strategies, and informed choices of different mobility packages – will be determined.

Without thoughtful and deliberate outreach that gives the community and transit riders ownership of the process, even the best plan will be looked upon suspiciously by many. That would make it hard for any bold vision to ever get off the ground and would make an improvement of the status quo unlikely.

To avoid this, we strongly ask that you consider the following points to ensure the best and most comprehensive outreach possible during the rest of the process, but especially during the “Visioning” and “Evaluating Options” phases.

We make these recommendations respectfully, and in the spirit of cooperation toward a shared goal:

- 1. Hold at least one well-publicized meeting during both the “Visioning” and “Evaluating Options” phases in each New Orleans planning district and at least two meetings in the City of Kenner:** We respect the desire of the strategic mobility
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outreach team to not make residents and riders “come to them” but rather to bring the RTA to standing community meetings and implement “pop up meetings” at busy transit stops. But this is problematic if there is no way for riders to plan in advance to go to a meeting to make their voice heard. The first phase had only two open houses – and only one in Orleans Parish. Riders who could not make the January 17 New Orleans public meeting were not able to give the same kind of informed input that attendees did, potentially putting them at a disadvantage and creating unnecessary cynicism in the process. This can be ameliorated in the third and fourth phases by committing to a small number of additional, geographically-dispersed public meetings that riders and community members can plan to attend.

- 2. Publicize an updated list of outreach meetings regularly in the third and fourth phases:** We understand that some organizations with standing meetings may not want their meeting location and date publicized ahead of time. But the community deserves to know which organizations the strategic mobility planning team is consulting, even if it is just a summary after the meeting. More importantly, this will be a good strategic move for the RTA. It will help the community to develop trust in the process rather than let suspicions fester that only certain individuals or organizations are being consulted.
- 3. Authorize a small subcommittee of community members to advise the strategic mobility planning team on outreach:** The RTA strategic mobility planning team is talented, well-regarded, and good at what they do. But everyone can always use input from the outside and a small subcommittee of community members well-versed in the different organizations and neighborhoods of our city and region will help to ensure that a diversity of viewpoints are considered. It will also create more public buy-in as more community members are brought directly into the decision-making and consulting processes.
- 4. Hold a series of focus groups with riders and community members to develop insights into the most effective way to communicate mobility strategies:** Ride New Orleans takes no position yet on what package of mobility strategies is the right one. We want to see a plan that creates a real increase in convenient and reliable access to important destinations. But any recommendation that includes nontraditional mobility strategies, revenue increases, network shifts, or other significant changes will be controversial to some community members. We want any ultimate decision to be guided by an informed community, not misinformation. Therefore, we recommend taking time to introduce concepts and tradeoffs/opportunities well ahead of any formal suggestions. A series of focus groups with riders and community members could help to introduce concepts and determine the best way to communicate them. We would be happy to help put several meetings together.
- 5. Include a complete list of all meetings and outreach activities during the first phase when you release the *What We Heard* summary later this month:** Anecdotally, we have heard encouraging reports of the rider and community member

feedback collected during the first phase of the planning process. But without knowing where those ideas came from and outreach metrics, it is hard for Ride New Orleans and other advocates to vouch that the phase was inclusive of the wider community. Releasing that list will let the community to see for themselves where the outreach focus has been and allow for a better understanding of the process. This increased transparency will also build trust between the community and the RTA – something that is still needed for the plan to ultimately be successful.

We would be happy to discuss any of the above points with you, other RTA board members, RTA Executive Director Greg Cook, or anyone on the strategic mobility planning team at your convenience. As we have noted before, we are very willing to organize additional community events like our February West Bank Transit Forum or execute other tasks to assist the outreach team. Please let us know how we can be helpful.

Thank you again for your dedicated work on behalf of the city and region.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Posorske". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alex Posorske
Executive Director, Ride New Orleans

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New Orleans City Council Transportation and Airport Committee members

Walter R. Brooks, Executive Director, Regional Planning Commission

Jeffrey P. Hebert, Chief Administrative Officer, City of New Orleans

Greg Cook, RTA Executive Director

Justin T. Augustine III, RTA General Manager

Adelee Marie Le Grand, Chief Strategy Officer, Transdev (In Service to the RTA)

Dwight Norton, Urban Mobility Coordinator, City of New Orleans

Jacquelyn Dadakis, President, Board of Directors, Ride New Orleans