Memo to: Board of Directors

From: Staff

Subject: Follow-up Information on MetroLink Preferred Alignment In Segment I of the Cross County Corridor

Date: September 16, 1997

During the week since the staff recommendation was transmitted to the Board of Directors and released to the public, a number of issues have been raised which either were not addressed in the staff recommendation or which require additional information to clarify our intent or logic. The following information is provided in question and answer format to help address these issues.

1. **Q: Is there a long-term plan for MetroLink expansion**?

   A: Yes. The Board of Directors adopted such a plan in 1991, which has served since that time as blueprint for planning and development of MetroLink. A total of nine corridors were designated in three priority groupings. The highest priority was given to the St. Clair Corridor (now in design), the Cross-County Corridor (planning now complete), and the St. Charles Corridor (planning and environmental documentation complete, financing turned down by voters). Second priority corridors include Northside, Southside and West County corridors. Planning has either begun or will start soon on each of these corridors. We have pursued the development of each of these corridors in the order prescribed by the 1991 plan.

   It is impossible to make credible commitments on cost and completion time more the 5 years in advance for any of these corridors, since funding is uncertain and variable from year to year, and because design is not done until funding can be reasonably predicted final cost estimates cannot be made until that time.

   The systems plan for MetroLink is part of the long range regional transportation plan *Transportation Redefined*, adopted in 1994, which sets forth goals, values and processes by which decisions will be made. The staff's recommendations regarding MetroLink extensions and other transportation improvements are grounded in the policies of *Transportation Redefined*.

2. **Q: How is MetroLink being paid for?**

A: Most MetroLink extensions will be paid for with a combination of federal and local funds. Since the flow of federal funds will be directed to the St. Clair Corridor until at least 2003, the only way to move the implementation of the Cross-County Corridor ahead quickly is to use solely local funding for the first segment, most likely west to Clayton and south to I-44. This local funding comes from a sales tax currently levied in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County. Subsequent phases of this corridor and future corridors would be financed in part with federal funds.

3. **Q: Why is East-West Gateway involved in this decision?**

A: East-West Gateway has a statutory role in decisions regarding federal transportation funding. Future federal funding requirements for Cross-County and other corridors in the region will depend in part on decisions made in the locally funded segment. Further, EWGCC approval will be required on future segments in this corridor, making the agency's assent to the first segment desirable as part of a consistent planning and decision-making process. The City of St. Louis and St. Louis County have previously agreed to this arrangement.

4. **Q: Why can't we get more money to pay for more costly route alternatives?**

A: We have explored, using NationsBank and other consultants, a variety of financing methods, including "innovative" approaches that other transit systems have used to raise capital for major projects. We have sought commitments for additional revenue from those businesses, local governments and institutions which might benefit from MetroLink. We have evaluated construction contracting methods like design-build which might reduce the cost or duration of construction. Thus far, commitments for new revenue have been very limited, and no cash contributions have been offered. The proposed Missouri state funding package produced by the Total Transportation Commission would provide an amount roughly equivalent to, and in lieu of, the additional one-quarter cent local sales tax on the ballot in November. This funding has already been accounted for in our financial plan. Given the complexity of the community planning and design issues, time and cost from a more streamlined design/construction process may not be significant.

5. **Q: Why not use a route along I-64?**

A: It is a common misconception that a transit facility co-located in a highway right-of-way will be most effective in reducing traffic congestion. Transit carries people, not vehicles, and people are less likely to live in the immediate vicinity of freeways. Highway rights-of-way are unattractive and unpleasant sites for transit stations. Access to the stations is very difficult, usually involving structures over the freeway, and the wide freeway right-of-way discourages walk-in traffic. Light rail transit is a pedestrian and neighborhood oriented mode, and freeways are not pedestrian-friendly environments. Based on the poor results experienced by cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, transit agencies across the country rarely, if ever, plan light rail alignments in highway corridors.

Added to the significant design problems when locating rail transit adjacent to a freeway are the specific routing issues which affect our recommendation. Locating the main east-west route along I-64 leads to a circuitous route to Clayton and a very unfavorable and inefficient operations plan when the corridor is fully complete. The synergy from connecting the two largest employment centers in the region would be greatly reduced. A further extension to west St. Louis County along I-64, through Ladue and Frontenac, would be very costly and likely unproductive due to the very low population density, high income and auto ownership, and lack of potential station locations.

6. **Q: How will Forest Park be served?**

A: In alternative S-IA (north of Forest Park) there will be two stations one block away from the northern edge of the park at DeBalieviere Ave. and Skinker Blvd. There is an existing bus shuttle to the park institutions. A more elaborate rubber-tired transportation system with upgraded vehicles, headways which match MetroLink frequency, and routes which serve all park institutions would cost $5-6 million in capital cost and about $600,000 in annual operating cost. The Missouri Historical Society has completed an early study which includes a service design for a park transportation system.

In alternative S-IB (through Forest Park) there would be one stop in the park adjacent to the zoo. Two stations along Oakland Ave. across I-64 from the park would directly serve the science center and community college. Access to other park institutions would be by bus shuttle or on foot.

7. **Q: Has there been public involvement through the planning stages of the Cross-County Corridor?**

A: Yes. There has been extensive consultation with the public, elected officials, business and civic leaders and others throughout the planning process. During the Major Transportation Investment Analysis which ended in February, the consultation process also considered a variety of highway improvements in the corridor. Since that time we have focused on the MetroLink portions of the MTIA recommendation. The consultation process included meetings with many types of individual groups and widely advertised open houses with the public at-large. We have met with any group that requested a meeting and are continuing to do so. (A reasonably complete list of all meetings held during the MTIA and subsequently is attached.) We have also made all reports, notes and files available to anyone who asked. In the design phase ahead, we are recommending a more extensive collaborative process with the affected communities.

8. **Q: Has EWGCC staff recommended an at-grade (surface) design for any light rail segment?**

A: No. We believe that it is important for elected officials and the public to consider the complete range of design alternatives and their associated costs before making a route decision. While the MTIA appeared to prejudge the outcome of the eventual design of the system, we believed that this was premature and misleading, since design and cost information was clearly of insufficient detail and reliability to make such a judgement. In fact, the MTIA was a planning study, never intended to produce conclusions on any design. While our recent analyses have been widely interpreted as unexpectedly introducing new design concepts, we simply fully described all of the alternatives that were investigated during the MTIA and their impact on route selection and financing.

No decisions on design will be made until the preliminary engineering phase is complete. Preliminary engineering will produce more complete, accurate and reliable design data and cost information and will allow a more deliberate, careful and sensitive community consultation process.

9. **Q: What is the difference in ridership between alternatives S-IA and S-IB?**

A: The MTIA estimated that alternative S-IB has an advantage of 1.6 million riders a year when fully extended to Florissant and Butler Hill Road. Conversely, alternative S-IA alone (to I-44) has an advantage of 1.1 million riders a year. It was widely observed that those results were counterintuitive, since these Cross-County route alternatives only differed for a relatively short segment in and around Forest Park, but ridership differences seemed to occur elsewhere along the route. For this reason we included a review of the demand estimates in the scope of work for the Strategic

Alignment Analysis. After a review of the estimates and inputs, Gannett Fleming concluded that there was no reason to expect that ridership on the two alignments should differ at all, *except* for the added stations in alignment S-IB and the increases in travel time associated with the added stations and greater length of S-IB. An analysis of the *incremental* demand associated with those stations, done by Gannett Fleming, produced an estimate of 1700 passengers a day for alignment S-IB, while disregarding any penalty for added travel time. A fully developed Arena site might add 500-1000 addition riders if tenants were not simply relocated from downtown St. Louis or some other location along the MetroLink system. We view these figures as the current best estimate of net ridership difference between the two alternatives.