

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is liberty" II COR. 3:17

A GANNETT COMPANY

Thursday, December 23, 2010
75 CENTS ★ CITY EDITION

Regional leaders united in effort for affordable, realistic mass transit

We join together today as citizens of Central Indiana. As bipartisan elected officials we represent various constituencies; as the mayor of Indianapolis, seeking a more livable city and a stronger economy; as state legislators representing both Indianapolis and our metropolitan area; as a congressman representing the core of the region; and as CIRTAs, representing the region's transportation needs. We are also members of the private sector.

We're speaking with a common purpose -- to move forward on a regional, multimodal mass transit system that is ambitious yet realistic and affordable to the taxpayers.

We support a system that revitalizes and expands our bus system while adding bus rapid transit routes and passenger rail lines across Greater Indianapolis. The system should allow both users and those who choose not to use mass transit to move around the region with greater speed and ease. It should make dramatic improvements in the mobility of the residents of Indianapolis, commuters from surrounding suburbs, and residents of the neighboring counties traveling within their own communities. The system should give all citizens more transportation options, connect our work force with job opportunities, enhance our economic competitiveness and encourage investment in our neighborhoods.

Such a system has been talked about for years, and this year enormous progress has been made in developing a specific plan to move forward. We are committed to taking the next steps toward our future transit system.

Looking ahead to 2011, there is still significant work to be done to create the best possible plan. A reliable economic analysis of the final system plan must be completed, so that its costs and benefits are transparent to all. The specifics of a regional transit authority empowered to build and manage the system will be refined. Input from local officials will continue to be encouraged, and we will seek their support.

Our goal for 2012 is to present a practical transit plan that delivers a strong return on investment to the region's taxpayers. Our hope is that the General Assembly will decide on such a plan during the 2012 short session. This would allow voters in the counties that wish to participate the opportunity to approve a local funding source and governance structure by referendum later that year, while also seeking federal funding for implementing the system. Any such plan must be deemed affordable in both capital costs and operating costs before it goes to the voters for a referendum.

While large-scale public investments demand exhaustive planning and careful stewardship of tax dollars, we believe that effective mass transit is a regional priority. The approach of refining and building public support for the plan in 2011, then taking legislative action and giving voters a voice through county-by-county referendums in 2012, will maintain positive momentum for a comprehensive, multimodal transportation system.

As public servants and civic leaders, we look forward to working together to move this process forward, and pledge constructive action in 2011, 2012 and

beyond to make effective mass transit a reality for Central Indiana.

This letter is signed by: Christine Altman, Hamilton County commissioner and chair, Central Indiana Regional Transit Authority; Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard; U.S. Rep. Andre Carson, D-Indianapolis; state Rep. Bill Crawford, D-Indianapolis; Roland Dorson, president, Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce; Al Hubbard, cochair, Central Indiana Transit Task Force; state Sen. Luke Kenley, R-Noblesville; Mark Miles, president and CEO, Central Indiana Corporate Partnership; John Neighbours, co-chair, Central Indiana Transit Task Force; Bob Palmer, co-chair, Central Indiana Transit Task Force; Brian Payne, president, Central Indiana Community Foundation.