



Dissenting Voices

By: Michael King
June 13, 2014

Even as the Project Connect proposal moves closer to official approval and enabling votes, opposition to the urban rail project continues to simmer. Last week, two groups otherwise unlikely to find common ground – mass transit supporters **Central Austin Community Development Corporation** and highway enthusiasts **Coalition on Sustainable Transportation** – both issued salvos strongly opposing the current Project Connect proposals.

COST board member Jim Skaggs distributed a longer version of a June 2 anti-rail *Statesman* op-ed by **Randal O'Toole** – a CATO Institute researcher known nationwide for his longtime opposition to any and all urban rail projects – which argued that Capital Metro should shelve rail plans in favor of more bus service. That and other materials were sent to the **Central Corridor Advisory Group**, to which Skaggs wrote, "The transportation evaluation process has been spearheaded, for several years, by Project Connect; an organization supported and funded by Cap Metro, Lone Star Rail, and the City of Austin. The entities supporting Project Connect and the people managing it have generally presented biased, unobjective evaluations, seemingly driven by strong self interest to support the pre-determined rail solution which is contrary to the greater good of the community, as described in these pieces."

Meanwhile, on June 5, the **CACDC** (a "community organizing" nonprofit) issued a press release on behalf of itself, **UT-Austin Student Government**, and four neighborhood associations representing the areas along the Highland route (**Crestview, Highland, Hyde Park, and Northfield**) – organizations "serving over 100,000 Austinites," claimed the release.

"Our groups strongly support light rail," read the release, "but Project Connect's East Riverside to Highland Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) would result in a broken system, an ineffective transportation investment for our city and region, and a politically non-viable ballot measure." The release said the groups have "formally endorsed a **Guadalupe North Lamar Corridor** urban rail alignment," and accused the Project Connect planners of having ignored public input in favor of "narrow development interests." The group said it was submitting a petition signed by more than 1,000 residents, along with supporting materials, to City Council and the boards of Capital Metro and Lone Star Rail.

A public campaign in support of the project likely won't begin in earnest until a specific proposal is formally adopted by elected officials. But it's fair to say that at this point in the process, the

opponents – from the right and the left – have gotten a running head start on official advocates of the plan.