



September 10, 2013

Open Letter to the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Policy Board

Dear Transportation Policy Board member:

We respectfully ask that you keep your promise and uphold the authority of the Transportation Policy Board by rejecting the Texas Department of Transportation's proposal to deprogram the bike share program.¹ Allowing TxDOT to arbitrarily dictate transportation funding policy decisions regardless of your approval sets a dubious precedent for all future decisions.

Voting No on TxDOT's power grab will maintain democratic accountability for the citizens of El Paso and will be an important first step towards making El Paso the most bicycle-friendly city in the Southwest.

The board unanimously approved the bike share program twice, in April and again in May 2013.² In a letter from the Federal Highway Administration, dated June 12, 2013, the Federal Highway Administration deemed the project eligible for federal funding, declaring it "...consistent with the modeling for the conforming [Metropolitan Transportation Plan] (Mission 2035)."³ After the City and the University of Texas at El Paso provided matching funds, El Paso was poised to launch a bike share program comparable to programs in Austin, Houston, San Antonio and Fort Worth. El Paso's bike share program received nationwide recognition when it was mentioned in the first paragraph of an article in the *New York Times* titled "Bicycling for Thinner Texans and New Businesses."⁴

In August, TxDOT unilaterally decided that it would divert the approved federal funds from the bike share program. TxDOT District Engineer Bob Bielek claimed that the project did not go through the Transportation Project Advisory Committee – a process which is neither mandatory nor commonly used – and that he had missed the meeting where bike share was discussed.⁵ Not only did TxDOT have ample time to review the bike share program, but Board meeting minutes show that Bielek was part of the body that unanimously voted for the project in May.⁶

¹ El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization, Transportation Policy Board Agenda, *available at* <http://www.elpasompo.org/2013Agendas/TPBAgenda091313.htm>.

² El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization, Meeting Minutes (April 5, 2013), *available at* <http://www.elpasompo.org/2013Minutes/AprilMin.pdf>; El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization (May 3, 2013), *available at* <http://www.elpasompo.org/2013Minutes/MayMin.pdf>.

³ Letter from Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration to the U.S. Department of Transportation regarding joint approval of May 2013 Quarterly Revisions to the FY2013-2016 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (June 12, 2013).

⁴ Batheja, Aman. "Bicycling for Thinner Texans and New Businesses." *New York Times* 18 Aug. 2013, natl. ed.: A25A

⁵ Bielek, Bob. ABC-7 Xtra: Transportation Priorities with host Maria Garcia. KVIA, 2013 (August 18, 2013), *available at* <http://www.kvia.com/video/ABC-7-Xtra-Aug-18-Transportation-Priorities-In-El-Paso/-/421452/21526500/-/d27wijz/-/index.html>.

⁶ Bielek also wrongly stated that bike share programs in the U.S. commonly rely on private funds, not federal funds. In fact according to the Federal Highway Administration's "Bike Sharing in the United

TxDOT overturned the Board's decision, disregarded the Federal Highway Administrations' approval, and ignored the broad support the program received from community partners. What is even more alarming is that TxDOT is undermining the democratic process that our public institutions are founded on.

In light of recent scandals involving public institutions in El Paso, the Board must ask whether TxDOT overstepped its jurisdictional authority, and, if so, was this the first time? Moreover, how can TxDOT and the Board ever expect the community to trust in the transparency of our public agencies when a program that was planned and approved through legitimate channels was then shelved by bureaucrats in favor of vague, unnamed, and unpublicized projects?

Bike Share programs have been incredibly successful in cities across the United States and the world. These programs reduce both congestion and air pollution, serve as an economic catalyst for local businesses, and, in the long term, lead to innumerable savings in health care costs. Bike Share programs are becoming the next form of public transportation, as commonplace as buses, light rails and subways. El Paso will also earn the notable distinction of launching the first bike share system in the Southwest, an achievement we should all be proud of.

On September 13, 2013, vote NO on Item 7, TxDOT's request to deprogram bike share.

Sincerely,

Scott White
Board Member
Velo Paso Bicycle-Pedestrian Coalition

cc: Hon. Veronica Escobar Hon. Walter Miller Rep. Mary Helen Garcia
Hon. Vincent Perez Rep. Joe Pickett Rep. Mary Gonzalez
Hon. Madeleine Praino Rep. Marisa Marquez Rep. Joe Moody
Hon. Javier Perea Sen. Jose Rodriguez Sen. Joseph Cervantes
Hon. Oscar Leeser Rep. Naomi Gonzalez Hon. Courtney Niland
Hon. Emma Acosta Hon. Luis Vela Hon. Michael Noe
Joyce Wilson, El Paso Hon. Dale Reinhardt Hon. David Garcia
Jane Shang, El Paso Jay Banasiak, Sun Metro Robert Bielek, TxDOT
Michael Leary, FHWA Marc Williams, TxDOT Michael Medina, El Paso MPO
Robert Patrick, FTA Victor Mendez, FHWA Phil Wilson, TxDOT
Anthony Foxx, DOT Genevieve Bales, FHWA Lynn Hayes, FTA
Peter Rogoff, FTA Ernesto Carrizal, III,
El Paso County