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On June 22, the City Council passed the extension of our Famous Transportation Tax along to the voters for consideration in October. A reasonable and democratic-minded course of action, unless you count the arbitrary anti-Rail pre-conditions and exclusions offered by a couple of Councilors. But with or without these “amendments”, Rail transit’s in trouble in Albuquerque.

How did Rail become a four-letter word in Albuquerque (and Albuquerque almost alone), and what can we Rail advocates do to reverse this ?

Rails Inc sees several reasons for this impasse, absent conspiracy theories. These include our American obsession with up-front cost at the expense of long-term gain, our brainwash-inspired fear of all taxation (good or bad), and Mayor-Council rivalries. These three reasons are worth a lot of ink somewhere, but I’d like to examine a fourth:

Tactical mistakes from our side.

We need Rail transit for a stunning number of reasons, reasons I and others have cited in these pages. Most of our Western sister cities, of all political colors, have acted on this knowledge to great benefit for their people, their economies and their environments. So what’s our problem? Here’s one example:

The 21st Century Transportation Task Force (I was a member) heard several Streetcar presentations, geared primarily toward its benefits for rejuvenation along “Inner” Central. Little attention was paid to the various other benefits —-Good Transportation benefits —- of the Streetcar, and almost none to other Rail modes like Light Rail or Urban Mag Lev, or to other possible routes like Lomas Or I-40.

Thanks to this narrowly-considered process and its shallow treatment by the media in general, most of our city’s far-flung people have no idea of what Rail can do for them. Albuquerque’s transit argument has been “bumper-stickered” to mean little

more than Streetcar On Central vs. No Streetcar On Central.

This is how Rails Inc thinks we can get local urban Rail back on track (sorry):

Establish and publicize a long-term transit plan. We need to agree on a coherent and easily-understood program addressing questions like Where, What, Why and for Whom? What kinds of land use changes are we after? Would we rather be innovators or followers?

Fit all transit proposals to this plan. What are the comparative virtues and drawbacks of Streetcar, Light Rail, Mag Lev and various sizes of busses? What are the long-run costs and benefits (I said Long Run, not tomorrow morning)? How do we tie the modes together seamlessly? What about neighborhood transit?

Promote all proposals, especially Rail proposals, with regard to their benefits to the entire city and to our visitors. Most of us are not residents — or developers — of Downtown, UNM or Nob Hill. What about fuel / energy economy? Smooth on-time ride? Connections to important destinations? Reduction of death, injury, congestion and pollution? thrifty use of land and materials? Low maintenance? Long system life? Is Modern Streetcar the best kind of Rail to start out with? Is Central the best place to stick it?

Besides Rail freaks like us, a few of our local leaders and more than a few regular people know that Rail is essential to achieve the above benefits. Some of us have our own pet ideas as to what kind of Rail to put in first and where to put it. What we haven't done yet is to convince enough Albuquerqueans and enough of their City Councilors just how damn right we are.

We need to start over. Rails Inc can be reached at: **rails@nmrails.org**.

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