

Steve

Public transit proposal on April 6 ballot



BJC ■ Public transportation in St. Louis City and County is at an important crossroad. And County voters have a chance to determine which direction it will take through Proposition A on the April 6 ballot.

I encourage BJC employees who live in St. Louis County to learn as much as you can about the ballot initiative. I count myself among you and can share that I support Prop A, which will help secure the future of our Metro transit system including light rail and buses.

Prop A would increase the sales tax by 1/2 cent. In addition, its passage would trigger a matching 1/4 cent sales tax in St. Louis City that was passed in 1997.

In the last few years, the public transportation system has struggled to remain financially viable with staff reductions, service cuts and fare increases. Those measures were so severe that the Missouri legislature approved a one-year appropriation to restore some services. But, that was a short-term solution that will expire in May and did not address future growth.

Some people ask me why I would support a tax to fund public transportation rather than expecting only those who use it to shoulder the cost. There are lots of reasons that I am a proponent of public support of transit.

First, the entire region benefits from public transit. Any major metropolis you visit boasts a thriving public transportation system used by residents and tourists alike. Think of New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

Closer to home, many of our own employees and patients rely on public transportation to access our hospitals and service organizations. You may not ride Metro personally, but you likely know, work alongside or depend upon someone who does. The Metro rail service runs from downtown to our Medical Center campus on Kingshighway to Washington University to Clayton and to the new BJC Learning Institute at North Hanley, as well as out to the airport. Metro bus service is available to many BJC employees who live or work in West County and North County. In addition to our daily work, many of us use public transportation on an occasional basis to get to the airport, the ballgame, a concert or other event.

There are also traffic and environmental reasons that public transportation is important to all of us, whether we use it on a daily basis or not. The availability of Metro means there are 45,000 fewer cars on the highways adding to both traffic congestion and air pollution.

Prop A merits serious consideration. The 1/2 cent sales tax increase would cost the typical family in St. Louis County about \$4 per month, or less than \$1 a week. I realize that, especially in our current economy, every dollar counts. Our collective dollars could go a very long way toward securing a public transit system that we can all count on — for ourselves, our co-workers, our patients, our tourism and our region.

I hope St. Louis County voters carefully consider Prop A and its impact on the region. ■

— Steve Lipstein, BJC president and CEO, NotestoSteve@bjc.org