



**THE WOODLANDS PARKWAY PARK AND RIDE FACILITY
PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY AND RESPONSE
August 28, 2006**

The Brazos Transit District currently operates two park and ride lots in south Montgomery County near I-45, primarily serving residents of The Woodlands. A third facility serving the western portion of The Woodlands as been discussed for many years and indicated on many area maps. In March of 2005 advanced planning, preliminary engineering, and environmental studies were completed for the facility located at Woodlands Parkway and Ashlane Way. Late in 2005 The District and The Woodlands Development Company began receiving telephone calls expressing concerns about the location and potential impacts of the proposed facility. In March 2006 a traffic update study was completed. As part of its public involvement policy, The District scheduled a public meeting to provide information to the public and to afford the public with an opportunity to express concerns about the facility in a comprehensive and constructive manner. The meeting was held at 7:00 pm on Monday June 26 at Sterling Ridge YMCA which is located across the street from the proposed site. A PowerPoint slide presentation was given and audience members were given three minutes each to provide comments. In addition written submittals of comments were received until July 5. Approximately 50 individuals attended and 17 spoke. Attachments include the PowerPoint slides, a transcript of the speakers' comments, the attendance list, and the speaker list.

At the meeting 10 individuals spoke against some aspect of the facility, primarily traffic and pedestrian safety issues. 7 individuals spoke in favor of the facility and its location, primarily in regard to its traffic reduction, pollution reduction, and convenience. During the following week, 30 written letters and emails were received; 25 in favor of the facility and 5 against. Copies of all written submittals are attached. Overall 32 have made comments in favor of the facility, 14 against, and 5 provided neutral questions or comments. Comments received in **support** of the facility are summarized as follows:

- Alleviates traffic
- Children/buses are there at different times.
- Good location; minimizes back tracking.
- Amount of traffic is less than shopping centers.
- Woodlands Parkway is the dangerous street for bikes, not Ashlane Way.
- Park and ride would produce a minimal traffic increase.
- Wal-Mart and others had much bigger traffic input.
- Reducing autos is good.
- Parking could be shared with other nearby facilities in off-peak times.
- Property could have been used for other uses like a Wal-Mart that would bring even more traffic around the clock.
- Park and ride users are professionals not criminals.

- Other park and rides have schools nearby (Spring).
- It would reduce traffic
- Other park and rides have much worse security problems than those in the Woodlands
- Traffic will be reduced
- The lot will be used by neighbors, not outsiders.
- Would reduce pollution
- Selected location is best; I would not go farther west.
- Reduces pollution
- Times do not conflict.
- Would reduce fuel consumption.
- It is a more convenient location.
- It would be a convenient location to drop off kids at school and take the bus to work.
- Location would not be an eyesore
- This is why I moved here.
- The localized traffic issues can be handled with signals and other traffic safety means.
- Do not delay.
- Limit hours, if necessary to minimize conflicts.

Between the verbal and written comments, several **questions and concerns** were posed by the public about the location, site selection, safety measures, and meeting notice. Key questions and responses are as follows:

- **Introduction of the park and ride will bring too much traffic to the intersection of Ashlane Way and McBeth Drive.**
Recent traffic counts indicate that the streets are operating well within capacity. Forecasts to 2025 indicate continued capacity availability.
- **The pedestrian and bicycle pathways cross bus and auto access roads/driveways.**
This is true at this location and at parking lots/intersections throughout The Woodlands. Improved lighting, signage, visibility will be provided. The suggested rerouting of the hike and bike pathway around the east and south sides of the lot will be considered.
- **There was not enough notice of the meeting.**
Ads publicizing the meeting appeared four times in two local newspapers. In addition the Sterling Ridge Homeowners Association published a notice in its newsletter. Meeting attendance at this meeting far exceeded any public meeting in The Woodlands held by The District in 20 years. A broad range of comments were expressed by the attendees and in the later written submittals.
- **Is there any recourse?**
Comments are always welcome. It is important to hear residents' concerns which allows The District to improve the design, implementation, and operation of its facilities. These responses provide the best information available to date. The potential impacts are being re-examined to insure that the conclusions are still valid. During final design, plans may be modified to reflect the valuable input received.
- **What will happen when the lot overflows and people park along the street?**

Parking along Ashlane Way and McBeth Drive will not be allowed under any circumstances. The County Commissioner and the Sheriff will be enlisted to assist in enforcement. With phased implementation, subsequent expansions will be planned to anticipate the need for new spaces to prevent overflow conditions.

- **Why was this selected as the best location?**

It is located in a commercial area. Surrounding streets can accommodate the small increase in traffic. It is well located in relation to the target users on the western portion of The Woodlands. There are no environmental concerns. It is not immediately adjacent to residences. Nearby existing and proposed land used can create a synergy of multiple purpose trips and shared parking. Sufficient space is available. Favorable purchase terms exist. It is in a less visible location but that keeps it unobtrusive.

- **Do other locations have similar children-oriented facilities nearby?**

That varies. Some other locations are isolated; some have schools and other activities near by. Integrating park and ride with other uses is generally desirable for multiple purpose trips and shared parking purposes. Inclusion of appropriate access and safety measures is also important.

- **There is a lot of traffic at the YMCA at 5:30 am.**

The initial operating plan calls for the first bus to depart at 5:20 am and the last at 7:50 am. Park and ride traffic will be spread over that time period. Schools start between 8:30 and 8:50 am. Many eastbound drivers will use (and all will be encouraged to use) the eastern access to McBeth Drive, completely avoiding Ashlane Way.

- **What were the considerations included in the 2025 traffic projections?**

Future traffic forecasts were based upon the Houston-Galveston Area Council's traffic forecasting model for the region. It is used by all agencies in the region. It accounts for increases in residential and commercial development as well as street/transportation improvements, local and through traffic.

- **What about more people coming to the existing facilities in 2025?**

Each facility will reach its own capacity. In growing areas like The Woodlands, additional schools, libraries, and YMCA's are constructed near new residential development. The H-GAC model considers new development and build-out of existing development.

- **What is the completion date?**

As stated in the presentation, the current expected opening is approximately one year from now.

- **Did you consider that the nearby 9th grade campus will quadruple in attendance?**

That is included in the traffic forecasting.

- **Others will use the facility from outside The Woodlands.**

The expected capture area does include areas outside the current Woodlands boundaries.

- **People have not been asked what they need**

This location has been indicated for a park and ride facility for many years. Many requests for a lot in the western portion of the Woodlands have been received from the public. This lot was planned using industry standards as developed by the Texas Transportation Institute and others.

- **Kids are here at 5 pm also?**

Auto and bus traffic at that time of day does not conflict with the large volume of traffic associated with the start and end of the normal school day.

- **What about light pollution? Height of poles? Reducing light intensity overnight?**
Light poles will be sized and located to provide an efficient and safe distribution of light across the lot and pedestrian areas. Fixtures will be selected to reduce light pollution and cutoff light extending beyond the property boundaries. A dense landscape buffer of at least 30 feet will surround the lot, further blocking stray light, especially to residential areas. Modifications to light intensity during late night hours will be considered.
- **Is The Woodlands Development Company donating the same amount of funds as at the other two lots?**
TWDC is assisting with land purchase. They provide no operating funds for this or any other park and ride lot.
- **Could the lot be located farther south, outside The Woodlands ?**
Locations farther south would not be as accessible for the bulk of the target users or for the buses that need to access I-45, HOV lanes, and the Hardy Toll Road.
- **One week is not sufficient time for additional written responses.**
Most people will respond immediately or forget about responding after a few days.
- **Why was the service area map in the report skewed to the east and not moved more to the west?**
The parabola-shaped typical park and ride service area, developed by the Texas Transportation Institute, was superimposed on the map to fill in the gap of current and future population areas not served by the existing two facilities. It is also oriented to the principal access arterial, The Woodlands Parkway.
- **Explain the pollution reduction.**
Pollution reduction is based on elimination of vehicle miles traveled of automobiles as a result of drivers who switch to transit. The entire 70 mile daily round trip from the proposed location to downtown Houston is used in calculating the total miles and the total pollutant reduction.
- **We did a survey/petition in which people said they would be willing to backtrack to FM 2978 to a safer lot.**
No survey forms or petition signatures have been received to date. The exact wording of the questions has not been submitted to verify their objectivity. Numerous industry studies indicate that backtracking more than ½ to 1.5 miles is rare. We are already expecting some backtracking from those living near Kuykendahl. Daily routines are usually based on the shortest and most direct path. This location is designed to capture the largest amount of ridership and achieve maximum reduction in pollution and fuel consumption.
- **Kids are less visible and less aware of their surroundings in a mixed traffic setting.**
Additional safety features and suggestions made as a result of public input will be considered in designing the facilities.
- **School buses are already delayed by traffic congestion.**
There is sufficient capacity at this location. The park and ride lot will not add to congestion, particularly at school start and end times.
- **What studies were done about security at the lot?**

The other two park and ride facilities in The Woodlands are the safest in the region. There have been far fewer incidents than at other locations.

- **What about pollution from idling buses?**

Buses idle at the lot for a very short time. Only one or two buses are there at one time. Buses parked for longer periods shut their engines. There are no residents immediately adjacent to the facility.

- **Why was Coulson Tough School not on the maps?**

Coulson Tough School is well beyond the direct influence area of traffic associated with the park and ride facility. Its traffic is included in the overall existing and forecasts on Branch Crossing.

- **Will you minimize visual impacts?**

The facility will be surrounded by a dense landscape buffer of at least 30 feet. Other aesthetics will meet typical Woodlands standards.

- **How were pedestrian and bicycle traffic estimated?**

The issue of pedestrian and bicycle conflicts with all vehicular traffic will receive maximum scrutiny during the design phase to ensure as safe a facility and interface with the community as possible.

Several individuals, both at the meeting and through correspondence, made **suggestions** for improvements or changes. These are summarized as follows:

- **Make the lot access only from Woodlands Parkway. Provide a break in the median at Woodlands Parkway for autos as well as buses.**

The automobile left turn had previously been discussed with Commissioner Chance who objected because it is too close to the Branch Crossing and Ashlane Way intersections and would not be signalized. Perhaps it can be revisited in light of public response. It would, however; not make sense to direct those traveling north on Branch Crossing to travel past the school, through the busy Woodlands Parkway intersection, through the Ashlane Way intersection and not take advantage of Ashlane Way for a more direct access to the lot. Other lot users traveling eastbound on Woodlands Parkway can be urged to use the already-proposed direct intersection with McBeth Drive.

- **Locate the park and ride near FM 2978.**

This location would not provide good coverage or access to Woodlands residents especially in Indian Springs, Sterling Ridge, and Alden Bridge. In addition traffic congestion at that location, because of the significant commercial traffic, will only get significantly worse, delaying buses and parkers. By comparison, the proposed location will not be subject to much more traffic growth because not much more vacant land is available. Access time by parkers would be longer and bus travel time would be longer on top of a commute time that is already very long.

- **Apply safe route to school funds for increased signage, lights, crossing guards, etc.**

This will definitely be pursued in conjunction with Montgomery County and CISD.

- **Move access to lot farther south, away from YMCA and library.**

This idea has merit especially linked to the first bullet in this section. The property ownership and additional cost will be investigated.

- **Reduce the size of the lot to limit traffic impact.**

There is currently not enough funding to construct the entire lot at one time. Thus it will be implemented in phases that can be evaluated before subsequent phases are initiated.

- **Put a hike and bike pathway behind (east and south) the lot to divert children from crossing lot entrances.**

This idea will be explored, especially in relationship to future development of park/ball fields south of the lot.

Comments were also made about other **related issues** as follows:

- **Poor lighting and grounds maintenance at Sawdust is not a good precedent for this new facility.**

That is a temporary situation. The District maintains high standards for maintenance of all of its facilities.

- **Keep the fare down.**

The fares have not yet been set for this facility. Market pricing will be applied at opening. Fares will also be dependent on the service contract executed at time of opening. The District has not raised fares in 6 years and have only raised fares twice since taking over the program in 1987

- **Ensure there are enough buses.**

The District constantly evaluates the number of riders, length of trip, and number of buses to provide sufficient capacity within reasonable cost range.