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June 22, 2001

To: Members of the Central Area Loop Study Committee

**Re: Upcoming Choice of Locally Preferred Alternative for the CAL**

Dear Fellow CALSC Members:

As you know, there is no meeting in June. The next meeting is July 17<sup>th</sup>. During this period, OKI and PB are preparing the data for the Level III Evaluation, which should be presented to us at the July meeting. This will be the basis for the CALSC to choose a Locally Preferred Alternative for the Central Area Loop circulator in August.

We feel this "quiet period" is a good time to pass on to you our best case for choosing the Sky Loop as that technology. There will be some very important data coming to you from PB, and we expect you will need to review that data before making a decision. Nevertheless, we have some points to make while we are all waiting for that data.

SLC had a very good meeting with OKI and PB on May 30<sup>th</sup> to review the Travel Demand Model that PB will be using to estimate ridership for each of the technologies. PB is employing experts on this subject from their San Francisco office, and we believe they will do their best to estimate demand for PRT, LRT/VT and the Southbank Shuttle, with route improvements. We believe this will be important to support the income side of a cost/benefit analysis.

However, there is a real difficulty in estimating demand for the Sky Loop .

The problem is best illustrated by an analogy. Let's go back 140 years. John Roebling has just designed the Suspension Bridge, the first to cross the Ohio River. John asked the city planners of his day "How many people will use this bridge if we build it?"

The planners said "Well, there isn't anything like it around here. Maybe we should count all the ferry boats, row boats and swimmers, and assume we will have at least that many."

The Sky Loop is as different from buses and streetcars as the Suspension Bridge was from ferry boats, row boats and swimmers. How do you estimate demand for something completely new? SLC has estimated 37,000 riders per day, compared to less than 2,000 per day on the current Southbank Shuttle. Is this realistic?

We base our estimate on selling Sky Loop Cards to about 20% of the 100,000 daily commuters who work in the three cities downtown. If these 20,000 cardholders make just two trips per day, five days per week, 90% of the time, that alone generates 25,714 trips per day. That leaves out all the visitors, shoppers, tourists and others who would likely use the Sky Loop.

We have been testing this premise with the Sky Loop Card Questionnaire for the last year. The questionnaire and the latest results are enclosed. We ask those who hear our presentation to complete this and turn it in before they leave. At this point they know what the Sky Loop is, so we feel it is an informed response. Out of 180 questionnaires received to date, 74 were from people who work downtown, and 35 of those said they would buy a monthly Sky Loop Card for \$50.00. This is 47%! In addition, of the 106 people who do not work downtown, 56 said they would buy a 10-trip card for \$15.00, 53% of this group.

While this is certainly not a professional survey, it does indicate our estimate of 20% usage for the Sky Loop is probably conservative.

There have been three ridership studies of PRT in other cities. The latest is for a 9.7 mile PRT system in downtown Minneapolis, which would tie into the Hiawatha light rail line to be built there. (Copy enclosed.) This proposed PRT system is the most comparable to our own. This study projects 88,900 daily trips!

A study was also done in Chicago in 1992 for the Chicago RTA. Four possible sites for PRT were studied. Rosemont, a suburb near O'Hare airport, was later chosen for a small 3.1 mile prototype system. Even for this small system, which would serve just a handful of hotels and small office buildings, the study concluded it would have 4,800 daily riders at \$2.00 each. (Selected pages enclosed.)

Finally, a ridership study was done at SeaTac, WA in 1997. This was for a PRT system at the Seattle-Tacoma Airport, including the City of SeaTac. Their Alignment C is a 12.1-mile system. It is planned to serve the airport hotels, taking passengers to and from the airport. It is a much less populated area than our downtown. It was estimated to achieve 24,100 daily PRT riders. (Selected pages enclosed.)

Another crucial issue for PRT involves safety, and the need for emergency walkways. Taxi 2000 has always maintained these would not be needed in most places. Again, PB and SLC met with the Cincinnati Fire Dept. on June 4<sup>th</sup>. Sam Lott came from Houston to participate, as this was one of his main concerns. After thorough discussion of the designed safety procedure for PRT, it was agreed by all that walkways would be needed only over the rivers and coming into stations, on the off-line portion of the guideway. Assuming this arrangement is ratified by the Cincinnati Fire Chief, this would remove a major obstacle, both in cost and intrusiveness for PRT.

Another objection we have heard to PRT, especially by DCI, concerns the argument that any elevated system will threaten "street life" downtown. We understand DCI even wants to remove the entire Skywalk system, for this reason.

SLC maintains there is absolutely no evidence that an elevated transit system threatens street-level activity, whether it is stores, restaurants, festivals, or whatever. In fact, intuitively we believe that making it much easier to get around the entire downtown area will attract many more people to downtown than ever before. Unlike the Skywalk system, however, the Sky Loop guideways are all outside of buildings, and thus riders will overlook all street level activity much like the monorail at Disney World. Further, we would use Mac Productions' City Link System in all stations. Through these interactive kiosks, riders would be informed daily of all activities in the area, which station to get off, etc. These electronic kiosks already exist in 50 locations in the downtown area, and their number would be greatly increased with the Sky Loop.

We also think you should consider carefully the potential benefits to Sky Loop Card Buyers, Stakeholders and Community Partners in the CAL area. (See "The Sky Loop," enclosed.)

Finally, we wish to address the leading objection we have heard to the Sky Loop: that it does not yet exist anywhere in the world, so why should Cincinnati choose it?

The reasons for doing so are these:

1. It is the only system that people will ride in significant numbers. The other technologies are unlikely to achieve any more riders than the Southbank Shuttle does now because they are too slow and inconvenient and too limited in the effective area they serve.
2. The Sky Loop has an excellent chance of making a substantial profit. (The alternatives will all lose money, just as the Southbank Shuttle does now.) Because of this, the Sky Loop can grow by reinvesting profits, without burdening taxpayers.
3. There is no reason to spend millions of dollars to build a system that won't attract new riders. If it is unlikely to attract more riders than the Southbank Shuttle, why do it?
4. Cincinnati could be one of the last cities in America to build a light rail system (the same as it was one of the last cities to build a major railroad passenger terminal and likely one of the last to build publicly-financed sports stadia), thereby perpetuating our image of being 10 years or more behind other major cities. Or, we can be the first city in the world to have a Sky Loop, and change our image overnight. Which do we want? If we are the first major city with a PRT system, we will have visitors from around the world who are concerned about their own transportation problems. If it works as intended, PRT will likely become a new high tech industry worth many billions of dollars each year. Wouldn't it be nice to have some of that industry here? That opportunity exists with Taxi 2000 at the moment.

Here is what SLC recommends be done by the CALSC:

1. Select the Sky Loop, using Taxi 2000 PRT, as the Locally Preferred Alternative for the Central Area Loop system.
2. Support the Southbank Shuttle, with any agreed improvements, to serve as the interim circulator until Taxi 2000 successfully builds and tests its prototype.
3. If light rail is approved by the voters for the 50% local match, and the FTA approves the I-71 Corridor proposal for Federal funding, then plan to interface the Sky Loop with light rail at the intermodal center and possibly other light rail stations in the downtown area.
4. Delay further work on the circulator until Taxi 2000 has funded construction and testing of its prototype. In this way, no further dollars will be spent until we know a PRT system should be available in about three years.
5. Once the Taxi 2000 prototype is funded, then proceed with Phase 2-Preliminary Engineering, a more complete Ridership Study for the Sky Loop, a complete Business Plan for the Sky Loop system, and any other preparations needed for approval by the FTA for Federal funding.
6. If the Taxi 2000 prototype and testing is not successful, the Sky Loop Project can be terminated without making a major capital investment.
7. If the prototype is successful, and the costs are within budget, then we would proceed.

One final comment. If we follow this course, we will not be the first city to do so. SeaTac conducted a Major Investment Study (MIS) in 1992 and selected PRT over all other alternatives at that time. They are now awaiting development of the Taxi 2000 prototype to proceed with their project. SeaTac could be first to build a PRT system. However, this is primarily an airport application, so we could still be first with PRT in a major downtown.

In addition, Chicago selected PRT in 1992 for a small system in Rosemont, as noted above. Chicago is thus a likely candidate for a Taxi 2000 system. However, at this point, we are ahead of Chicago if we select Taxi 2000 PRT.

These earlier projects did not proceed. Why? Taxi 2000 licensed its rights to Raytheon in 1992. From 1992 to 1994 Raytheon proceeded to re-engineer the Taxi 2000 design into a new design with guideways and vehicles four times as large and expensive as the Taxi 2000 design. Predictably, Raytheon failed to find buyers from 1995 to 1999 because of size and cost. Raytheon abandoned their design in late 1999. Taxi 2000 re-acquired its development rights from Raytheon in 2000, and is now seeking funding to proceed with a full scale prototype for its original version.

The Sky Loop will change our downtown, and the way we view ourselves, forever. Let's have the courage and vision to make it a reality.

Sincerely,

Charles S. Tappan  
Chairman