

# Taking the Scenic Route

SCENIC AMERICA 2014 CONFERENCE

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# Safeguarding Visual Image of Metropolitan Transit Authority

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# Safeguard Scenic Qualities of America's Communities

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- Educated citizenry
- Corps of committed scenic activists
- Business community that understands the economic value of beauty
- Public policy that defends natural beauty and distinctive character
- Technical Expertise

# A Little History

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- **Before 9/27/78:** METRO created but not yet operating
- **9/27/78:** City Council (7-1) granted Transit Shelters Inc. a bus shelter franchise
- **Shortly thereafter:** Scenic activists organized to oppose measure

# Scenics Take Charge

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## **Next 30 days:**

- Create CATSA (Citizens Against Transit Shelter Advertising)
- Drafted referendum petition
- Secured 800+ signatures
- Oct. 25, 1978: CATSA filed Petition with City Council

# Next 11 months

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- CATSA public education and outreach
- October 1979: Media alert
- Oct. 31, 1979: Media response

# The Truth Revealed

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**6 days before the election, well-respected *Houston Post* columnist Lynn Ashby spoke:**

- “The shelters would have ads on the side, illuminated at night. They could put them anyplace a bus goes, or will go in the future... The shelters can definitely go in any commercial area, which---in view of our strict zoning---covers most surface areas.”
- “Yes, we need bus shelters. Yes, it would be nice if someone else would put them up. But these free shelters are too expensive, because the very last thing we need is more billboards and advertising signs around town. Remember this on election day, when you get one of those rare chances to have a say in the livability of Houston.”





**BUS SHELTERS  
FRANCHISE  
FOR  
ADVERTISEMENTS?**



**NO BY 56%**



# Most Recent

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- 2012-2013: Houston Metro examined “asset monetization”
- Translation: selling ad space to raise money
- Scenic Houston action:
  - Testimony
  - Op-eds
  - Letter writing campaign
  - Coordinated opposition
- Result: Metro ended its study after one year

# Transit Advertising: Issues to consider

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- Income potential (rarely significant)
- Public reaction
- First Amendment challenges
- Health and safety considerations
- Integrity of the transit authority “brand”

# Guiding Principles

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Strong sign code: no new billboards.

Watch for questionable actions

- Granting of improper franchise or gift
- Other city or state legal/constitutional constraints

Develop strong citizen scenic group

- Influence decision-makers
- Develop business partners
- Connect with media
- Activate grassroots machine

Remain ever-vigilant

# Future METRO Boards: Issue not resolved

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- The topic resurfaces with every new Mayor and Metro board chairman.
- Scenic Houston will continue open dialogue
- Scenic Houston preserves the public's “memory”

# Houston has chosen

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METRO

METRO

Flavor that  
coffee

Dollar  Menu

at breakfast



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