

STATE OF CITY ADDRESS 2009
MAYOR MIKE MONCRIEF
11:30 a.m. Thursday, February 12, 2009
Fort Worth Convention Center Ballroom

A woman grabbed my arm to stop me recently. The exact time and place escapes me, but I distinctly remember her cheerful voice. She smiled and spoke right up—She said, “*Mayor, we haven’t been here for long, and with my husband’s job we’ve been from city to city, but we’ve never experienced anything like this! Fort Worth is now our home, and we could not be more proud!*”

One of the best parts about this job are those moments when Rosie and I are stopped by a passer-by. It happens all the time—while we’re at events, walking down the street, or out to dinner...Even when we’re out of town. Yes, we’ll occasionally get the predictable, “*What are you going to do about my neighbor’s dog doing their business in my yard,*” or, in Sal’s case, those pesky feral chickens on the Northside! But, not a week passes that someone doesn’t tap my shoulder or tug on my sleeve to tell me how much they love this city.

The stories are many, and each is different. But, together, they can only lead to one conclusion: We don’t stand in anyone’s shadow. The spirit of Fort Worth continues to soar above the clouds and pulsate through the good people of this dynamic city. You can feel it! You can see it!

My esteemed city council colleagues...members of the Fort Worth Chamber...business leaders...and, especially, my fellow citizens: I’m honored to stand before you once again to do what I love to do: talk about this city, our home and yours. It’s a city that—despite great national economic uncertainty—continues to graciously bless her people and her communities. Before I begin, let me thank my good friend Bill Thornton and the Chamber for hosting us. The Chamber’s team worked very hard to make this a memorable afternoon, and they’ve done a wonderful job. Let’s give them a hand.

Let us also take a quiet moment to remember Lisa Dodson, whom we lost in December. As Bill’s executive assistant, Lisa no doubt worked with many of you in some form or fashion, and we certainly miss her presence today.

Last year was an extraordinary time for Fort Worth. And, while I plan to discuss the road ahead, it’s extremely satisfying to recall our accomplishments in ’08: Under extremely difficult circumstances, we delivered a billion-dollar balanced budget that maintains and improves critical city services. And, as of last week we have a current financial report card with our Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.

We continued to re-energize many of our more historic communities and kept our foot on the pedal in our high growth job centers. We adopted a new Gas Drilling Ordinance that provides even more protection for neighborhoods while preserving the benefits of the Barnett Shale.

Yes, we made a great deal of progress over the past year. But, the reason we have done so is teamwork. There’s no “I” in “Team!” I am but one vote on this council, and our united progress

is a testament to the synergy among the members of your City Council and the best city staff in the country. I'm privileged to serve along side seven strong and compassionate community leaders.

Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Hicks, Sal Espino, Danny Scarth, Frank Moss, Jungus Jordan, Carter Burdette, and Joel Burns—would you please stand or raise your hand.

There is one empty chair at our council dais. In October, we said good-bye to a stalwart Fort Worth soldier—Chuck Silcox. Before his passing, Chuck was a loyal advocate for the people of District 3. Sure, at times he was as stubborn as a mule, but you always knew where he stood. Chuck will be missed, and his contributions will not be forgotten.

Also making his mark on Fort Worth is City Manager Dale Fisseler and his brilliant city management team. In September, Dale and his staff faced a huge challenge wrestling with one of the toughest budgets in our city's recent history. Such adversity can bring out either the best or the worst in people. Dale proved that he and his team are more than capable. They truly are the best in the business, and we appreciate their dedication to protecting our tax payers while supporting their needs.

Because of its strong leadership, Fort Worth was placed by *Forbes* among the top five “Best Cities for Jobs.” *Business Wire* touted Cowtown as one of the “Most affordable college towns in the country.” The National Trust for Historic Preservation named Fort Worth as one of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations. And, the ladies will be glad to hear that *Men's Health Magazine* placed Fort Worth among the “Best Cities for Men!” I suppose men would be glad to hear that too...

But these accolades can't take the place of what you'll hear around the table at Joe T's...the Paris Coffee Shop...the West Side Café...or the Poly Grill. As you walk through any neighborhood, any gathering place, you can feel the pulse of our city. The can-do spirit in the air is so thick you can almost taste it. The people here have what I call that “Fort Worth Fever.” It's truly infectious.

A local entrepreneur, Casey Newell, was recently quoted in the Fort Worth Business Press, and I think she captured it best when she said, “*We're cowboys, lawyers, builders, and dreamers. We're entrepreneurs and entertainers. We're all those things, a big family. Fort Worth is a diversity of people. We are a unity of differences. The city is made up of so many different people, but they all stand proud no matter who they are...*” I could not agree more, Casey.

This deep-rooted community pride, the extraordinary growth, and the abundant opportunity are proof that the state of Fort Worth is strong—hotter than a Habañero. Ever taste one?

During my 2008 state of the city address, we outlined a few objectives. Specifically, as gas drilling reached its peak, we said we needed greater participation from the Texas Railroad Commission. I also stated that it was time to take another look at our Gas Drilling Ordinance.

Today, the Texas Railroad Commission has a new office in Fort Worth. This has strengthened our relationship as we work together to protect our neighborhoods. Additionally, after a very exhaustive, open, and fair process, the City Council adopted sweeping changes to the Gas Drilling Ordinance in December. We greatly appreciate the work by the Gas Drilling Task Force under the leadership of Bob Riley. And I especially want to thank city staffers Sarah Fullenwider and Susan Alanis who listened carefully and made sure the final product was rock solid. A veteran in the energy industry, Councilmember Carter Burdette has also been invaluable in our efforts to craft a meaningful ordinance. Thank you Carter.

The Barnett Shale represents an enormous advantage for our local economy. The benefits are undeniable: jobs, business investment, and bonus and royalty checks in the hands of countless residents. But thanks to the new ordinance, we are in a better position to protect our neighborhoods, protect our environment, and protect our quality of life. All of this, while protecting the rights of residents to lease their minerals.

In 2008, we also met some notable milestones with respect to our extraordinary Trinity River Vision. The support for this project has never been better. We signed the official agreement with the U.S. Corps of Engineers to begin construction. Voters approved funding for the three bridges that will span the new river bypass channel. And, hundreds of eastside neighbors came together on a bright and beautiful day to celebrate the start of work along the Trinity River Oxbow and Gateway Park. Councilmember Danny Scarth and Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Hicks have been working hard to bring improvements to Gateway, and their efforts have paid off.

Soon, the former Radio Shack campus will be swarming with Tarrant County College students. This was a big shift for TCC, but it ensures much of the former Radio Shack campus is not left vacant, and it opens new development opportunities in the heart of our TRV project. The momentum has clearly picked up for the Trinity River Vision, and we will continue to push hard in '09 as blue prints and drafting tables make way for hard hats and bulldozers.

During my last address, I also said I wanted to see a comprehensive 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness on my desk by the end of the year. Not only has that plan been delivered, it has been adopted by the city and endorsed by the county and many other partners. I will expand on this plan in a few minutes.

Finally, we announced last year our intention to host an all-encompassing, city-wide town hall meeting. "Let's Talk, Fort Worth" was a resounding success. I'm sure you saw some of the citizen comments on display as you came in. Roughly 700 people submitted formal comments and many more came to the meetings. The input we received spans more than 1,500 topics. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Dennis Shingleton, the members of the Citizen's Committee, and the city staff who made these remarkable results possible. Over the coming months, we will continue to review and act on many of the innovative and thoughtful suggestions—like making Fort Worth deaf friendly.

The progress in 2008 is undeniable, but the past is prologue. The years behind us are nothing more than an introduction to the future—and that's where our focus should be: the future.

Just over the bright horizon I see a radiant city where young children pedal their bikes along quiet neighborhoods streets or sidewalks without fear for their safety. A city where commuters travel freely thanks to adequate streets and convenient modes of public transit. A city that affords every citizen—regardless of their socio-economic status—just as much chance as the next person to succeed. It's a clean, sustainable, and colorful city. A competitive, diverse, and economically viable city. A city with boundless opportunity.

You know what? Fort Worth is well on its way, but we have some work to do.

As I talk with citizens, one of the most important issues is public safety. Just ask Lance Griggs. He's been patrolling the Summerfields community as a Citizens On Patrol volunteer since 1994. Lance understands that public safety is the very foundation of a thriving city. After a career in the Air Force and 20 years at Lockheed, Lance now enjoys the life of retirement. And, although he's already given so much to his country, he is not resting on his laurels. While his neighbors are at work supporting their families and our economy, Lance is watching their backs.

He and his wife, Judy, don their blue shirts and strap into their black Hyundai SanteFe. After reporting in for duty using their city-issued police radio, they begin their slow, careful patrol, keenly watching for suspicious behavior—people or cars that don't belong in the neighborhood, open garage doors.

This kind of devotion is honorable. But Lance and Judy don't think twice about it. To them and their fellow volunteers, it's a natural and necessary sacrifice. Helping protect others gives them a special sense of pride. Lance said, "*Volunteers are what make this city great. People must be active in their community or it won't survive.*"

Lance's observation is spot on. Imagine: What if every able adult in Fort Worth gave one or two hours a week to serve alongside Lance and Judy? Think about that... The criminals would have nowhere to hide. Our Citizens On Patrol volunteers don't usually get the headlines. But, because of them, Fort Worth's community policing program is recognized as one of the best in the nation. Lance and Judy, thank you.

If you are not yet involved in some level of community service, find a way to contribute. Match a personal interest with an opportunity to serve. You can learn more about getting involved by visiting my Web page on the city's Web site.

Thanks to our citizen volunteers and the skilled men and women of our police and fire departments, we continue to make progress when it comes to protecting people and property.

Overall, crime rates in 2008 were down 4.8 percent from the previous year, and Fort Worth saw its lowest number of homicides in 40 years! Additionally, we opened the new Fire Station 11 in north Fort Worth, which will help us maintain our four-minute average response time for high

priority fire and EMS calls. These are great accomplishments considering the growth both in people and land mass.

To build upon our success, the 2009 budget added 28 new firefighters. It also includes funding for 34 additional patrol officers and five more police sergeants.

I recently had the proud opportunity to swear in our new Police Chief, Jeff Halstead. Our city's 24th police chief comes to us with a proud 20-year record of service with the Phoenix Police Department. This man exudes confidence. He's a proven leader. And, he is going to help us reach our goal of becoming the nation's safest major city. Chief, please stand and let us give you a big Fort Worth welcome...

Chief Halstead joins the company of skillful leadership in Fire Chief Rudy Jackson.

Aside from adding police officers and beefing up our volunteer ranks, maintaining safe communities in Fort Worth will also require the reauthorization of the city's Crime Control and Prevention District. The district is funded by a half-cent sales tax, which voters approved in 1994. Since then, the District has been vital to our success in preventing and fighting crime.

In fact, since it was adopted in 1994, Fort Worth's crime rate has dropped 39 percent!

Soon, voters will have the opportunity to reauthorize the District. It's a critical part of our crime fighting efforts, and I strongly urge residents to soundly ensure its renewal.

Our success fighting crime is only surpassed by our progress over the past year battling homelessness.

Consider this: A recent study showed that 83 percent of cities nationwide have seen an *increase* in homelessness. I'm very proud to report to you that, last week, we learned that during the same study period, we saw a *decrease* in homelessness of almost 10 percent! Given national economic challenges, this is nothing short of spectacular! Thanks to you, the tides are shifting.

Our progress is the result of our community circling the wagons in support of our recently adopted homelessness plan. It is entitled *Directions Home*, and our goal is to make homelessness rare, short-term, and non-recurring in Fort Worth within 10 years. The plan was drafted by a team of passionate people on the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Homelessness, led by Rev. Brooks Harrington from First United Methodist Church.

I want to also mention County Commissioner Roy Brooks who helped organize the healthcare portion of this plan. Recognizing that homelessness has no boundaries, Judge Glen Whitley and the Tarrant County Commissioner's Court unanimously endorsed our plan. In doing so, the county joined the city to offset the operating costs of the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition.

Not only is the plan practical and compassionate, it also makes good economic sense. Getting people off the streets and out of emergency shelters is less expensive than leaving them to suffer under a bridge or in an alley. That's right, less expensive.

Last year, our community spent roughly \$30 million responding to homelessness. It's expensive to pay for care in the emergency room, or send an ambulance and dispatch a fire truck every time 911 is dialed from a shelter. More shocking is that two-thirds of that money—your tax dollars—was spent reacting to homelessness rather than ending it.

But, with our new plan, we now have a roadmap that focuses on measureable results and addressing the core needs of the homeless: Housing, health care, social services, and employment.

To get us started, my council colleagues and I approved \$2.9 million worth of new funding in the city's 2009 budget. We've already begun to distribute this funding to expand housing and the associated supportive services. Moreover, countless local service providers are taking a stand in support of our plan—Cook Children's Health System, JPS, MHMR, United Way, Recovery Resource Council, Workforce Solutions. These are but a few examples.

People are talking about this. Preachers are preaching about this. Our friends in the media are reporting about this. Doors are opening. Hearts are opening. And, wallets are opening too. There's a transformative movement afoot in Fort Worth.

For example, thanks to Carol Klocek and the caring staff at the Presbyterian Night Shelter, more than 400 of their frequent residents ended their homelessness in 2008! That's powerful, folks, and all it took was hiring a few case managers to address the specific needs of these individuals. One of these success stories spent 15 years either in the shelter, on the street, or in jail. She worked hard for five months with the staff at the Presbyterian Night Shelter and moved out of the shelter just in time to watch the Olympic Games in the comfort of her very own apartment.

We're making progress on the employment front too. Project W.I.S.H., a job readiness initiative administered by Workforce Solutions of Tarrant County, has now placed 348 homeless individuals in full-time jobs—348 people! What's more, the majority of these good folks are keeping their jobs. Now that's exciting, Fort Worth! The myth that homeless people will not work is unfounded. These wonderful individuals are not only employed, they have confidence. They have a special pride. They have a new sense of hope!

A special thanks the corporate partners who support this program and, in some cases, hire graduates. These businesses represent solid high ground for those who have fallen into an unforgiving sea of hopelessness. But the need is still great. If your business is not yet involved, we need you. Just ask Rick Merrill and Ginny Hickman at Cook Children's how getting involved can electrify an entire organization.

We need jobs, we need mentors, we need capital. Friends, I know times are tough. But, once we push through this economic malaise, when you have an opportunity to hire, please remember these folks. And, if you are willing to serve as a mentor, guardian, or job coach, we have folks

ready with open ears. Call one of our shelters or non-profit partners and ask how you or your business can help. You'll find a brochure from Project W.I.S.H. on your table, and I encourage you to visit the Project W.I.S.H. booth outside the ballroom on your way out and ask what your company can do.

Ladies and gentlemen, ending chronic homelessness is not a dream beyond our reach—it's a goal within our grasp. Thanks to your generosity, our citizen volunteers, and countless community partners, many of our most vulnerable citizens are already finding their direction home.

And, helping those less fortunate will only strengthen what has proven to be a very resilient local economy. Considering the state of the American economy, Fort Worth shines like the glow of a lighthouse in a dense and stubborn morning fog. It's a beacon of hope for those who find themselves in extremely rough seas.

Many people are taking full advantage of Fort Worth's promise of opportunity—people like Robert and Donna Griffin and their partner, Herbert Davis. Together, they own and operate MOPS, a booming janitorial contracting business. After 23 years at Vaught, Robert longed to blaze a new path on his own. His wife was involved with the Fort Worth Business Assistance Center, and he saw an opportunity. With help from the Center, he began to build his business. Today, their small business employs not 5, or 10, or even 40...but 85 people!

Robert could've launched his business anywhere, but he knew Fort Worth was the place of opportunity. As he puts it, *"If you want to start a business, you ought to be moving to Fort Worth because the city is putting its money where its mouth is. The entrepreneurial spirit is being re-invented in Fort Worth."*

Robert, Donna, and Herbert are with us today, and we thank them for proving that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in our community. Because of entrepreneurs like them and the city's commitment to job creation, Fort Worth is holding its own against the national and global financial uncertainty.

Today that paper said sales tax revenue for our city was down 7.5 percent in December. But, I want you to know that for the fiscal year to date, we were only off two tenths of one percent.

Think about this: The National Bureau of Economic Research determined that the U.S. economic recession actually began in December of 2007. But in 2008, the value of commercial construction was the highest in our city's history! Yes, the highest ever recorded! And, looking at new home starts for last year, Fort Worth had the second highest number of new home starts in the country!

Let me add a note of caution, however: We're not immune to outside economic trends. Let's be clear: Friends and neighbors have lost jobs. Some have lost their homes. I would expect it to get worse before it gets better. But just as any good soldier will tell you: We must adjust, adapt, and overcome. That's exactly what we're doing in City Hall.

Recognizing the turbulent storms ahead, we delivered a balanced budget that created a leaner city government while maintaining core public services. Changing the financial course of a city of this size is about as easy as navigating the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan along the Trinity. But we did it. We cut costs...We held the property tax rate flat...All of this, while beefing up our fire and police forces, increasing spending for street improvements, funding our new homelessness initiatives, and much more.

By being fiscally conservative, Fort Worth is in a better position to weather the storms and maintain that low cost of living. It's that low cost of living, our high quality of life, and strong economic climate that make Fort Worth such an attractive option for building businesses and creating jobs.

Take Daimler Financial, for instance. Thanks to Fort Worth's promise of opportunity, this global giant relocated its trucking finance office from Illinois to a bright new building at Alliance. The office in north Fort Worth now employs more than 660 people. Daimler plans to relocate even more employees here from New Jersey and California this year. I bet those folks can't wait to get here! While this represents a multi-million dollar investment, the payoff of creating good-paying jobs is, as they say, priceless. This is only one of the many, many ways Fort Worth continues to buck national trends.

If we are to maintain our momentum, we must continue to invest in our central city. We've made great progress in that regard thanks to the leadership of Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Hicks and Councilmembers Sal Espino, Frank Moss, and Joel Burns, who represent these communities.

The near southern and eastern portions of our city are ripe for investment. Evidence of this is clear in Poly, along the Evans and Rosedale corridor, in the historic Terrell Heights neighborhood, at the confluence of Riverside and Berry, and along the western shores of Lake Arlington. Even abandoned areas, like the former Masonic Home campus, are on their way up thanks to commitments from many gracious partners, both public and private.

These communities have the financial wherewithal to support new development. They deserve new development. And, mark my words: Fort Worth will continue to use our toolbox to support growth and investment in our central city!

We also must continue to support growth in the tourism sector. This is very important, because business travelers and tourists generate sales tax revenue that offsets our property taxes. This works in our favor to hold down our cost of living. For more than 10 years now, Texas Motor Speedway has been an unbelievable draw for visitors, and there are others: The Stockyards, the Fort Worth Zoo, LaGrave Field, Bass Hall, Sundance Square, and our world-renowned museums—not the least of which is our new Museum of Science and History. Once completed later this year, this remarkable facility will forever brand Fort Worth as the museum capital of the Southwest.

Taking down the cranes and opening the doors to the Omni Fort Worth Hotel will prove to be a “game changer,” as Omni CEO Bob Rowling said recently. This magnificent structure—

combined with an already star-studded inventory of hotels—puts everyone on notice that Fort Worth is now a serious contender in the national and international convention market! The numbers already show it.

Thanks to our efforts to increase hotel room capacity, Fort Worth will host the NFL's AFC Champions in 2011 as North Texas celebrates Super Bowl 45! This is yet another opportunity to showcase our city to the world!

Some of you may remember that, in 2004, I set a goal of doubling tourism business by this year. Since then, we've greatly expanded hotel capacity and increased funding for the Fort Worth Convention and Visitor's Bureau. The result: This year, we expect to book more than 300,000 definite room nights—double from where we were in 2004. Mission accomplished!

But simply meeting this goal doesn't mean we're finished. If we are to maintain our recognition as one of the nation's most distinctive destinations, we must keep our shoulder to the wheel. The new parking garage at Will Rogers Memorial Center will help, and we must not lose sight of our target to build a new Will Rogers arena.

In terms of economics, we have a lot to be thankful for. We're home to a strong and diverse workforce. Our city has become a world-class destination. Our economy is floating high atop the steady tides created by the Barnett Shale and growth centers like Alliance Texas, the Cultural District, and our burgeoning downtown—including the new Carnegie Building. Take a look at it when you get a chance. Notice it has no backside like most buildings. Ed Bass knew it would be seen from all directions, and it has windows and balconies on all four sides. It's an extra touch of Fort Worth class!

But, the future chapters of our city's story are yet to be written. It's no secret that the 800-pound gorilla in the room is mobility. We've got \$2.4 billion in street needs over the next 10 years staring us in the face. I don't have to tell any of you about the condition of our highways and some neighborhood streets during rush hour.

Benny Araujo joins us this afternoon. He lives in Summercreek Meadows in southwest Fort Worth. For the past 10 years, Benny has made the long haul to his job in Lewisville and back. He'll be the first to tell you: Without swift and major upgrades to our transportation network, Fort Worth's economic engine will sputter and die. Benny said, *"There's got to be a better way. There's no good route out of southwest Fort Worth to anywhere else in the Metroplex."*

He's absolutely right, of course, and the same is true for other parts of our city. Fortunately, we are closer to turning dirt on the North Tarrant Express. Not as close as I'd like, but closer. This includes major improvements to the northern parts of Loop 820 and Airport Freeway, with some connections to I-35.

Last month, the Texas Transportation Commission awarded the project to a private contractor to begin construction. This agreement leverages limited gas-tax dollars for an estimated \$2 billion

in up-front investment that will nearly double the existing number of lanes and provide long-term maintenance. As part of this contract, TxDOT will work with the private sector to identify creative ways to expand and improve I-35 between downtown and Denton County. Friends, we're not going to let off the gas when it comes to fixing I-35 North.

Southwest Parkway will also bring relief to Fort Worth commuters by creating a convenient link between downtown and Johnson County. Reaching an agreement on how to build the Southwest Parkway bridge over Union Pacific's Davidson Rail Yard proved to be a difficult challenge in 2008. But, in true Fort Worth fashion, the various partners came together, forged a solution, and we're moving forward once again. Most of the right-of-way has been cleared, utility work is almost complete, and we expect to be moving dirt by the end of this year.

We also continue to make headway on neighborhood streets. We found room in a tight budget to add an extra \$1.5 million for street maintenance. And, we've committed to fund additional street improvements with the remaining un-restricted gas well revenues. The latter is yet another example of how the Barnett Shale will improve our lives. We also adopted transportation impact fees aimed at building more roads in rapidly growing suburban areas. What's more, voters approved our \$150 million street bond program last spring. This was a big win.

But let me be very clear: Simply building more streets to accommodate more vehicles is not the answer to our mobility problems. North Texas will be home to more than nine million people by the year 2030. Even with all the money and support in the world, we could not build enough roads and highways fast enough to support such growth.

So how do we give commuters, like Benny, more options? I believe a seamless, clean, and efficient commuter rail system connected to other modes of public transportation will help us literally get moving again. With central city density increasing, frequent road congestion, and uncertain gas prices, residents are ready for a change. Like me, Benny and his fellow commuters see rail as a way to bring them some relief.

Streetcars are certainly part of the solution we're seriously considering, and I thank Councilmember Joel Burns for his help and leadership in this effort.

But, even more impactful will be regional commuter rail that will interconnect North Texas communities and our region's largest economic engine, DFW International Airport. If you haven't heard about Rail North Texas, I encourage you to visit my Web page to learn about it.

Texas Senator John Corona and State Representative Vicki Truitt have told us they will introduce a new piece of legislation called the Texas Local Option Transportation Act. Local option. Our choice. This will implement the provisions of the Rail North Texas discussion we've had in Fort Worth for the last two years.

Our own Councilmember Jungus Jordan has been leading the charge for this initiative in our region, and we thank him for his strong leadership. Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Hicks and Councilmember Sal Espino—both members of the Regional Transportation Council—also deserve our thanks.

We have identified more than 250 miles of additional rail lines that could serve seven different counties in North Central Texas. But, commuter rail is incredibly expensive. We're talking about \$5 to \$9 billion when it's all said and done. There's been a lot of cussin' and discussin'—both here and in Austin—to get us to this point. But this time we're going to put our efforts to controlling the sail not the wind.

Our dream of an efficient and seamless public transit system in North Texas is doable, folks! However, generating the needed funds will require action by our state legislators. If approved, the Texas Local Option Transportation Act would let local voters in each county decide if they want this commuter rail system and/or roads, and how they want to pay for it. This would be much like a local bond issue.

Only after receiving the blessing of the voters would fees be imposed for both new rail systems and new roads. I want to stress this bill is not just for commuter railroads, but rather rail and roads.

The Texas Local Option Transportation Act gives us flexibility. It maintains local control. Moreover, it would give commuters the option to step out of their vehicles and onto clean, safe, air-conditioned trains. From their seats in the quiet railcar, passengers will zoom past the traffic while reading their newspaper, enjoying their cup of joe, or preparing for the morning's meeting on their laptop. The possibilities are profound, and we can get there.

Support is building across the state for this initiative. But, we cannot diminish the importance of a major grass roots effort. We need your help! Our leaders in Austin must take a stand in support of the Texas Local Option Transportation Act. And, they won't stand unless you stand with them!

Believe me, I know from personal experience—getting anything through the legislature is like trying to push a wet noodle! But my fellow citizens, if we don't make headway during this session, we may never have another chance. The needed right-of-way will be gone. Options will be eliminated. Are we going to continue to breathe this air? Are we going to continue to waste valuable time in these parking lots they call highways? This doesn't have to be our future.

I'm not going to sit around scratching lotto tickets, hoping on luck that things will fix themselves. I know better. This is our chance. This is our time. We must have a united voice Fort Worth! A preacher friend of mine told me once that, "When you pray, move your feet." That's exactly what we must do. I'm not going to lie—this will take some praying, but we can't afford to just sit back and hope!

Help us send a clear message to your representatives. Let them know that, without action on rail, the economic viability of Fort Worth and North Texas will be lost. You know these folks. You know their numbers. Give them a call. No voice is too small or heard too often.

Thanks to all of you for the opportunity to stand before you this afternoon. Being the 43rd mayor of Fort Worth is indeed an honor and a great privilege. No matter how tough this job gets, the words, letters, and prayers of support are humbling. And, I especially want to thank my wife Rosie. Not only for being my life partner, but for all she does to make Fort Worth a better place. The boards she's served on. The countless events she's chaired for charitable causes. And finally, for her love of this great city and all who call it home.

In his 1922 book *Fort Worth and Texas Northwest*, Capt. B.B. Paddock had this to say about our city:

“When one has studied the history of Fort Worth from its inception, he is impressed to the point of amazement by the tremendous energy and magnificent civic spirit that have actuated the builders and promoters of the city’s real greatness...Every advantage has been seized...no opportunities have been overlooked...and the place has risen to first magnitude because of the vigilance and tireless endeavor of its citizens.”

I submit, what was true in 1922 is still true today. Fort Worth still stands as one of the greatest examples of a stable, diverse, and growing community. And, *together* we will maintain our course to further protect our neighborhoods, end chronic homelessness, fuel our economy, and improve mobility. These must be our priorities in 2009.

The key word is *“together.”* Not apart, but together!

No city can, by itself, maintain a course toward its bright destiny over the expansive horizon. But, a city home to passionately engaged citizens—true to their values and unified in vision—can move mountains.

Let's move some mountains, Fort Worth!

God bless you and God bless our city.