

SUBJECT: Removing term limits for members of the Capital Metro board

COMMITTEE: Transportation — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Krusee, Phillips, Callegari, Casteel, Deshotel, Hamric, West
0 nays
2 absent — Flores, Hill

WITNESSES: For — Charles Betts, Downtown Austin Alliance; Kirk Watson, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce
Against — None

BACKGROUND: Transportation Code, sec. 451.506 deals with term limits for board members of certain metropolitan rapid transit authorities including Capital Metro, the transit authority for Austin and surrounding areas. Capital Metro board members currently serve two-year terms and may not exceed eight years of lifetime service on the board. The chair of the seven-member Capital Metro board is restricted two terms of total service in that position.

DIGEST: HB 1815 would eliminate the eight-year limit on lifetime service for members of the Capital Metro board. The bill also would remove the two-term limit that applies to the chair the Capital Metro board.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2005.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Eliminating term limits for Capital Metro board members would bring stability to the board and maintain the institutional knowledge necessary to carry out the recently adopted All Systems Go Long Range Transit Plan, which includes the introduction of commuter rail to Austin. Term limits have caused a great deal of turnover among board members in recent years, and four more experienced members are scheduled to step down this year as required by law. An experienced board is key to the successful

implementation of this ambitious transit plan, which is essential to the long-term prosperity of the rapidly growing Austin metropolitan area.

Commuter rail is a unique endeavor for metro Austin and will require the specialized knowledge of the current board. In November 2004, Austin-area voters approved the creation of a commuter rail system extending from Leander through northwest and east Austin and on to downtown, a rail line that is expected to transport 17,000 passengers daily by 2025. Such a project is unprecedented in Austin and should not be left in the hands of inexperienced leaders.

The sudden loss of such a substantial portion of the board could weaken Capital Metro's clout in the national transportation community. Loss of the current board members and the close relationships they have established with public officials across the nation could result in the isolation of Capital Metro from peer organizations around the country that work on transportation issues. HB 1815 would enable the board to maintain these vital ties with other public officials and keep open the established channels for obtaining valuable transportation-related information.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Term limits for transit authority board members are necessary to prevent a single point of view from dominating transportation policy for long periods of time. They help ensure that the Capital Metro board receives input from diverse perspectives and considers a variety of transit policies. HB 1815 inappropriately would allow the board to pursue its agenda of proliferating commuter rail indefinitely while insulating the board from the constructive influence of different viewpoints.

Eight years is a sufficient amount of time for any individual to serve on the Capital Metro board and to affect transit policies for Austin and neighboring areas. The eight-year limit on service allows an individual board member to serve a total of four two-year terms, longer than the term limits that bind officials in many of the state's other local governmental bodies.

Despite claims that term limits must be eliminated to ensure the successful implementation of Austin's long-range transit plan, this plan will be implemented not by board members but by Capital Metro's permanent staff. The transit authority's large and well qualified staff is quite capable

of implementing the plan no matter who serves on the board or for how long.

NOTES: The companion bill, SB 752 by Barrientos, has been referred to the Senate Intergovernmental Relations Committee.