

Metro to debut Uptown line next month

First rapid bus transit project in Houston comes two years later than initially expected

By **Dug Begley**
STAFF WRITER

Rapid bus service is coming to Uptown next month, a couple weeks later than Metro first said this summer and two years later than expected when construction began in 2016.

Service will start along the Silver Line on Aug. 23, along with other

bus route changes planned by Metropolitan Transit Authority, CEO Tom Lambert said. Officials pushed back opening day a couple weeks from an earlier estimate to make all the changes at once.

"This allows us to be consistent," Lambert said.

The line is Houston's first foray into bus rapid transit, with vehicles using mostly dedicated lanes

to ferry riders from the new Westpark/Lower Uptown Transit Center south of Interstate 69 along Post Oak and eventually to the Northwest Transit Center at Loop 610 and Interstate 10.

"There are four critical traffic signals to getting this done," said Roberto Trevino, Metro's executive vice president for planning, engineering and construction, outlining the remaining work.

City officials, Trevino said, pledged to have the signals in place by the end of the week. The

lights are vital to giving buses their own signal to enter and exit the lanes at key intersections, such as Westpark and the Loop 610 Southbound Frontage Road.

When work started on Post Oak in 2016, officials said it would finish by the end of 2018. Deadlines, however, came and went as a myriad of issues, including weather and having to wait on wiring, delayed progress. Last year, some of the concrete curb along the lane was redone after it failed to meet specifications, as officials planned

for work-arounds to the ongoing construction at the I-69 interchange with Loop 610.

Reduced traffic caused by the COVID-19 crisis allowed for some work to accelerate at the intersection, meaning detours once feared were avoided as buses began testing along the route in May.

The opening, however, comes amid the pandemic, which has sharply decreased bus ridership. Metro is currently carrying about half as many riders as it did pre-pandemic.

POLITIFACT



N. Carolina politician wrong on masks

By **Paul Specht**
POLITIFACT

The claim: "There have been multiple comprehensive studies at the deepest level held to scientific standards in controlled environments that have all said for decades, masks do not work with viruses." – Lt. Gov. Dan Forest of North Carolina, at a campaign event as he runs for governor.

PolitiFact ruling: False. Forest's statement overlooks recent data, CDC guidance and the advice of one of President Donald Trump's top pandemic advisers. While face coverings alone can't guarantee protection from a virus, recent studies show they do reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

Discussion: While virologist and Trump adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and other experts have said masks alone don't guarantee protection from the virus, they do believe masks can help slow the spread of COVID-19.

When asked for the basis of Forest's remark, campaign spokesman Andrew Dunn noted an article published in the New England Journal of Medicine on April 1 titled, "Universal masking in hospitals in the COVID-19 era."

Dunn quoted a line from the authors' opening statement, which reads:

"We know that wearing a mask outside health care facilities offers little, if any, protection from infection." Authors go on to say the purpose of their article is to examine "whether a mask offers any further protection in health care settings in which the wearer has no direct interactions with symptomatic patients."

Authors later noticed that people were quoting their article to discourage mask-wearing, so they released a follow-up letter to clarify their position.

"We understand that some people are citing our Perspective article (published on April 1 at NEJM.org) as support for discrediting widespread masking. In truth, the intent of our article was to push for more masking, not less," researchers wrote in a June 1 letter.

They acknowledged writing **PolitiFact continues on A16**

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Taking a break for a grateful thanks



Mark Mulligan / Staff photographer

Health care professionals stand outside of Ben Taub Hospital as a parade drives by Sunday through the Texas Medical Center. The parade, organized by Community Health Choice, sought to spread gratitude for medical professionals.

EARL LEWIS THOMAS: 1948-2020

Former wide receiver for Oilers seen as a 'father to the fatherless'

By **Molly Glentzer**
STAFF WRITER

A person really can't be defined by numbers, even when those numbers are a source of fame. But that's one of the first ways some people remember Earl Lewis Thomas.

A football fan might start with Thomas' years as a tight end for three nationally-ranked University of Houston Cougar teams in the late 1960s and early '70s. Or the stats he accrued during six seasons as a wide receiver with the NFL's Chicago Bears, St. Lou-

is Cardinals and Houston Oilers: He caught 106 passes for 1,651 yards, scoring 14 touchdowns – one of which was a heart-pounding, 82-yard kickoff return.

Thomas died July 4 of COVID-19, at 71, and the bigger numbers of his life can't be so neatly packaged. Let's just say they are significant, and added up to enough that the city of Houston proclaimed an "Earl Thomas Day" one day in March last year.

Knowing how many people would want to pay their respects, Thomas' family organized a special drive-thru memo-

rial service Saturday, where visitors passed by six tents, each one commemorating a different aspect of Thomas' life: his childhood, college years, NFL career, Track Houston legacy, businesses and philanthropy, and family.

"He was larger than life. A father to the fatherless," said one of his two biological daughters, Kirbi Thomas Smith. "He was just a good man."

Thomas grew up in Greenville, about 50 miles northeast of Dallas. He was the fourth of Jimmie and Mae Frances Thomas'

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TSU radio program to take on hot topics

By **Brittany Britto**
STAFF WRITER

Texas Southern University's radio station will debut a show to tackle issues facing the Black community.

The radio show #OneVoice, a program designed to educate and engage the Black community and its allies, will touch on topics including police brutality, mass incarceration, politics and racism. Hosts will include civil rights activist Bishop James Dixon II, educator and former professional basketball player Marcus Session and TSU alumna Paige Morgan.

"It's very important, now more than ever, for each generation past, present, and future to openly communicate and discuss what life has been like and what we want it to be like for those to come to improve the quality of life for all people," Morgan, 28, said in a statement.

Sessions, 38, a TSU alumna, will bring his experience as an educator and a former college and professional basketball player.

"What will make us unique are the different lenses through which the hosts view our past, present and future. It's going to make for an engaging discussion every week," said Session.

"A show like #ONEVOICE is desperately needed and our goal is to be relevant, resourceful and relatable for our listeners. We look forward to bringing thought-provoking conversations each week," Dixon said in a written statement.

The #OneVoice show will broadcast at 8 a.m. Saturdays on KTSU 90.9, The Choice 90.9.

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NATIVE TEXAN

Ex-teammate lived a hall of fame life

Bill Gilbreth, my old baseball teammate at Abilene Christian, used to scare me. A left-handed pitcher, he threw harder than anybody I'd ever seen, maybe as hard as Nolan Ryan. He was just wild enough that anyone stepping into the batter's box had to be thinking there was a chance the pitch rocketing toward the plate might not end up where Bill expected it to.

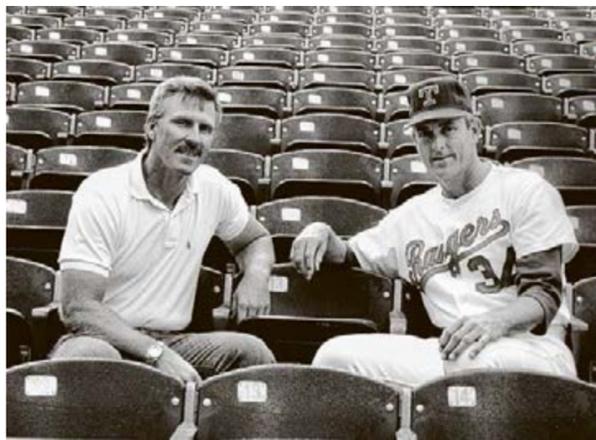


JOE HOLLEY

Fortunately, I was a teammate, not a hapless would-be hitter for Trinity or Arkansas State or Lamar Tech. I only had to face him in batting practice now and then. That was more than enough.

Last Sunday, the only ACU baseball player to make it to the bigs died suddenly, not of COVID-19, as I suspected when I saw the Abilene Reporter-News headline, but of complications following emergency heart surgery.

Although we went our sep-



Courtesy Ron Hadfield

Bill Gilbreth visits with his friend Nolan Ryan before a game at old Arlington Stadium.

arate ways after college, Bill's passing affected me more than I would have expected. Maybe it had something to do with the extraordinary times we're living through or with time fast passing for his generation and mine or maybe it's just the simple fact that he was a good guy – West Texas friendly,

unassuming. "Such a great and humble fellow," is how his longtime friend Ron Hadfield, ACU's vice president for communications, put it the day after Bill's passing.

In his four seasons with the Wildcats, Bill was 25-9, with a school-record 2.14 earned-run

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