Council's brave stand on bus service

By ROBERT G. LIMING

Guest columnist

Like knights of old, Richland County Council members took on the foul-tongued dragon of deceit and deception Tuesday night to ride toward salvation of public transit — they clearly didn't miss the bus.

A majority of members refused to bow to misguided malcontents more interested in themselves than their community. The council rejected increasing property taxes and instead advanced a well-developed plan to raise existing road maintenance fees a paltry 5.4 cents a day per vehicle to help fund safe, efficient public transit for all.

Increasing existing road fees is fair and just. It affords us sufficient time to work together to forge an overall transit system that will help all communities in the Midlands grow and prosper.

Rabid critics of public funding will rush to condemn these stalwart knights, but I'd challenge them to leave their cars home and ride the bus with me tomorrow. Most riders are infirm, or poor, elderly, simple hard-working souls whose lives depend on effective public transit.

The council's majority refused to wallow in the political blame game over public transit. Frankly, there's enough blame for each of us. I willingly accept my share for not becoming more involved sooner. Plenty have shirked their civic duty, and many local governments have failed to pay their fare share, but that's no excuse to abandon our buses.

Self-appointed defenders of the public treasury, intent on badgering us into submission through half-truths and muddied misconceptions, need to stand in the sweltering summer sun this week to ride the bus with the nobodies, their unknown neighbors, and tell them face-to-face why taxpayer dollars shouldn't help fund and advance public transit.

Ask the Shandon attorney, Spring Valley soccer mom or Heathwood banker with his three cars to ride the bus one morning and tell the young wheelchair-bound Midlands Tech student we don't have any obligation to help her get to class, because public buses are an unnecessary frill.

Let them sit next to Tommy after telling him not a penny of their coveted tax dollars will go to funding bus service so the 53-year-old blind black man, and some of the other nearly quarter-million monthly riders, can't get to their place of employment because people blessed with their own automobiles can't afford a few pennies a day to help their neighbors.

Maybe they have a point: If I can afford a car, I should pay for all road paving myself; it shouldn't be government's obligation to build roads. Let's not forget pedestrians: Why should our tax dollars be used to pay for sidewalks or installing

walk/don't walk signs? Let the people who walk pay for them, not those who own cars.

These zealots pledged to eliminate the evil of public transit should surely be at the forefront of abolishing public parks, baseball fields, tennis and basketball courts — after all, our neighbors should stay in their own yards.

On Sept. 12, each of us who feels useless and unheard can do something: We can attend the public hearing on funding the bus system and stand with the knights on Richland County Council. Tell them how vital public transit is to you. Please don't let Richland County miss the bus.

Mr. Liming works for the S.C. Department of Health and Human Services.

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