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Metro Chair Pam O'Connor types a response to a question during yesterday's first Metro chat. O'Connor took questions for an hour beginning at noon. She will also host next month's chat as well.

**Photo by
Ned Racine**

Board Chair Pam O'Connor Hosts Metro's First Online Chat

- Questions appeared to originate from cities across county

By NED RACINE

(Oct. 18, 2007) Convening a Town Hall Meeting—digital style—Metro Chair Pam O'Connor held an online chat at noon Wednesday with Metro riders and transit advocates.

The hour-long internet exchange was the first in a series of chats Metro will host. The questions O'Connor answered are available at http://interactive.metro.net/archive_chat/archive_oct_17_2007.php

Questions ranged from the general—"What is Metro doing to ease traffic?"—to the specific—"Why not place subways under freeways?" At one point, 115 Internet users were signed onto the chat. Sixteen contributed questions before the chat and, based on local reference in questions, chat members appeared to be writing from across the county.

"It's going to be a fun, new, innovative way of communicating with the folks who are the users of the system," O'Connor said before the chat began. "That's the heartbeat of what we do: serving people out there."

O'Connor, who was eager to do Metro's first chat, welcomed yet another way to hear questions about Metro, from simple questions about current service to complex questions about long-term planning.

"It gives us an opportunity [for] telling people what the agency is doing,

as well as... what the needs are," she said.

She noted that Internet users could be joining the chat from their home, their work, their mobile devices, possibly while riding the Metro System.

'No filter, direct communication'

One of the charms of the chat format for O'Connor is that she can communicate with online questioners directly. "There is not a filter. This is direct communication. It's an opportunity for us, Metro, to be able to be frank about issues."

"You have the immediacy without the filter," she said in praise of the chat format. "You have that interaction. But you also have the ability for people to pause and take a moment and think through their questions and not just do a knee-jerk question."

After the chat, O'Connor told media she was not surprised by the questions. "I really have believed that a lot of people use the system; people are interested; they pay attention, they have an opinion and a lot of folks out there know about transportation."

O'Connor, who found the chat "very exciting," will be leading next month's chat. "I'm having fun, so I'm ready to keep doing it."

"It's the sharing of ideas that will be the real strength of this chat," she said.