

# Keener: Capital Metro takes a road less traveled

*Justin Keener, Local Contributor*

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Capital Metro has proved critics wrong including me by embracing financial transparency. Recently, Austin's transit agency became a flagship by posting its financial records and transactions on its websites for all taxpayers to see.

It is courageous to be so open to scrutiny, and any agency that decides to follow in Capital Metro's footsteps must be aware that the road is indeed less traveled. Capital Metro certainly has seen its share of difficulties over the past several years, being widely labeled as secretive and bureaucratic.

But by humbling itself at the feet of the very people who breathe it into life — taxpayers — it sets a standard that all levels of government must strive to follow.

Doing so will lead to many benefits, not the least of which is a public relations boon by which such an agency can say that it is at least accountable to those whom it serves.

The most common objection to transparency efforts is that they cost too much to implement. However, nearly every government agency implementing reforms has done so at far lower cost than expected, with most saving money because of decreased time spent on public information requests, as well as identification of wasteful and inefficient spending. After implementing transparency reforms at the state level, Comptroller Susan Combs was able to trim \$10 million in duplicative services and other inefficiencies — just within her own agency.

As Capitol Metro board members pointed out at their news conference, they hope new found accountability efforts will hold each individual employee to a fresh standard of fiscal responsibility. The gumption required to make this move is well worth all of the potential benefits. And besides, it is natural to American leadership.

Today, transparency advocates like **TexasBudgetSource.com** advance the front lines of those same efforts. They understand that those who have entered into the "social contract," as John Locke put it, must ensure that the entity they have created to make laws for them is as they intended. A government that runs afoul of this essential principle runs afoul of the spirit of American government itself.

Freedom is protected when government acts in its best role: that of a protector of individual rights. Because there are so few ways to express the power of the individual, we rely on money and its role as a transaction mechanism to grant our governments the means by which to act. In doing so, we cannot give up the ultimate check on that action: transparency. Should other government agencies wish to follow the wise example set by Capital Metro, the first step is clear: Put your checks online, and let your constituents know where their money is being spent.

Do not be afraid of criticism, as it is essential to sound government. Do not forget that everything you do owes its authority to each individual in your district, county, city or state, and never try to hide your true intention behind an expenditure or program.

Capital Metro's embrace of financial openness is not a silver bullet that will miraculously resolve the agency's fundamental and long-standing challenges, but it is an important step toward rebuilding trust with its constituents. In this time, when the public feels more disconnected than ever from its governments, a commitment to transparency becomes essential.

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