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Friday, July 1, 2011

MTS Board Chair Emeritus and SDSU Alum was critical in bringing Trolley to San Diego State

With more than 100 friends, family, and elected officials looking on, the Metropolitan Transit System dedicated the San Diego State University Trolley Station to Leon Williams on Wednesday, June 29, 2011. The dedication honors Leon Williams for his tireless support of public transit and more than 30 years of public service.

Leon Williams first took office in 1969 as the City of San Diego's first black council member. In 1982, after serving the City for more than 12 years, he became the first black San Diego County Board of Supervisor and served San Diegans in that capacity for another dozen years. He retired from the County in 1994.

In 1976, while Williams was a City of San Diego Councilman, he was appointed as a board member for the Metropolitan Transit Development Board, a new agency formed to build a light rail line in San Diego. That agency later became the Metropolitan Transit System. Williams was named the MTS Vice-Chair in 1985 and its Chair in 1994, a post he held until retiring in 2006 when the Board gave him the title as MTS Chair Emeritus.

As MTS Board Chair, Leon Williams was instrumental in bringing Trolley service to the center of the San Diego State University campus, resulting in the award-winning Trolley Station that opened in July 2005 and now serves thousands of people every day.

MTS current Board Chair Harry Mathis said, "It is only fitting that we recognize Leon with the dedication of SDSU Station. Without Leon, the trolley may never have made it to campus. Leon insisted on an alignment that came to the heart of campus. And it has been a great success from the very first day."

San Diego County Supervisor Ron Roberts and MTS Vice-Chair said, "The SDSU Transit Center was built at a much grander scale than every other station, just as Leon is a much grander man than most. The transit center is essentially a 30-story building that is lying on its side, mid-way along a 4,000 foot long tunnel which at its deepest point is 60 feet underground. That's quite a monument and it is a fitting one for a man who has helped bring monumental change to public transit and the greater San Diego Community."

San Diego Council President Tony Young reminisced that his first job out of college was working in Leon William's City Council office. "Leon Williams has been an amazing visionary and trailblazer always ahead of the popular and political curve on issues from downtown redevelopment and smart growth to banning smoking and funding HIV/AIDS programs," said

Council President Young. "His tremendous contributions to the fabric of this city will be felt for generations." Young continued, "There is no one more deserving of this honor than this gentle giant of a man who has long been a champion of the region's mass transportation system and the continued achievement of SDSU."

Looking back to the opening of the Green Line in July 2005, Paul Jablonski, MTS Chief Executive Officer said, "At that time, Leon Williams and I shared a mutual pride in the incredibly positive public reception for the opening of Green Line and this Transit Center. We were confident then that this project, which was one of the biggest public transit investments in our history, would make a significant difference in how San Diego would perceive and use public transit. Now, in 2011, this project continues to exceed all of our expectations. The university loves it and students have embraced it."

Sally Roush, SDSU Vice President for Business and Finance who worked closely with MTS during construction of the Green Line echoed Jablonski's remarks and said, "Dedication of the SDSU Station is a fitting tribute to our alumnus Leon Williams. He is an inspiration and the SDSU community takes considerable pride in his accomplishments."

The final speaker, Incoming Board Chair of the San Diego Foundation, Jennifer Adams-Brooks said, "The San Diego Foundation is pleased to use this grant from the Legacy Foundation to fund the plaque so all who see it are reminded of Leon who embodies civic pride and bestows the leadership characteristics that ensures a great community."

After the remarks, San Diego Trolley facilities staff climbed a ladder to unveil the plaque which was installed outside the doorway into the Transit Center's mezzanine level. Then Leon Williams with his wife Margaret by his side said, in his familiar, soft spoken way to the crowd celebrating with him, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It was a pleasure to serve, it was hard. It was fun. And it was worth it."

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Leon and Margaret Williams and friends stand by the Honor Plaque at SDSU Transit Center following the dedication ceremony.

L-R: Anthony Young, City of San Diego Council President; Ron Roberts, San Diego County Supervisor; Leon Williams, MTS Board Chair Emeritus; Harry Mathis, MTS Board Chair; Margaret Williams; Mary Mathis; Paul Jablonski, MTS Chief Executive Officer; and Jerry Rindone, former MTS Vice-Chair

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