



Kansas City Star Editorial Board Gets It Half Right

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In a recent column, [The Kansas City Star](#) editorial board bemoaned the instinct of Mayor Sly James to be opaque and secretive in his negotiations. Specifically, the *Star's* piece argued that negotiations over the construction of the new airport terminal and the related community benefit agreements should be open to the public. No one would disagree with that.

The *Star's* board is correct to caution against the “troubling, recurring and unhelpful mindset that crucial details of the KCI project must be kept hidden from public view”—recall that the mayor and city manager wanted to [skip the bidding process altogether](#) and then require councilmembers to sign [nondisclosure agreements](#) . Because of such secrecy and [ineptitude](#) , we still don't know much about the final details of the project.

Consider that the same editorial states that the \$1.4 billion projected cost for the terminal is likely to go up, and that we are not sure that the airlines are on board with the project. At the time of the vote in 2017, not only did Kansas Citians not know the details of the contract with Edgemoor, we didn't even have a basic understanding of what that contract might look like. Yet the *Star's* editorial board includes [this line](#) in their piece:

It's been nearly a year since Kansas City voters overwhelmingly approved a new terminal at the

airport. That vote proved Kansas Citians are more than capable of digesting a frank conversation about an important public issue.

What exactly was that frank conversation about if it wasn't about contracts, costs, number of gates, or community benefit agreements? There wasn't even enough substance to guarantee the airlines were fully on board. What we got from the *Star* at the time were [pie-in-the-sky arguments](#) that contradicted its own journalists' reporting.

It's more likely that the vote proved that a well-funded public relations campaign with little to no opposition can convince voters to trust city officials to do the right thing despite those same officials' hostility to basic transparency.

Back before the vote and even today, the *Star* has supported the idea of a new terminal, but it doesn't know the details about the project in question. No one does. That sums up [much of our](#) and [others'](#) arguments regarding why the project should not have moved forward.

It may be completely reasonable, once issues such as cost and contract and airline agreements are settled, to support a billion-and-a-half (likely more) dollar new terminal. And the editorial board is correct that cost overruns and delays are to be expected with any project of this size. But up until the point that such information is known, no one knows enough about this project to support it. Instead, the *Star* has chosen to give carte-blanche to the same officials they criticize for not being transparent.

Unless city officials feel that they are being held accountable—that is, that support for the project could be withdrawn should it turn into the boondoggle that many fear—Kansas Citians are unlikely to see any more transparency than they have up to this point.

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- [KCI](#)

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