

I-45 Expansion Workshop 5/29/2019

Near Northside Summary



As part of their Northside Advocacy Initiative, Avenue CDC hosted a community workshop for Near Northside residents to learn about and discuss the Texas Department of Transportation's North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHIP), or I-45 expansion. This document summarizes the eight priorities identified by the 47 participating community members; potential mitigation strategies or fixes to address these concerns; and opportunities to advocate for project changes.

Prioritizing People over Highways

Concern. The North Houston Highway Improvement Project/I-45 expansion project, as well as the extension and expansion of the Hardy Toll Road, are taking property and other resources from the Near Northside Community and ultimately shrinking the livable area of the neighborhood. We want plans and projects, like the I-45 expansion, to prioritize the preservation or improvement of the neighborhood's culture, economic development, housing, and mobility. We do not want highway projects that expand further into our community's livable space.

Potential Mitigation Strategies	Advocacy Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halt project in its current form, or shape project to stay within existing rights-of-way • Reduce number of general-purpose main lanes; motivating drivers to carpool or use METRO (increase people throughput per vehicle through our community) • Reduce the width of lanes on frontage roads 	<p>Governor Abbott appoints the Texas Transportation Commission, which serves as the governing board of TxDOT and develops a statewide plan for all modes of transportation. Contact Governor Abbott, Texas Transportation Commission Commissioner Laura Ryan (responsible for the Houston area), or Chair of the Commission Bruce Bugg about big picture issues on the impact of highways and long-term concerns about transportation projects like this one. The project significantly impacts Harris County Commissioners Adrian Garcia and Rodney Ellis's precincts and the districts of U.S. Congressmembers Sheila Jackson-Lee and Sylvia Garcia. While outside of her district, U.S. Congressmember Lizzie Fletcher is a member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, which oversees all modes of transportation.</p> <p><i>See last page for contact information and meeting information</i></p>

Mobility & Safety for All

Concern 1. Residents of the Near Northside walk, ride bicycles, use wheelchairs, and move in cars. However, car-oriented infrastructure, such as I-45, often acts as a barrier to safe pedestrian, bicycle, and accessible mobility in our neighborhood. The I-45 expansion will make the highway wider, increasing the interaction between pedestrians and the highway, including people crossing beneath the highway to and from residences on one side and commercial locations on other; children who attend schools with attendance zones that cross the highway; or people walking to and from destinations and bus stops (e.g., METRO bus routes #29 or #36) along the highway access road, where speeds will routinely exceed 40 or 50 mph.

Concern 2. The highway project will impact many of our existing bikeways and push more cars onto local streets during construction. We want to see full implementation of the Houston Bike Plan, including preserving or improving existing bike facilities and construction of all planned connections, to improve mobility in the neighborhood.

Concern 3. Highway infrastructure reinforces boundaries between communities. Instead, we seek to preserve and improve people's ability to move freely east and west between communities. Plans in the I-45 expansion to cut off or move existing highway entrances, such as the North Main entrance, and pedestrian crossing challenges (e.g., distance, heat, vehicle speeds, street width) further disturb this freedom of movement and community cohesion.

Potential Mitigation Strategies	Advocacy Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only use frontage roads where necessary, keep them to two lanes narrower than 12' wide to calm traffic speed • Install pedestrian-oriented lighting; ladder style highly visible crosswalks; and bilingual accessible pedestrian signals • Restrict right turns on red so there is no expectation of turning into the nearest receiving lane; minimize corner radii to slow right-hand turns • Provide wide walk/bike facilities like those planned for Segment 3 Downtown and fully implement the highest comfort type of bike facilities in the Houston Bike Plan • Do not use a wide outside lane on frontage roads as the parallel bike route; a 14'-15' outside lane on a frontage road is not a safe bike facility with vehicle speeds in the 40-55 mph range 	<p>As TxDOT-Houston District Engineer, Quincy Allen oversees TxDOT's Houston District Office, 1 of 25 district offices reporting to TxDOT Executive Director James Bass. Local leaders, including Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, direct their planners and engineers to coordinate with TxDOT on locations where the highway meets urban streets. Councilmember David Robinson chairs City Council's Transportation, Technology, and Infrastructure Committee; he is first vice chair of the Houston-Galveston Area Council's Transportation Policy Council, which directs how the region plans and improves transportation. Houston-Galveston Area Council's Director of Transportation Planning Alan Clark also influences regional mobility and safety planning.</p> <p><i>See last page for contact information and meeting information</i></p>

Air Quality

Concern. Air pollution, as a result of industrial emissions and traffic-related emissions, decreases the air quality of the Near Northside neighborhood. Rather than adding vehicles and subsequently increasing emissions and air pollution, we want infrastructure projects that bring a net benefit, including improving the neighborhood's air quality.

Potential Mitigation Strategies	Advocacy Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce number of general-purpose main lanes; motivating drivers to carpool or use METRO (increase people throughput per vehicle to reduce per person emissions through our community) • Install HEPA quality filtration in buildings (e.g., schools, community centers) • Install community air monitors so residents can be informed about air quality in the community 	<p>Under Director of Transportation Planning Alan Clark, the Houston-Galveston Area Council is responsible for leading a team that must model transportation projects to prove they will bring our region into "attainment" air quality in accordance with state standards administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the federal Clean Air Act administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Judge Hidalgo has made climate resilience a key platform issue.</p> <p><i>See last page for contact information and meeting information</i></p>



Flooding

Concern. Increasing impervious structures, such as the extensive placement of concrete that will be used for the I-45 highway expansion, will decrease permeability and likely exacerbate local and pass-through regional flooding in our area. We are especially concerned about flooding at North Main, Independence Heights, and the residences at/near 2800 Fulton.

Potential Mitigation Strategies	Advocacy Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce rain runoff by reducing impervious surface (i.e., concrete): reduce the number of lanes, reduce lane width, eliminate the inside shoulder on the MAX lanes (one is enough for two lanes) Model and mitigate for rainfall events at the 500-year level, to mitigate localized impacts as well as at-large impacts 	<p>Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and Houston Mayor Turner both have significant influence over flood mitigation. TXDOT District Engineer Quincy Allen, Harris County Flood Control District, and City of Houston's Floodplain Management Office are counterparts with important expertise to share on many major aspects of flood mitigation.</p> <p><i>See last page for contact information and meeting information</i></p>

Noise Pollution

Concern. The planned project does not address existing or anticipated noise caused by vehicles on I-45 and access roads; consistent noise is known to impact health, including mental health, of people who are regularly exposed to loud sounds.

Potential Mitigation Strategies	Advocacy Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use vegetation and physical barriers to reduce noise penetration from the highway lanes into Near Northside Physical barriers may be 10'-16' sound walls, but in many cases a shorter 6'-8' wall between the main lanes and frontage road would be as effective and desirable (i.e., like on I-610 West Loop through Bellaire) Use pavement technologies to reduce noise at the point between tire and surface (i.e., longitudinally tined pavement) 	<p>As an obscure health issue, noise pollution is often overlooked by the state and local officials. This is an area where state legislators who have shown interest in the project – State Senator Carol Alvarado and State Senator Boris Miles – can consider the impact of noise and other health impacts in highway projects. Local public health experts and researchers from the Texas Medical Center can also take a lead in bringing attention to this negative impact of noise on people's health to TXDOT, the Texas Transportation Commission, and the Texas legislature.</p> <p><i>See last page for contact information and meeting information</i></p>

Visual Impacts and Parks/Greenspace

Concern. The increase of lanes, particularly pylons to support dozens of elevated lanes, will block the community's view of the Houston skyline, especially from important community sites in Near Northside (e.g., Leonel Castillo Community Center). The expansion will also diminish the quality and utility of greenspace in Near Northside.

Potential Mitigation Strategies	Advocacy Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the number of lanes and width of lanes Shape project to stay within existing rights-of-way Consult the community during final design to accommodate localized opinions about the look, views, and operational elements of the project for people on local streets and paths, especially in parks/greenspace and community centers 	<p>Leonel Castillo Community Center is a Harris County Precinct 2 facility, run by Harris County Commissioner Adrian Garcia. Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and Mayor Turner share significant influence about how greenspace and parks are designated and administered in the community – including improving walk/bike access to opportunity through parks. Outside of government, the Kinder Foundation has been one of the most philanthropic supporters of park space.</p> <p><i>See last page for contact information and meeting information</i></p>

Local Economic Development Impact (property displacement)

Concern. The state government's purchase of land to gain additional right-of-way for the highway expansion will in turn result in the loss of privately-owned property. This loss of private property will significantly impact small and large businesses and jobs in the near term and result in loss of income and lower commercial and residential property values in the longer term. (Note: As planned, the highway expansion will result in the loss of 24,873 jobs and 331 businesses.)

Potential Mitigation Strategies	Advocacy Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shape project to stay within existing rights-of-way Prioritize mitigating the project's impacts on existing commercial use land parcels (in concert with mitigating people/customer/employee displacement) Relocate displaced businesses within Near Northside, as requested, at similar price points to ensure employers can remain in the actual neighborhood long-term at locations with equal or better market for the business' services 	<p>Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner engage with TXDOT to ensure that highway projects, including this one, benefit their jurisdictions economically and should be told by communities if the projects do not. Job and business losses of this magnitude, with little opportunity to counter the downturn, should capture the attention of the Greater Houston Partnership.</p> <p><i>See last page for contact information and meeting information</i></p>

Local Housing Impacts (people displacement)

Concern. The state government's purchase of land to gain additional right-of-way for the highway expansion will in turn result in a loss of housing stock, including some affordable housing in the Near Northside. (Note: As planned, the highway expansion will result in the loss of about 1,235 homes, impacting thousands of people.)

Potential Mitigation Strategies	Advocacy Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shape project to stay within existing rights-of-way Prioritize mitigating the project's impacts on residences, especially affordable homes/units Replace displaced residences with new housing within Near Northside that is available to owners/renters at similar price points (subsidize cost to ensure people can remain in the actual neighborhood long-term) 	<p>Limited affordable housing near employment centers is a chronic stress on the City of Houston, one that Houston Mayor Turner is tackling in his Complete Communities initiative. Four of the five Complete Communities, including Near Northside, are affected by this project.</p> <p><i>See last page for contact information and meeting information</i></p>

KEY DECISIONMAKERS AND INFLUENCERS

Here is a list of local, regional, state, and federal leaders to contact. Use the information from the summary as talking points to frame your concerns.

FEDERAL

U.S. Representative, 18th District: Sheila Jackson-Lee

Heights Office 713.861.4070 | <https://jacksonlee.house.gov/>

U.S. Representative, 29th District: Sylvia Garcia

Houston Office 832.325.3150 | <https://sylviagarcia.house.gov/>

U.S. Representative, 7th District: Lizzie Fletcher

Houston Office 713.353.8680 | <https://fletcher.house.gov/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6 (includes Texas):

Wren Stenger, Director, Air & Radiation Division

214.665.7200 | www.epa.gov/aboutepa/epa-region-6-south-central

TEXAS TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Texas Transportation Commission (TxDOT Governing Board)

J. Bruce Bugg, Chairman: 512.305.9509

***Laura Ryan**, Commissioner: 512.305.9509

* responsible for coordinating with TxDOT Houston District

www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/administration/commission.html

CITY OF HOUSTON

Houston Mayor

Sylvester Turner: 713.837.0311 | mayor@houstontx.gov

District H City Council Member

Karla Cisneros: 832.393.3003 | districth@houstontx.gov

City Hall Annex, 900 Bagby, First Floor, Houston, 77002

HARRIS COUNTY

Harris County Judge

Lina Hidalgo, County Judge: 713.274.7000

OTHER

Houston-Galveston Area Council, Alan Clark, Director of Transportation Planning: alan.clark@h-gac.com | PublicComments@h-gac.com

Greater Houston Partnership: 713.844.3600 | ghp@houston.org

Kinder Foundation: 2229 San Felipe, Suite 1700, Houston, TX 77019 | www.facebook.com/KinderFoundation/

STATE

Governor: Greg Abbott

800.843.5789 | <https://gov.texas.gov/contact>

State Senator, District 6: Carol Alvarado

512.463.0106 | carol.alvarado@senate.texas.gov

State Senator, District 13: Borris Miles

512.463.0113 | borris.miles@senate.texas.gov

State Representative, District 140: Armando Walle

512.463.0924 | armando.walle@house.texas.gov

State Representative, District 148: Jessica Cristina Farrar

512.463.0620 | jessica.farrar@house.texas.gov

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Office of Air:

Tonya Baer, Deputy Director

512.239.2104 | www.tceq.texas.gov/agency/air_main.html

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

TxDOT Statewide Executive

James Bass, Executive Director: 512.305.9501

TxDOT Houston District

Quincy Allen, District Engineer: 713.802.5000

Project website: www.ih45northandmore.com

Email comments to: HOU-PIOWebmail@txdot.gov

At-Large City Council Members

Mike Knox: 832.393.3014 | atlarge1@houstontx.gov

David Robinson: 832.393.3013 | atlarge2@houstontx.gov

Michael Kubosh: 832.393.3005 | atlarge3@houstontx.gov

Amanda Edwards: 832.393.3012 | atlarge4@houstontx.gov

Jack Christie: 832.393.3017 | atlarge5@houstontx.gov

Harris County Commissioners

Rodney Ellis, Precinct 1: 713.274.1000

Adrian Garcia, Precinct 2: 713.755.6220

IMPORTANT REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETINGS

The following are some of the key meetings held routinely during which public comments regarding transportation are welcome.

Texas Transportation Commission: Meeting (Monthly, typically on the 4th Thursday | 9:00 AM)

125 East 11th St, Austin, TX 78701. Sign up to speak: 512.305.9509; www.txdot.gov/contact-us/form.html?id=transcom-email

Houston-Galveston Area Council: Transportation Policy Council (Monthly, typically on the 4th Friday | 9:30 AM)

TxDOT Houston District Auditorium, 7600 Washington Ave, Houston, TX 77002. Schedule: www.h-gac.com/transportation-policy-council/

Houston City Council: Public Comment Session (Every Tuesday 1:30 PM; Schedule: www.houstontx.gov/citysec/calendar.pdf)

2nd floor of City Hall, 901 Bagby, Houston, TX 77002. Sign up to speak: 832.393.1100, citysecretary@houstontx.gov, or by coming by the office on the public level of the City Hall Annex by 1:30 p.m. that Tuesday.

City Council: Transportation, Technology, and Infrastructure Committee Meeting (Typically monthly on varying dates | Thursdays at 10:00 AM)

City Hall Council Chambers, 901 Bagby, Houston 77002. Email Julia.Retta@houstontx.gov to be added to email list.

Harris County: Commissioners Court (One or more times per month | 10:00 AM; Schedule: <https://agenda.harriscountytx.gov/>)

1001 Preston Street, Suite 934, Houston, TX 77002. Request an appearance: <https://appearancerequest.harriscountytx.gov/>.

Super Neighborhood #51: Meeting (Every 4th Thursday at 6:00 PM)

2101 South St., Houston, TX 77009. Email Jack.valinski@houstontx.gov to be added to email list.