

Transportation Policy Council Public Comments- (week of 6/22-6/26/2020)

North Houston Highway Improvement Project-Segment

Comment 1:

Transportation Policy Council members,

I **oppose** the approval of funding for the North Houston Highway Improvement Project, Segment 3, in the 2021-2024 TIP.

The Texas Department of Transportation has not committed to mitigating adverse impacts of this project, such as displacement, flooding, and air quality, and should **not** receive the green light to bulldoze, disconnect, and dismantle historic Black and Latinx communities along the project corridor.

I urge TPC to withhold funding for this project unless and until TxDOT addresses these issues in an equitable way for the benefit of all of our city's residents, especially those most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of the proposed highway expansion.

Nina Culotta

Comment 2:

Could you please make sure the Amtrak station is joined to the new station for Highspeed rail to Dallas and also is directly connected to local rail and transit services. Should be a new station befitting of Houston's stature in the world today.

I am a frequent Amtrak customer and enjoy my trains and wish for more access and more train options soon.

david blomstrom

Richmond, Texas

Comment 3:

Comments to Transportation Policy Council (TPC) June 26 meeting - Segment 3 of the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP):

The North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP) must include integration of area transportation modes.

The project as proposed envisions major changes to the Union Pacific Railroad mainline that serves Houston's Amtrak station that probably will require relocating the rail passenger station.

This should be done as part of a coordinated effort to integrate surface transportation facilities in the area.

The project should result in integration of Houston's Amtrak station into Metro's transit system (whether BRT or LRT), to include direct connections to downtown and the future Texas Central Railway terminal near Metro's Northwest Transit Center.

Modern, attractive, welcoming station facilities sized for future growth of environmentally friendly passenger rail service should be built, including convenient access to such amenities as dining, shopping and secure overnight parking, as befits a key gateway to our nation's fourth largest city.

Thomas E. Marsh

Houston, Texas

Comment 4:

To the TPC:

I understand that there is a proposal to relocate a portion of Union Pacific's Terminal Subdivision west and north of downtown Houston in conjunction with the North Houston Highway Improvement Project. Such relocation would include the passenger main and would most likely also require relocation of the existing Houston Amtrak station (HOS) located adjacent to the City of Houston permitting center at the east end of Washington Street. Regardless of the ultimate location of HOS, the following goals should guide any changes to the existing station or a new, relocated station:

1. Integration of HOS into Metro's transit system (whether BRT or LRT), to include direct connections to Downtown and the future Texas Central Railway terminal near Metro's Northwest Transit Center.
2. Modern, attractive, welcoming station facilities, including convenient access to such amenities as dining, shopping and secure overnight parking, as befits a key gateway to our nation's fourth largest city.
3. A station sized for future growth of intercity passenger rail service in Houston. Amtrak currently serves Houston with thrice-weekly train service on the Sunset Limited, which runs from New Orleans to Los Angeles, and a daily bus connection to the Texas Eagle in Longview, which runs from San Antonio to Chicago. RPA has an ongoing campaign to increase service on the Sunset Limited to daily, and long-term aspirations to add more passenger rail service in Houston.

A world class city deserves world-class passenger rail service, and a station to match.

Tom Compson
RPA Member
Houston, TX

Comment 5:

Please consider these points in relocating the Houston Amtrak station:

1. Integration of HOS into Metro's transit system (whether BRT or LRT), to include direct connections to Downtown and the future Texas Central Railway terminal near Metro's Northwest Transit Center.
2. Modern, attractive, welcoming station facilities, including convenient access to such amenities as dining, shopping and secure overnight parking, as befits a key gateway to our nation's fourth largest city.
3. A station sized for future growth of intercity passenger rail service in Houston. Amtrak currently serves Houston with thrice-weekly train service on the Sunset Limited, which runs from New Orleans to Los Angeles, and a daily bus connection to the Texas Eagle in Longview, which runs from San Antonio to Chicago.

Lee Reaves

Comment 6:

Gentlemen:

My name is Mike Gonzales. I am a senior citizen and a native Houstonian. Railroading is a part of my life. I live and breathe railroading. My father worked at the T&N Railroad and the Southern Pacific Railroad for 30 years. Nothing would be more devastating to me and hundreds of others if railroad passenger service is sacrificed over highway upgrades.

Rail passenger service has been and continues to be a vital part of my family. Any plan to strike it from our daily life would be devastating, particularly seniors like myself. At the very least, the Project should take advantage what rail travel brings to highway travel.

Air travel and auto transportation is an option, yes, but for many us, traveling by train is the most agreeable mode of travel. In addition, train travel is more economical in view of our financial constraints living under social security. And weather conditions won't constrain our travel. I am confident I speak for many other rail passenger proponents. We need vigorous train service to compliment our lives.

Over the last thirty years I, personally, have travelled on the Sunset Limited to Santa Barbara, California and other California cities. Eastbound, I have travelled to and from Jacksonville, Fl. (before Katrina intervened); and other routes into the nation's capital across the middle South. The Texas Eagle via Palestine, Texas and into Chicago is another one of my many past routes. From there I travelled to St. Louis and into Philadelphia, Pa. and returned via round trip from New York and the Great Lakes and to HOuston, Texas. The point of all this, is to remind those that will control our lives with the I-45 Project that passenger travel is vital to, not just senior citizens, but also those with limited financial capital, and those in rural areas with limited rail service.

The NNHIP project, is probably well intentioned and probably has the city of Houston's welfare in their hearts, but in moving forward with their project, their officials should take care that railroad service is not sacrificed in favor of the I-45 project. Nor should they ignore and cast aside a much-needed upgrade of a new Passenger Terminal. If it is to be moved, move it to a location accessible to ancillary services; taxi service, food courts, parking, Inter transit services, security, etc. An upgrade will most assuredly enhance rail travel.

Mike Gonzales
Houston, Texas

Comment 7:

Re: The Houston-Galveston Area Council's Transportation Policy Council (TPC) hearing on June 26

Dear Sirs:

I have comments I would like to see inputted into the proceedings. The planning being considered would affect the current Amtrak station, and would involve moving or eliminating the current railroad route through the north side of downtown Houston known historically as the "Passenger Main". The route's main purpose was to serve the Southern Pacific's large Grand Central Station, though it did serve a large number of local businesses, none of which utilize rail access now as far as I know. The "Freight Main" splits from the Passenger Main west of downtown and runs straight to Union Pacific's Englewood [freight] Yard, an important yard practically adjacent to Settegast Yard, another major UP freight yard.

I am a long-time train traveler in and around Houston, Texas, and the country. I rode trains before Amtrak came into existence. I also had a short 5-year career in train service with the Missouri Pacific/Union Pacific Railroad back in the early 1980s and keep abreast of railroad matters in the Houston area and across the country. I am qualified to make the following points:

- Amtrak's current station in Houston is frankly an embarrassment. It is in a seedy location; is too small for even the six trains a week it serves and is difficult to access. It is not much more than a glorified restroom facility.
- If the Amtrak station location is moved, it should be moved to a location that would be adjacent to or close by bus routes, light rail routes or future routes, freeways, and the Texas Central Railroad's proposed terminal near the Northwest Transit Center, though I have also heard that a location for the TC terminal at the old Northwest Mall location is unfortunately being considered.
- The new modern Amtrak facility should have a minimum of two tracks to ease track maintenance, plus a short private car track. This is nothing additional, as this is what the current Amtrak station has.
- The Railroad Passenger Association is pushing for an increase of the Sunset Limited to daily service (from tri-weekly), as well as for additional future service. So, while the above two platform tracks would be sufficient for current passenger service, the location

needs to be large enough so as to be expandable to at least one more platform incorporating two additional tracks. The current Amtrak location is also expandable in that regard.

- The location of the new Amtrak station should take into consideration the location of nearby freeways as well, and nearby easy on-and-off access to at least one freeway is mandatory.

Not adequately providing for the Amtrak facility's needs as outlined above could have costly repercussions in the future, not to mention hampering passenger service down the line.

David N. Currey

Houston, Texas

Comment 8:

The idea of removing the existing Amtrak station and passenger main in Houston is absolutely insane. There is no place to relocate it to! There is no location on the Union Pacific route through Houston with access to interstate routes or bus service. What is your suggestion, boarding at the next station in Beaumont or San Antonio?

The movement of I45 onto the already overcrowded I69 is already totally illogical. Eliminating passenger rail service to Houston is one more poorly conceived concept.

Houston needs improved passenger rail service and a much-improved station.

David Ritter

Houston, Texas

Comment 9:

Dear Transportation Policy Council members,

The Texas Department of Transportation has not learned from the mistakes it has made in the past. More damning, though, is that the agency seems intent on repeating them.

Houston is notorious as the deadliest region in the country for drivers and people on foot, on bikes and in wheelchairs. The agency claims the project will improve safety, reduce congestion and accommodate the region's projected growth. These claims are dubious. TxDOT has not shown how a wider I-45 would be different from a wider Katy Freeway. TranStar data first compiled by Houston Tomorrow and [reported in City Observatory](#) now more than 5 years ago show clearly that the very modest gains in average commute time the first few years have been

completely nullified. Average commute times are now longer than they were before the freeway was widened.

In other words: TxDOT spent \$2.8 billion only to get commuters back where they started: stuck behind the wheel.

TxDOT wants to spend \$7 billion more. Experts know that adding capacity does not reduce congestion. In 2017, Dr. Susan Handy, professor at the University of California at Davis and the director of the National Center for Sustainable Transportation, told me, “The freeway carries more vehicles, but [it's very unlikely that you're doing anything to reduce congestion](#). Adding capacity is just about accommodating more traffic.”

Increasing vehicle miles traveled by more than 100 percent and average speeds by about 24 miles per hour, as TxDOT claims the project will do, does not increase safety. As the urban designer and planner Jeff Speck wrote this year, “The single greatest predictor of a death in a car crash is vehicle speed.”

What’s more concerning to me, even more than the flimsy rationale that the NHHIP is teetering on, is that TxDOT seems fully intent to ignore its own history of plowing through Houston’s neighborhoods of color and low wealth. I am quoting directly from the agency’s own impact assessments, published this December. They write: “The construction of I-45 through downtown Houston started in the 1950s, with the Pierce Elevated opening in 1967. This section of I-45 displaced nearly 560 residences and businesses through Downtown and parts of the Third Ward, in addition to causing widespread turnover of neighborhood land uses Most of the displaced residents in the Third Ward were renters with little legal power to contest the displacements.”

Elsewhere, on page 44 of the [Cumulative Impacts Technical Report](#), TxDOT acknowledges, “Multiple negative [impacts] . . . would result from” the NHHIP. And: “The proposed project would result in numerous displacements, including residences of members of minority and low-income communities, businesses, and community facilities that primarily serve Environmental Justice individuals/populations.”

Why did the acknowledgement of “multiple negative” impacts and “numerous displacements” not *immediately* trigger a redesign? Why did TxDOT decide that these lives don’t matter enough to do better?

TxDOT, and supporters of this project, has claimed that it’s necessary to accommodate the region’s projected growth. That means that TxDOT is willing to sacrifice the jobs and the homes of people who already live here for people who may or may not someday move here in the future.

It’s a tough message to sell, isn’t it? In Houston, you’re replaceable. We displaced you in the ‘50s, and we’re all set to do it again.

It should be alarming to all of you that the city had to assemble a task force that depended on the volunteer labor of hundreds of the very residents TxDOT sees as replaceable to improve the project that intends to displace them.

These residents gave away hundreds of hours of their time over months in community workshops, meetings and online surveys to improve a design that was already nearly two decades in the making. How much money has already been wasted on a design the agency *fully acknowledges, in hundreds of pages of its own assessments*, will displace thousands of Houstonians, mostly residents of color and low wealth, require the relocation of thousands of jobs and cause the city to forfeit potentially \$313 million in combined property and sales tax revenue each and every year?

I am quoting, again, directly from the assessments.

This is where we are at. TxDOT wants to spend \$7 billion to build a project experts know will not accomplish what the agency claims it will and will cause the negative impacts the agency fully acknowledges.

Make them do better.

It's a lot of money. For that same amount of money, together, you could fund:

- The entirety of the city's backlog of requests for new sidewalks (\$83 million)
- The city's Bike Plan (\$150 million), which has languished without funding since City Council approved it in 2015
- Two more brand-new Discovery Greens (\$250 million)
- 150 more miles of bayou greenways (\$220 million)
- All of Metro's MetroNext transit plan (\$3.5 billion)

And the region would *still* have left more than \$2.5 billion, which would allow us to build double the 237 flood-control projects that voters overwhelmingly approved in the bond referendum after Hurricane Harvey.

It's a lot of money. If TxDOT can't commit in writing to starting over, right now, with the city's much-improved "Vision C," which was literally handed to them by hundreds of concerned residents who will be asked to live with the consequences of this project for a generation, then they should be considered an agency that has failed Texans.

Allyn West, Ph.D. (he/his)

Senior Communications Specialist

Comment 10:

I-45 should not be expanded. At best it is a temporary stop gap measure until highway use surges. At a realistic level it furthers climate change, destroys mainly black neighborhoods and costs too much money. Highways are not the answer

Bess Wilhelms

Comment 11:

It is without dispute that freeway construction in the city of Houston is a historically racist endeavour. To borrow some words from the activists in 1970s Washington D.C., they have been white folks roads through Black folks bedrooms.

This present endeavor to widen I-45 follows this trend of racist road building. This is also indisputable. I wish to make a secondary claim, and that is that the presently proposed plan, without revision, is positively stupid. It is stupid for multiple reasons.

Principally, it is stupid because it is a massive investment of capital resources into a mistake. Folks will be stuck in traffic while it is under construction, worse traffic than existed before the pandemic, and then following the completion in God knows how many years because these projects are never on time or on budget, people will think the traffic has improved significantly, because they are comparing it to the traffic when the construction made everything much worse. And this significant bump will slowly be lost until traffic is actually worse than before and we've wasted tax dollars.

Another reason it is stupid is that young people and creatives do not want to live in their car. In fact no one wants to live in their car except some strange hippies. And yet with the TxDoT view of the world everyone lives in their car and only briefly touches earth just long enough to spend money, then gets back in their car and continues driving. Driving is the end-all-be-all of life. Houses should not exist and that is why they will be destroyed to make way for people to live in their cars, perpetually driving in the modern purgatory of I-45, now with a new lane or two.

Finally, it is a known fact the environment is deteriorating, and climate change is a real issue. Houston, a disproportionate contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, is also facing a disproportionate impact by the adverse effects of climate change. In order to build future-proof infrastructure that infrastructure must be built for more environmentally sustainable transportation methods.

I hope these provide a small snippet about how the I-45 expansion in its present form is stupid and racist.

Yoseph Daniel Maguire

Comment 12:

The NHHIP represents one of the region's largest investments and infrastructure projects in a generation. Since the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the City of Houston has worked to drive a thorough public engagement process. Through this process, the City developed a number of recommendations as expressed in Mayor Turner's, June 9, 2020, letter to the Texas Transportation Commission.

However, the rationale for how these recommendations were derived has not been made available, and public discourse has grinded to a halt. Prior to moving forward on a vote for funding or further authorization on the future of this project, it is recommended that the City of Houston provide the disposition of all responses received in the NHHIP Alternates Survey provided earlier this year, as it seems much of the rationale provided for the current opinion was derived from these results, and there appear to be large inconsistencies between how public responses were incorporated between Segments 1, 2, and 3.

Further, as has been echoed in every public meeting since the spread of the Novel Coronavirus, the impacts to both residents and businesses by this potential project will certainly put unbearable pressures on their livelihood and success. Again, I strongly recommend that these decisions be put on hold, if not for reasons of factual discovery, then for the livelihoods of the many who will be impacted by these decisions at a time when they are in the literal worst position to absorb them.

Michael Duckworth

Comment 13:

I do not support providing any funding or support for the I-45 expansion (North Freeway Project) at this time. The City of Houston and many community groups and individuals have provided the Texas Department of Transportation with copious and significant comments about air quality, neighborhood and community fragmentation, environmental justice, park, flooding, and many other issues. TxDOT has not decided about or negotiated on these suggestions. TxDOT does not deserve support right now because it has not done its job and has not been responsible in getting public consensus.

Just say no to funding or support for the I-45 expansion project! Do the right thing.

Brandt Mannchen

Comment 14:

The current proposal for the expansion of I-45 is unacceptable. I demand that TXDOT do better for all of the people of Houston and our region.

I ask that HGAC withhold support from that project until it is revised, resubmitted, and benefits all members of our community. We have the engineering talent to put men on the moon and women on the space station. We can and should do better.

Amir Befroui

Comment 15:

I'm a Long-time resident of the heights, and I currently live in Lindale Park. I own a business in the heights, and I own two businesses downtown. I am excited for the i-45 expansion to take place. I'm certain I will be frustrated during the process, but I think it is necessary for the city of Houston. I was especially impressed by the drawings that put a green space across the freeway and connected parts of the more traditional heights with some of the parts on the east side of i-45.

Shaun sharma

Comment 16:

There is a proposal to relocate portions of Union Pacific Railroad's Terminal Subdivision west and north of downtown in conjunction with the NHHIP. This proposed relocation would include the Passenger Main and would most likely require relocating the Amtrak station also. The NHHIP would also impact Metro's HOV lanes that currently enter downtown just east of the Amtrak station on Franklin Street. The following should be considered:

- Integration of the Amtrak station into Metro's transit system (whether BRT or LRT), to include direct connections to Downtown and the future Texas Central Railway terminal near Metro's Northwest Transit Center.
- Modern, attractive, welcoming station facilities, including convenient access to such amenities as dining, shopping and secure overnight parking, as befits a key gateway to our nation's fourth largest city.
- A station sized for future growth of intercity passenger rail service in Houston. Amtrak currently serves Houston with thrice-weekly train service on the Sunset Limited, which runs from New Orleans to Los Angeles, and a daily bus connection to the Texas Eagle in Longview, which runs from San Antonio to Chicago.

Re: Segment 3 of the NHHIP

Segment 3 funding should not be included in the Transportation Improvement Program funding and should be voted on separately.

The MOU holds TxDOT accountable to the demands of the City and should work to ensure equity, environmental and social justice, and livability for Houstonians as the project develops.

Thousands of downtown jobs may be permanently eliminated. Do we really want to be expanding highway capacity that may never be needed for commuters?

William Wilson

Comment 17:

I write today about your consideration of an MOU between TxDOT and local jurisdictions around the next steps in the NNHIP project. I ask that as a body you act to ensure that any MOU requires that TxDOT directly respond in writing about how it will incorporate the requests of Mayor Turner, Judge Hidalgo, and the thousands of residents who have voiced concerns about the project both through the city's official engagement and outside of it. The agency must ensure that concerns are not just heard, but that they are directly incorporated into the plan. An MOU should also make clear that future funding considerations should be tied to whether or not the agency meaningfully incorporates mitigation strategies and works to dramatically lessen impacts.

Public input and statements from Mayor Turner, Judge Hidalgo, and other local officials have called for the project to minimize displacement and reduce or remove negative impacts on the communities along the route. Most of the communities likely hit by the current project have already experienced previous negative impacts from highway projects in the past. They should not continue to bear the brunt of infrastructure impacts.

There are many excellent ideas about how to improve the proposal going forward in ways that can benefit regional mobility and quality of life. These same solutions can mitigate disruptions of thousands of residents' lives and prevent more folks from being exposed to environmental pollution. Greater investments in public transit, steps to reduce displacements and ensure all those displaced have a home to relocate too, and steps to reduce flooding and air quality issues must all be incorporated into the project formally.

TxDOT should commit to concrete steps to address publicly raised concerns and improve the project before any other funding is considered. The MOU should reflect this need.

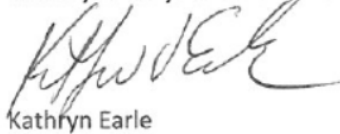
Kyle Shelton

Comment 18:

On June 26th you will make a decision about Section 3 of the North Houston Improvement Project that will have long term implications on many communities of color that in the past have not had a voice to stand up for their rights. These communities along I45 have long provided a rich cultural component for Houston. At a time where the nation is rising up to defend the rights of all people to be treated equally this move to eliminate not only Housing for low income families but historic buildings. As a real estate agent, I have seen many low income and racially diverse neighborhoods destroyed in the name of progress. This freeway expansion as proposed would not benefit Houston as one of the most diverse cities in the United States. There have been many proposals made to modify this project to make it less destructive both to displacement of people, flooding issues and air quality issues. I do not believe this recommendation have been fully reviewed and considered and I do not believe that the project should move forward until full discussions have been had on these concerns and that TxDOT demonstrates progress in addressing these concerns.

I am asking that the decision on moving forward on this project be postponed until all of these issues can be mediated between the affected communities, the City of Houston and their recommendations and the community at large.

Thank you for your consideration



Kathryn Earle

Comment 19:

The benefits claimed by TXDOT with this I-45 expansion are very much in doubt and we should not allow bureaucratic momentum to push this plan through This is an opportunity for Houston to get out from under its reputation as a driver-focused city. Let's take the wider view and build in different ways to reduce congestion, not just more highways and wider highways, but transit lanes and incentives to ride-share or leave the car outside the downtown area.

One thing seems clear in this debate and is proven through experience. If you build bigger highways you attract more drivers and the congestion builds back up again in a few years. I don't want you to destroy important parts of our city and waste billions of dollars in this pursuit.

Betsy Taylor

Comment 20:

I am writing to express my concerns about the NHHIP. I am writing to ask that a memorandum of understanding is developed that will hold TxDOT accountable for the numerous impacts of the highway expansion project.

My concern about this project began over two years ago, when I, as a student at Rice University, interned at Air Alliance Houston and saw first hand the process of performing a Health Impact

Assessment on NHHIP. It quickly became clear to me the negative impact on air quality the project would have, in addition to impacts on mobility, resilience, climate, and equity.

In this current moment where racial justice is rightly at the forefront, I am deeply concerned about a project that will **disproportionately displace communities of color** and increase air pollution, which also **disproportionately impacts communities of color**.

Any MOU must continue to engage the public and work to decrease or eliminate the negative impacts of this project. I ask that you **withhold or halt funding** unless **significant progress in addressing these concerns is made by TXDOT**. I appreciate comments, such as those by the Mayor, that wish to decrease the negative impacts of this project, but we need to see accountability to ensure **racial and environmental justice**.

I love Houston, I live in Houston, and I plan for it to be my home for years to come. This project will impact our city for years to come. I want to live in a Houston that is just, that is resilient, and that has clean air to breathe.

Please hold TxDOT accountable for the impacts of this project so that I can live in that kind of city.

Allison Yelvington

Comment 21:

I'd like to begin by thanking the Houston Endowment Fund for donating the money necessary to conduct the City of Houston's thorough and very effective community engagement process conducted by Huitt-Zollars and the UH Design Center. This process was in sharp contrast to TxDot's woefully inadequate process.

Hundreds of people all along the I-45 corridor showed up. They were asked what they wanted and were listened to. 72 % said they wanted the freeway to stay within the current right away, and most said they wanted public transit that also served their neighborhoods. They said they wanted high comfort bike lanes, sidewalks, noise reduction, and not to be cut off from other neighborhoods and downtown. The data collected was used to create 2 alternative design plans, which were presented to the Mayor and the Mayor's Steering Committee. They selected the design that supported what most Houstonian's were asking for. Mayor Turner wrote a very detailed letter to Comm Ryan outlining his requests. County Judge, Lina Hidalgo wrote a letter in support of the Mayor along with six City of Houston Council Members, Commissioner Garcia, State Representatives, Eastman and Morales, State Senator Alvarado and U.S. House of Representatives Lee. The City of Houston has spoken and it doesn't support the NHHIP in its current design.

So why are we here today voting again on funding for Segment 3? Let's not pretend that it's because this project will reduce congestion, I know you're smarter than that. Let's not pretend that this is progress, this way of thinking is older than I am. Let's not pretend that this is in anyway innovative, Jeff Speck is innovative and this doesn't even come close. Let's not pretend that you care about the displacement of primarily low income black and brown people and the systemic racism embedded in this project. If you did wouldn't support a project that burdens minority communities for the benefit of their white counterparts. Let's not pretend that you are concerned about climate change, vehicle miles traveled, reserving a car centric paradigm or liveable/walkable cities. So, let's not pretend that voting for funding for Segment 3 will benefit the Houston-Galveston area, the state of Texas or the world.

So, if we quit pretending that these things are true what are we left with? I can't answer that. There is no reason that I can't think of as to why you would vote for this project that clearly has no benefit when measured against the harm done to our communities, our city and the world as a whole.

So, I ask that you the minimum today. I ask that you vote to remove Segment 3 funding from the TIP until TxDot commits in writing that it will honor the requests of the City of Houston.

I also request that the proposed Memorandum of Understanding, include monetary incentives for TxDot to comply with Mayor Turner's requests. The draft MOU included in our materials isn't worth the paper it's written on. It will be quickly be disregarded by TxDot once they have the 3 million dollars, and a certified FEIS and a Record of Decision and you will be powerless to intervene. And I know you know this.

If you vote to give TxDot the 3 million and approve an ineffective MOU you will be sending a clear message to the residents of Houston that you don't care what they want, even though they will bear all the negative impacts of this expansion. You will send a clear message to low - income communities of color that they don't matter either, that they are dispensable and disposable. You will also be sending a clear message that money and a faster trip from the burbs, in your single occupancy vehicle, is more important than the resident's of Houston quality of life. I find this despicable.

Susan Graham, Co-Founder, Stop TxDot I-45

Comment 22:

Please halt this process until the important issues have been resolved. Future-oriented cities are taking the opposite approach than TXDOT. No more expanded highways – date shows repeatedly that bigger highways breed more drivers, not fewer as the public wants. Destroying thousands of minorities' homes and businesses – and neighborhoods, as has been done

repeatedly in the past, is unconscionable. TX-DOT has enjoyed free range, and first dibs at the Legislature's \$\$ for far too long. We need to put Houston and its future first.

Ann Kennedy

Comment 23:

I am a resident of Houston, Texas and have been one for the past 5 years. I am very excited about the chance we have to create a better transportation system for Houston. Months ago before COVID I attended a community event where the public was able to give comments on some proposals and there was a large turnout, with overwhelming support for increased public transit, green and bike/pedestrian spaces, and bus lanes.

However, I am very concerned about how the current plans for the project will displace many homes of Houstonians, especially in Black and Latino communities. I think that we should pause for some time until TXDOT can more fully address the environmental and displacement concerns of the communities being impacted.

Katherine Webber

Comment 24:

I am a resident of district E in Houston, and I strongly oppose the proposed expansion plan of I-45. It is unconscionable to continue expanding highways by displacing largely Black and brown communities. This proposal as it currently stands is UNACCEPTABLE. Additionally, it is irresponsible to continue to spend so much money on highway construction and expansion projects which are not a sustainable way to handle population growth. Instead of spending money on highway expansion, the funds need to be invested in creating more public transportation to the residents of Houston.

Anna Willits

Comment 25:

Our family strongly endorses "Vision C". The current TxDOT plan needs to be revised. A few rich people would get richer, but at an unconscionably grim price to be paid by the everyone else in our region - and grotesquely to be paid especially by obliterating predominantly Black and Latinx communities.

Please listen to the people

Geoffrey K. Walker

Comment 26:

My name is Helen Bonnyman and I live in Houston. I am writing to express my concern that H-GAC's TPC will vote to approve the 2021-2024 TIP without stipulating that TxDOT be held accountable to community concerns about the harms of the I-45 expansion project. According to the agenda for tomorrow's TPC meeting, a memorandum of understanding between the City of Houston and TxDOT will be discussed. **This memorandum of understanding must hold TxDOT accountable** for addressing the many negative impacts of the NHHIP, which includes the displacement of 1,079 housing units in predominantly Black and Latinx areas. H-GAC must demand TxDOT make real commitments to tangibly the thousands of Houstonians, predominantly people of color, who will be negatively impacted by this project in areas related to flooding, air quality, cultural and historic preservation, and the displacement I previously mentioned.

Helen Bonnyman

Comment 27:

I am a resident of District E in Houston, and I strongly oppose the proposed expansion plan of I-45. It is unconscionable to continue expanding highways by displacing large communities of predominantly Black and Brown people. This proposal, as it currently stands, is UNACCEPTABLE. Additionally, it is irresponsible to continue to spend so much money on highway construction and expansion projects when are are not a sustainable way to maintain transportation needs resulting from population growth. Instead of spending money on highway expansion, the funds need to be invested in creating more public transportation options for the residents of Houston.

Anthony Mak

Comment 28:

As a Rice student, I chose to attend my university because of the diverse and beautiful city of Houston. During my weekends, I often travel between the Third Ward, Midtown, and Museum District (where I live) (both by car and bike). I believe that the TxDot proposals for segment 3 will inhibit my ability to engage with these areas of the city without increased traffic and danger.

I also worry more broadly that this project will negatively affect the vibrant communities that drew me to Houston in the first place. The construction of segment 3, as it stands, will primarily affect those in the Second and Third ward and displace hundreds of people.

I ask that TPC keep TxDot accountable for the community concerns before voting to secure the funding to build this section of the project.

Kaarthika Thakker

Comment 29:

My name is Renae and I am writing from Houston, TX. I am writing because I'm concerned about the proposed expansion of I-45.

This project cannot move ahead without serious reckoning with displacement, increased flooding, among other things. As a city, as a state, as a country we need to be investing in public transportation. Expanding highways and freeways has not shown to decrease traffic or contribute to residents' quality of life. How is this going to help our society? What can we do instead.

Renae DeLucia

Comment 30:

My comments for the HGAC TPC Meeting 06.26.2020.

Adgenda Item 5.

I agree with Mayor Sylvester Turner's concerns in his letter to TXDOT.

I agree with the proposed MOU draft, with the following suggestions:

Last Paragraph, page 3:

Freight, both truck and rail.

Intercity Amtrak service.

Update the TAC, the TPC, and BOD of METRO, and appropriate committees there of.

Disruption and other issues with all houses of belief/worship.

Agenda Item 6.

The Shepherd/Durham Corridor is becoming highly used from the Shepherd Curve at IH45N to just north of Astrodome/NRG Park.

The following METRO buses use this corridor, all or in part:

003 W Little York
027 Shepherd Frequent Netwrk
030 Clinton/Ella
032 Renwick/San Felipe
036 Kempwood
040 Telephone/Heights
041 Kirby Polk
044 Acres Homes
045 Tidewell
059 Aldine Mail Route
064 Lincoln City Circulator
096 Veterans Memorial Local
099 Ella/FM 1960
108 Veterans Memorial Express
212 Seton Lake vis N Shepherd Park and Ride
344 Acres Homes Community Connector

All these buses have some sort of opetational issues during rush hour. The 027 has it the worse because it is routed the longest on the corridor.

Also, with METRONext, there is planned a Shepherd/Durham connection with the Inner Katy Bus lanes. That would help with connections and a speedup of service.

Lastly, thete needs to be grade separation at Shepherd/Durham and the UP Houston Terminal Division just north of Washington Ave. Trains upset the traffic flow of all cars, trucks, and buses, including METRO.

Dominic Mazoch

Comment 31:

Comment in opposition to funding Segment 3 of the NHHIP:

TxDOT seems to have gone to great lengths to solicit public comment on their proposed design for the NHHIP, and yet appears unwilling to commit to mitigating any of the adverse impacts brought to light by those comments. This speaks to the true intent of TxDOT: attempt to placate

opponents by cynically signaling that their concerns are being heard, and then do nothing to address them. Firstly, the project will have numerous adverse impacts on our community, including air quality degradation and exposure of under served communities to increased noise, light, and flood risk. The project also assumes that communities have already been degraded by the original highway build-out, with TxDOT concluding that this project essentially just perpetuates already existing problems. Clearly, Segment 3 should either be built within the currently existing highway footprint (Vision “C”) or it should not be built at all. Anything more fractures neighborhoods, damages our environment, and clearly exploits under served communities. I urge members to vote no on funding Segment 3.

Mark R. Steuer Ph.D.

Comment 32:

My name is Eliza Pillsbury, and I am a proud, life-long Texan.

I fear that the Texas Department of Transportation is moving forward with the proposed IH-45 expansion project without a meaningful commitment to address the harmful effects, including displacement, flooding, and air pollution. **These impacts will be concentrated in mostly Black and Latinx neighborhoods, continuing to perpetuate historic racial and environmental injustices.** This is horrific and unacceptable.

I demand a plan for cultural and historic preservation and to address the numerous environmental concerns raised by residents over the past year. Any memorandum of understanding between parties must include ongoing **engagement with the public**; elimination or significant efforts to **address displacement and other negative impacts**; and the meaningful consequence of **halting funding until the TxDOT demonstrates progress** in addressing these concerns.

Please do your job to hold the TxDOT accountable.

Eliza Pillsbury

Comment 33:

I am a resident of Houston and wanted to express my strong opposition for funding the NHHIP as part of the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program. TxDOT has not committed to mitigating concerns about flooding and the displacement of over 1,000 families from their homes. I urge the TPC to halt support and funding for this project until TxDOT adequately addresses these concerns.

Emily Fulk

Comment 34:

My name is Madyson Wells and I am a resident of Houston, Texas. I believe that the IH-45 project should not be allowed to continue until displacement, flooding, air quality, cultural and historical preservation is addressed. A city cannot exist without its people and we cannot continue to be ignored on these issues. We are a living breathing community and we deserve to be heard and served. I demand that TX DOT Houston holds the IH-45 expansion.

Madyson Wells

Comment 35:

I am writing about the proposed I-45 expansion. As a resident of Houston near the near Northside, I am highly concerned about the negative impacts of this expansion on neighborhood isolation, access, and safety. First, this construction will isolate the Near Town neighborhoods in particular, increasing their travel times, traffic, noise and air pollution, and stunting economic development in the area, in addition to decreasing their access to quick first responder times and emergency evacuation by eliminating the entrances to I-45 and 610 in the area.

Furthermore, this expansion blocks the Near Northside's view of downtown, cuts off bike trails (endangering bikers and pedestrians), creates undesirable retention ponds, and cuts off access to the Heights, downtown, and nearby shopping through the loss of the North Avenue bridge.

More broadly, the expansion threatens to displace thousands of residents across Houston, most of whom are already low-income or otherwise vulnerable, and it further segments Black and Brown communities. It also increases flood risk, which Houston quite simply cannot afford. This project does not prioritize the safety and vitality of Houston communities and should not be approved.

I hope you will seriously consider this comment and meaningfully address displacement and other negative impacts of the I-45 expansion before moving forward with the project. Thank you.

Sarah Berton Rice University Class of 2020 seb10@rice.edu

Comment 36:

In these times, we can no longer continue doing "business as usual," whether that's in how we interact with people of different persuasions, races, beliefs, or economic status; how we respond to a global pandemic; or how we plan and conduct major public works projects, such as the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP) – IH-45 Expansion.

While I recognize that TxDOT has incorporated more meetings with the public than usual with the NHHIP, and some extra opportunities for comment, I have yet to see any

significant changes in the project design that reflect addressing community concerns in any meaningful way.

As Mayor Turner has noted, “The NHHIP is a potentially transformative project.” As currently planned, that transformation will have the disastrous impacts of similar projects in the past: neighborhood, community, and small business destruction; seriously impacted air quality for families and for students in nearby schools; significantly increased danger to those using forms of transportation other than individual automobiles; continuing flooding and water quality impacts to area streams; and generally impaired quality of life to surrounding residences, businesses, and recreationists; with the only major benefits accruing to those users passing through the project area on I-45.

Alternatively, the NHHIP could be transformative in all the positive ways that the times demand: respect and support for communities of color, as well as communities with a long history in the region; improved safety for people traveling through the project area by any means; incorporation of flood reduction and water quality improvement features to mitigate both new and long-standing impacts of this stretch of highway; reducing or mitigating air quality impacts from transportation in the project area; preserving business and community resources that support the neighborhoods adjacent to the project; increased collaboration with other transportation planning to enhance multi-modal transportation; and many other potential opportunities to enhance the quality of life for Houstonians with this project.

Adopting and implementing Vision C is one way to achieve a transformative project of which we can all be proud – current residents and those of the future.

Linda Shead

Comment 37:

I strongly urge you to reconsider your expansion plans for I-45. The solution to Houston's traffic problems is not wider roads. It is PUBLIC TRANSPORT.

Syed Muhammad Ishtiaq

Comment 38:

I can't measure the annoyance I've built up over the years, traveling on IH-45 through Houston. It gets congested, it floods, it smells like a gas station. I also know that no annoyance is worth depriving my neighbors of housing, clean air, safety, or their culture and history. Our city's infrastructure exists to serve the people who live here. If improving infrastructure significantly reduces the quality of life for real human people, that's bad infrastructure.

To that end, the memorandum of understanding between the Texas Department of Transportation and the City of Houston must hold TxDOT accountable for the displacement of Houston residents that will be caused by the proposed Segment 3 expansion of IH-45. Numerous comments to TxDOT, the Houston-Galveston Area Council, and Mayor Turner demonstrate that significant concerns about the IH-45 expansion have not been addressed. They must be addressed before this project proceeds.

Any memorandum of understanding must include input from and communication with the public who will be affected by the project. Displacement and other significant impacts (flooding, air quality, cultural and historic preservation) must be addressed by TxDOT before they proceed. Until TxDOT demonstrates that they are addressing these concerns, funding should be halted.

Mr. Silas J. Ralston

Comment 39:

As a long-time resident of Houston (since 2003), I am seriously concerned about this proposal. I think it requires more investigation into the neighborhoods that it would affect, specifically by the highway itself. In addition, I would ask the City of Houston to consider funding alternative projects that would more sustainably reduce the use of highways overall. These include protected bike lanes (of which there are very, very few), bike lanes in general, expansion of the MetroRAIL project and increased reliability of the METRO system. More highway is not the way to go -- Houston will have traffic regardless of how wide our highways are. We need to begin reducing the actual use of the roads.

Christina Tan

Comment 40:

I am writing this email to submit formal opposition to the proposed expansion plan since the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) has not committed to mitigating adverse impacts such as displacement, flooding, and air quality in the proposed NHHIP and so this project should not receive the green light to bulldoze, disconnect, and dismantle historic Black and Latinx communities along the project corridor.

At the Transportation Advisory Committee's (TAC) June 17 meeting, the precursor review of the TPC agenda, LINK's Executive Director Oni K. Blair opposed funding for the NHHIP by reminding fellow voting members, "America is grappling with racial tensions and the real impacts of systemic racism. Every person on the TAC must understand that a vote on this project continues those very systems of oppression, disparity, and racial inequities."

Considering TxDOT's projections that the project will displace over 1,000 homes in predominantly Black and Latinx communities, she called on the committee members to push for "real commitments to improve the NHHIP or to halt the project until it can satisfactorily address" community concerns. I stand by her request and formally submit by dissension against the proposed expansion of IH-45.

Kunal Shinde

Comment 41:

I am a resident of Houston and I am writing to express my opposition to funding for the NHHIP. I am disappointed in the Texas Department of Transportation's lack of commitment to mitigating adverse impacts in the proposed NHHIP such as displacement, flooding, and air quality. The funding should not move forward until these problems are adequately addressed.

As it stands, the proposed NHHIP threatens to displace and disconnect predominantly Black and Latinx communities that have historically lived in the project corridor. This is unacceptable, especially given the moment we find ourselves. I urge the council to consider ways to mitigate the harm done to these communities before moving this project forward.

Rebecca Francis

Comment 42:

My name is Carolina English, a Houston resident. I am concerned about the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Numerous comments to TxDOT, H-GAC, and Mayor Turner show significant concerns haven't been addressed. I am calling for the future MOU to hold TxDOT accountable for addressing the negative impacts of the project or, if TxDOT further fails the community, that H-GAC halt funding until TxDOT addresses these concerns.

I am concerned that TxDOT is getting the green light to move forward with the IH-45 project without a meaningful commitment to address displacement, flooding, air quality, cultural and historic preservation, and a number of other concerns residents raised over the years. In TxDOT's December 2019 updated [Draft Community Impacts Assessment](#), the agency expects to displace 1,079 housing units (Tabel 5-2, page 54) in Segment 3. This is an increase from previous impact assessments. Instead of working to minimize impacts, TxDOT seems to work to increase them. These impacts will be concentrated in mostly Black and Latinx neighborhoods, continuing to perpetuate historic racial and environmental injustices. This is unacceptable!

Any MOU between the parties must include ongoing engagement with the public; elimination or significant efforts to address displacement and other negative impacts; and a consequence of halting the funding until TxDOT demonstrates progress in addressing these concerns.

Carolina English

Comment 43:

I am writing to express concern over the current plans for the NHHIP. In its current form, the expansion would displace many Houstonians and significantly increase their exposure to pollutants and air contamination, directly harming members of our community and leaving them without housing while destroying historic parts of Houston. Mayor Turner and the City of Houston have seen these concerns and worked to create guidelines and workable alternatives to address them, namely Vision C.

Given the unique circumstances of Covid-19, I believe the project should be halted until further exploration and attempts at other alternatives can be made. Covid-19 has made it difficult and dangerous for people to work towards and argue for meaningful alternatives and has made significant parts of the project inaccessible to community input. Pausing work on the project until the community can be properly and safely engaged is imperative. There are effective alternatives that would benefit all of Houston for years to come, it is necessary we give our citizens and representatives the time and resources to find and execute them. Thank you for your time.

Emma Hanan

Comment 44:

My name is Michael Moritz and I am Houston resident.

It cannot be stressed enough how critical it is that the City of Houston and HGAC oppose the as designed expansion of I-45. Expanding I-45 will exacerbate already poor air quality in the region and prolong racially biased city planning in Houston. The role of the HGAC Transportation Policy Council, TXDOT, and other regional leaders is to address the issues our region faces (air quality, mobility for low income neighborhoods, and transportation safety) and create policy that improves the way Texans move about our state. You have a responsibility to solve these problems, and the TXDOT design of I-45 only increases these problems. I urge this council to set aside highway construction precedent, political interests, or any other motives affecting the decision making process and think of the people who will lose their businesses, places of worship, and homes as a result of an expansion of the I-45 right of way. Think of asthmatic children and those killed in automobile crashes. This is an opportunity to lead the way in transforming pedestrian and transit mobility around interstates, connect previously disconnected neighborhoods, and catalyze increased use of park and ride transit from outlying suburbs. Do any

of the council members think interstates are pleasing to the eye? Does Houston need more eye sore cuts through our dynamic city? It is time to stop TXDOT from hitting copy and paste on another highway expansion project. The I-10 expansion proved induced demand will lead to further congestion just a few years after completion. This is a once in a generation opportunity to put our money where our mouth is on improving air quality and prioritizing Vision Zero initiatives.

Please, for the sake of Texas, for the sake of Houston, do what is right. Stop the I-45 expansion. Propose the Mayor's Vision C design or stop the expansion altogether.

Michael Moritz

Comment 45:

I write to you today as a concerned Houston resident and urging you to have TxDOT revise and resubmit North Houston Highway Improvement Project because as it stands now, the expansion would result in mass displacement, especially for residents in affordable housing, increased air pollution and more flooding.

Furthermore, I'm requesting Segment 3 funding to not be included in the Transportation Improvement Program funding and be voted on separately. I'm also asking that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) holds TxDOT accountable to the demands of the City and work to ensure equity, environmental and social justice, and livability for Houstonians as the project develops.

Alberto Careaga

Comment 46:

My views on I - 45 Expansion are very similar to those of Mayor Turner and the Houston Chronicle Editorial Board. The I - 45 expansion design needs considerable revision, especially Segment 3 which traverses a densely populated area, in order to relocate the current residents and businesses in a manner acceptable to them. To amplify my other concerns see the quotations below:

Mayor Sylvester Turner, City of Houston

Transportation Advocacy Group (TAG) State of Mobility 2020

“The Interstate 45, the North Houston Highway Project [sic] is the project of a generation. Not just of a decade, but of a generation. I created an engagement process unlike any Houston has seen before. And as a result of that year-long process, I sent a letter to TxDOT identifying my goals, the City’s goals for this project, goals that will transform - and I underscore the word transform - the project into a benefit to the city and to the region. TxDOT, I’m pleased to say, is

listening and I look forward to working with them as we move forward to join forces and the goals that we have put forth. And these goals for all of the Segments - 1, 2, and 3 - for all the segments, include: strengthening Houston's economy; reduce flooding on and off the freeway; make travel safer for all road users; provide long term capacity for all users of the road, including automobile, freight, and transit; serve and preserve the neighborhoods along the corridor while enhancing connectivity between the neighborhoods; mitigate impacts to existing parks and green space while creating additional opportunities for green space; and limit the right-of-way to the extent necessary to meet the project goals, including reducing the footprint of the original proposed plan; and ensure accessible evacuation routes. And if we can mutually agree, based on these goals I've outlined, transportation will truly shape the City of Houston for decades to come and this will be a transformational project that all of us- all of us will be extremely proud of."

Mayor Sylvester Turner, City of Houston

Letter to the H-GAC Transportation Policy Council on July 25, 2019, RE: NHHIP

"Numerous concerns raised by the City and by affected communities remain unresolved, including flooding, air quality, multi-modal connectivity, and the amount of land acquired for right-of-way. It is imperative that TxDOT continue to listen and address these concerns as early in the design process as possible.

There are future decision points at which the Transportation Policy Council will again evaluate the project for funding, including a major definitive funding decision next spring. It is my expectation that TxDOT will resolve many of the pressing outstanding issues before then. It is TxDOT's responsibility to design a project with positive impacts for the community, the City of Houston, and the greater region. We will, without hesitation, not support the funding decision in the spring if these items are not accomplished."

There will be no opportunity for a do-over, so please get it right the first time.

Nancy Edwards

Climate Change Campaigner

Comment 47:

My name is Rose Kantarczyk and I live in Houston. I am writing to express my concern that the Transportation Policy Council will vote to approve the 2021-2024 TIP without stipulating that TxDOT be held accountable to community concerns about the harms of the I-45 expansion project. According to the agenda for tomorrow's TPC meeting, a memorandum of

understanding between the City of Houston and TxDOT will be discussed. The many negative impacts of the North Houston Highway Improvement Project cannot be left out of this memorandum. This project has the potential to further segment the city in a way that cuts off historically Black and Latinx communities in the 2nd and 3rd wards, and has the potential to displace over 1,000 people from their homes.

Rose Kantorczyk

Comment 48:

My name is Zoabe Hafeez, I live in the 77002 zip code, and I'm a pediatrician in the Texas Medical Center. I appreciate the communication and the thought that has occurred between HGAC, The City of Houston, and TxDOT regarding the North Highway Improvement Project and hope for a resolution that truly serves the health and well being of Harris County residents. I was born in Houston and hope to raise my children here. Given that, I have three concerns about continuing to subsidize exurban expansion at the expense of the health, land, and prosperity of urban communities.

First, if we expand the highway footprint to accommodate more commuting vehicles, we will worsen the health of children in the urban core. It doesn't take a physician to know that increasing the number of vehicles that can drive at a high speed through our city will increase the noise, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and automobile crashes that the next generation of Houston children will be exposed to. Automobiles are the most common cause of injury and death of children and something I've seen in both my personal and professional life. The children who get hurt or die by motor vehicles not only see their own lives ruined but they negatively affect a family, neighborhood, and community for generations. I've had the misfortune of seeing it play out repeatedly in our city. Increased motor vehicles are also associated with decreased pediatric IQ, increased preterm birth in pregnant women, increased pediatric asthma, and limits to pediatric final height. We're at risk of contributing to all of these metrics if we continue to allow for increased motor vehicle lanes as a tool to accommodate projected population growth.

Second, the children of the new exurbs that this expanded highway will subsidize will also be poorly served. They are at risk of being victims of the increasing loneliness epidemic, which I believe will be the great pediatric public health fight of our generation. The way we design our communities significantly contributes to loneliness. Simply put, these exurbs will create a generation of kids who will experience their communities from the backseat of their car as they will exist only because of the highway expansion and need the motor vehicle to survive. This will subsidize childhoods who will suffer from physical inactivity, lack of easily accessible gathering places, increased risk of automobile injury, and a decreased number of human interactions compared to most childhoods throughout human history. I've seen the effects loneliness has on kids through pediatric psychiatric emergencies in my practice. We should take

this increasing phenomenon and think long and hard about communities built around the highway.

Finally, we're doing all of this by degrading the integrity of multiple strong communities that children can thrive in. Older communities such as Independence Heights will be worsened, most notably through the destruction of multiple businesses and a church that has been a community pillar for over 100 years. Newer urban communities will also be worsened. EaDo has organically developed into a walkable place centered around St. Emanuel St. in a city where such places are rare. The opportunity cost of destroying half the street will have negative consequences in terms of potential property tax revenue, community public health, and will decrease faith that if our communities build great, walkable streets, they won't be destroyed by the next highway expansion.

I believe that if HGAC advocates for keeping the same number of motor vehicle lanes, keeping the same highway footprint, and prioritizing safe inter-neighborhood, non-automobile travel across the highways, it will maximize the potential public health for the majority of Harris County residents going into the next generation.

Zoabe Hafeez

Comment 49:

TXDOT should not rebuild I-45 without major changes to improve Transit, Flooding, and both preservation of and connections among neighborhood communities. Since TXDOT has made no commitment to include in its planning, the officially submitted expectations of Houston's Mayor, more than a dozen elected officials and hundreds of public comments, Funding for Segment 3 of NHHIP must be separated from the 2021-2024 TIP until a later date and after TXDOT makes official, written commitment to alter its original designs.

Stephen Klineberg, renowned professor, researcher from Rice University and the Kinder Institute for Urban Studies, provided a 2-page essay about his research conclusions in last Sunday's Houston Chronicle that I think relate to our hugely important discussion about the future of freeways in the Houston area. He says, "...respondents" (to his systematic surveys) "have been expressing significantly more support ...for policies to reduce the inequalities and address the needs of the poor; they have been calling for more... stringent controls on development to reduce the region's flooding and enhance its quality- of- life attributes."

TXDOT's current design for NHHIP has not done this. It has imbedded the historical racism of civic planning into walking its hugely expanded highway footprint right over the neighborhoods of Houston's low income working class; and into its plans to submit residents and businesses in the vicinity of Segment 3 to up to 10 years of toxic cement and soil dust, with totally inadequate, if any abatements. The planned changes in Segment 3 will not benefit Houstonians who live there. It will pave the road to rapid, increased development on the edge of the city when 21st century cities with eyes on the future are doing the opposite. TPC should demand commitment from TXDOT to incorporate changes already defined by years of active discussion in the Houston area.

Mary Schultz

Comment 50:

Displacing residents and businesses along the I-45 corridor will be a financial disruption to local businesses. Many minority residents have few options when one is speaking of relocation. These residents will be at a disadvantage. This project will affect the historical significance and value of their communities.

Kashmere Gardens Super Neighborhood Council [#52](#)

Comment 51:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Montie Beach Civic Club. Our neighborhood, Brooke Smith, is bounded by I-45 to our east, N. Main, Airline, and Link Road. We have been actively involved for years advocating for a solution to the NHHIP that incorporates not only our concerns, but those of our neighboring Downtown and North Houston communities. We are quite concerned that with today's vote you may be funding TxDOT without requiring that there is a mechanism to insure that community concerns are mitigated. **Hence, we are asking you to create a Memorandum of Understanding (or similar document) that will require TxDOT to mitigate our concerns for Segments 1 and 2.** As stated ably in Mayor Turner's Letter to Commissioner Ryan, "*we need specific exceptions linked to TAC/TPC decisions to halt or withdraw funding should the project fail to address our concerns.*"

Given that we are at an inflection point following the murder of George Floyd, it is imperative that NHHIP not perpetuate centuries of structural racism, such as continuing and/or exacerbating the 20th century construction of interstates and highways through neighborhoods of color. This project *must* stay as much as possible within the current I-45 footprint rather than displacing homes and businesses belonging to people of color throughout Segment 3.

The NHHIP is a potentially transformative project...I believe we can all agree that this is a once-in-a-generation investment that will shape the City of Houston for decades to come. This is our chance to rise to the challenge and chart a new course for transportation in the region. It is crucial that every opportunity is taken to design and construct the best possible project.”

Mayor Sylvester Turner, City of Houston

Letter to Texas Transportation Commissioner Laura Ryan, May 12, 2020

http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/nhhip/docs_pdfs/Commissioner%20Ryan%20-%20NHHIP%20-%20Letter%20&%20Technical%20Appendix.pdf

We in Brooke Smith/Montie Beach concur with Mayor Turner’s goals to

- Strengthen Houston's economy.
- Reduce flooding on and off the freeway.
- Make travel safer for all road users.
- Provide long term capacity for all users of the roadway, including automobile, freight and transit.
- Serve and preserve the neighborhoods along the corridor while enhancing connectivity between neighborhoods.
- Mitigate impacts to existing parks and greenspace while creating additional opportunity for green space.
- Limit right-of-way to the extent necessary to meet project goals, i.e., reduce the current footprint of the proposed plan.

In fact, Mayor Turner said in his July 2019 letter to TPC, *“There are future decision points at which the Transportation Policy Council will again evaluate the project for funding, including a major definitive funding decision next spring. It is my expectation that TxDOT will resolve many of the pressing outstanding issues before then. It is TxDOT’s responsibility to design a project with positive impacts for the community, the City of Houston, and the greater region. We will, without hesitation, not support the funding decision in the spring if these items are not accomplished.”*

Mayor Sylvester Turner, City of Houston

Letter to the H-GAC Transportation Policy Council on July 25, 2019, RE: NHHIP

<https://www.houstontx.gov/govrelations/turner-letter-tpc-nhhip-20190725.pdf>

Thank you

Peggy Robinson, President Montie Beach Civic Club

Comment 52:

I call on you to **reject** funding for segment 3 of the I-45 Expansion. This proposal, which has already received broad criticism, threatens violence on our communities and financial folly for our city.

Multiple studies have shown that this segment of the expansion will displace Black and Latinx people in Houston. George Floyd's death brought Americans together to demand an end to violence against Black Americans. The displacement of Black communities that Segment 3 will cause is another kind of violence our cities must think about. Floyd's death marked the beginning of a new era in race relations (see the latest *Time* cover from July 6, 2020). Houston holds an opportunity here, in this vote, to begin working toward racial equity in step with this change. A vote against this funding is a vote to preserve and value our residents in a way that we have not historically.

Secondly, we know from top transportation experts (including Christoff Spieler, former member of the the Houston METRO board of directors and my former professor at Rice) that induced demand is real. When we build more lanes and expand the capacity of highways, **more cars come, increasing congestion**. Winning, superstar cities, as urbanist Richard Florida would call them, have tended to decrease their highway capacity over the past 50 years. San Francisco removed its Embarcadero highway and unlocked millions of dollars in real estate potential. Houston has had opportunities to do the same, but it has historically done the opposite. This is a chance for Houston to turn this trajectory around and divert this money to transit infrastructure that will benefit a broader range of Houstonians, such as public transit.

I sincerely hope that the Houston-Galveston Area Council will consider these points and reject funding for Segment 3 of the I-45 expansion.

Alec Tobin

Comment 53:

I know there's an upcoming vote on the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that plans to expand I-45 in hopes of reducing traffic. Yet some of the consequences of that expansion would be: displacing over 1000 homes and many businesses predominately in Black and Latinx communities, destroying green space, and not improving public transit and bike infrastructure. After the murder of George Floyd and the important discussions about systemic racism, Houston should not displace minority communities, especially with a project that has so many flaws and does nothing to help those communities. If the goal is the reduce traffic, why build more highways? That's putting a band-aid on the problem instead of addressing the underlying cause—people are driving too much in single occupancy vehicles and there isn't proper infrastructure or incentives to do otherwise. There aren't enough safe bike routes and infrastructure or public transportation. Look at cities around the country and the world that have successfully reduced their traffic and beautified their city. We should spend money on

infrastructure in alignment with the Houston Climate Action Plan and community goals. Let's put those words, and those dollars, into actions that benefit the communities, the environment, and the people of Houston.

Jordin Metz

Comment 54:

My comments are with regard to your agenda item 5: Developing a Memorandum of Understanding for the future coordination on the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP).

I am writing in support of Mayor Sylvester Turner's vision for the NHHIP and to urge this Council to 1) approve development of the proposed Memorandum of Understanding and 2) ensure that the Memorandum includes specific requirements for TxDOT to **demonstrate progress in addressing the concerns** spelled out in the Mayor's May 12, 2020 letter on the NHHIP **as a condition of continued funding for the project.**

As a native Houstonian and lifelong resident of the city, I am deeply concerned about Houston's future – how we make the most of opportunities as well as tackle challenges to the benefit of all Houstonians. To that end, I have devoted significant time over the last decade active on the boards of my civic association and my Super Neighborhood as well as advocating for improved neighborhood-oriented transit. As Mayor Turner has said, "The NHHIP is a potentially transformative project..." It will have a huge impact on the city for decades to come. I hope that the project will be one that contributes to the vitality and livability of the city and helps the city tackle some of its major challenges. For that to be the case, TxDOT must seriously respond to the City's vision and address concerns of displacement, flooding, air quality, cultural and historic preservation, and other concerns that have been raised by residents during the City's extensive project review process. While TxDOT has indicated an intention to continue working with the City on the design and development of the project, it has clearly not addressed specific concerns as yet. The Memorandum of Understanding must hold TxDOT accountable for doing so and must include a provision to stop further funding if the agency fails to do so.

Kay Warhol

Comment 55:

My name is Daniela Castillo, I am a student immersed in the world of cities, the built environment, design, and planning. I was raised outside of Houston, and made my home in City Council District C. There's a lot to unearth and unpack with the inherent racism embedded in the history of American cities, and with a global reckoning and righteous uprisings calling for the dismantling and abolition of a racist carceral system taking place today, it's an important history at that.

We can learn so much by just driving around and observing our cities, there are decades of disinvestment and purposeful planning and policy that bred much of the inequities we witness today. Which is why I'm submitting a public comment speaking against the proposed I-45 expansion, which I wholeheartedly believe is simply following in the footsteps of, and further reinforcing, systemic racism in transportation planning that has historically allowed entire communities to be torn down and divided by highways, all in the name of "infrastructural improvements".

As has been investigated, the plan to expand and merge I-45 (Segment 3 specifically), would result in the displacement of 919 homes, while also producing a larger effect on the health, stability, culture, economics, and general well-being of many of Houston's historic African-American and Latinx neighborhoods. Mindy Thompson Fullilove, M.D., social psychiatrist and professor of Urban Policy and Health, has extensively studied and written about the detrimental effects of displacement and destruction on communities through a phenomenon she has named "root shock". There's proof that tearing up neighborhoods and communities produces not just physical harm, but also mental and emotional damage on families. The proposed expansion also, of course, has the potential of being an environmental catastrophe, as it would exacerbate air pollution for communities impacted, and produce more flooding.

If Mayor Turner claims that ... "This is our chance to rise to the challenge and chart a new course for transportation in the region. It is crucial that every opportunity is taken to design and construct the best possible project..." then I sincerely urge against funding Segment 3 of the NHHIP. There are various concerns that have yet to be addressed in regards to the "disproportionately high and adverse effects to minority or low-income populations", and the TPC can play an incredibly important role in urging TxDOT to address the negative consequences of the expansion.

In this incredibly significant and historic time, with this very grave environmental justice issue at hand with this proposed expansion, I urge you all to move against funding Segment 3, and consider what it means to practice justice in planning today.

Comment 56:

As a voting constituent on the 77009 zip code I urge to postpone the vote for the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) has not committed to mitigating adverse impacts such as displacement, flooding, and air quality in the proposed NHHIP and should not receive the green light to bulldoze, disconnect, and dismantle historic Black and Latinx communities along the project corridor.

The Segment 3 funding for I-45 project will displace over 1,000 homes in predominantly Black and Latinx communities, committee members need to push for “real commitments to improve the NHHIP or to halt the project until it can satisfactorily address community concerns.

I oppose this project to move forward.

Amada Mireles

Comment 57:

My Name is Zoe Middleton and I am the Houston and SE Texas Co-Director of Texas Housers. Texas Housers is a policy advocacy organization that believes in the right of every Texan to have a healthy, affordable home in a quality neighborhood of their choice.

I request that the following be read into the record and that every member of the TPC be provided a copy of the letter attached to this email.

In almost every American city, highway projects are racist monuments disguised as public infrastructure. Their legacy is as pernicious, if less obvious, than Confederate generals or redlining.

Segment 3 of the NHHIP has 916 residential displacements total, including the entirety of Clayton Homes, part of Kelly Village, Midtown Terrace suites and a huge amount of so-called “naturally occurring affordable housing stock”. The draft Community Impacts assessment clearly states that disproportionately will cause high and adverse effects on minority or low-income populations.

We believe that there must be an MOU between the County, the City, and TxDOT and other regional governing bodies so that our demands, recommendations, expectations in the letter can be guaranteed. The recommendations enumerated in our letter fall under the following categories and will be published on our blog in detail shortly.

- 1.
2. Long-term, plentiful,
3. and deeply affordable housing
- 4.
- 5.
6. Community oversight and
7. transparency
- 8.
- 9.
10. Accessibility and flexibility
- 11.
- 12.
13. Historic preservation
14. and economic development

- 15.
- 16.
17. Equitable treatment
- 18.

Zoe Middleton (she/her) | Houston and Southeast Texas Co-Director

Comment 58:

The Houston area does not need I-45 widened. A global climate emergency is happening now and this project would just inflict more damage to the planet. Also the communities living by the existing interstate don't need their neighborhoods torn up and worsened by more lanes of freeway.

Nicholas Cody, lifelong Houstonian

Comment 59:

Dear TPC Members,

I support Harris County's and local officials' and residents' requests for funding of Segment 3 but not Segments 1-2 of NHHIP for the time being.

I respectfully ask that you state your positions on the record. The "livestreamed" hearings do not provide video. While I appreciate the many staff comments, they won't have any effect without a clear and explicit statement by this body.

The TIP will reshape the center of the city of Houston for generations, and whether it will have a center comparable to other major cities. This is not a decision that should be made in secrecy or in silence.

Cooke Kelsey

Comment 60:

I am writing to express my concerns on the expansion of IH-45 when the problem Houston has on transportation is less on the availability and number of highways than on the lack of a reliable and expanded public transportation system. An expansion on IH-45 would negatively affect the communities living right under and next to its passage. Communities that are predominantly Black and of Spanish speaking descent. All and every move to make this expansion a possibility is a threat to the livelihood, health, and environment of in-the-loop inhabitants along the greater 3rd ward and east end. Again, Black and Brown communities will be negatively affected by the expansion of a highway. To move forward with the expansion is to declare the disposability of Black and Brown Houstonians for the convenience of a few.

Instead of wasting money, on the expansion of a highway we don't need, I propose an in depth plan of the construction of a public transportation system that expands past the loop and into the cities to its proximity.

Yasmeen Davila

Comment 61:

My name is Aaron Balderas. My wife Mary Beth and I reside in 77012. We both frequent the neighborhoods that surround the I-45 segment 3 of the NHHIP. We would both like to see a separate vote be taken on the NHHIP and the rest of the TIP projects. While we are in favor of progress for the city and southeast Texas, we believe that the NHHIP and in this specific instance, Segment 3, as it stands does not meet the standard necessary for not only improving transportation but actively working against the structural racism that exists because of choices transportation, municipal, and state officials have made in the past. The NHHIP (as it stands) continues that legacy of design and construction that benefits those that are well off and casts aside those with less means, in many cases Black and Latinx communities and their neighborhood "micro-environments".

The NHHIP does have the potential to position Houston as a leader in equitable, socially-conscious, and environmentally responsible design. The right design, influenced by the right and numerous stakeholders, can be something that we can hang our hats on as a city and region for the next half century or more. It is possible to improve air quality, reduce flooding, not displace people, and yes, provide smoother transportation for the affluent suburbs, but all these things should not be at the expense of the communities along the way. As a native Houstonian and southeast Texan who loves the damn city, I urge the Transportation Policy Council to make the right choice. Contamos con ustedes.

Aaron & Mary Beth Balderas

Comment 62:

Thank you to all Policy Board members and to TXDOT Houston staff and leadership for all the listening that is required to develop a project of this scale.

I hope that you will continue to ground your work in this area around these principles:

1. Crashes are a much bigger problem than congestion in the Houston region, and reducing travel time for long distance trips is not actually an important regionally significant goal.

The first priority for fixing transportation in this corridor must be safety of all users and people along the corridor. The outdated design standards proposed in the DEIS need to be updated to modern safe design using context sensitive design speed appropriate for an urban project like this. Following current national standards, including the AASHTO Green Book, would mean

designing any limited access lanes to 50 or 55 mph design speed and any surface elements to 25 to 35 mph design speed. All surface elements should be designed as city streets integrated into a grid network of multimodal access.

2. There is no need to destroy so many existing homes, businesses, churches, or other fabric of existing communities for expansion of Right Of Way to achieve the needs of the public in this project.

Using safe design speed will allow the safer options of narrower lanes, and prioritizing multimodal access will allow optimizing all facilities for transit and other modes rather than all of us being forced to drive alone in a car, eliminating the perceived need for car priority lane expansions. All vehicle counters within the study area for segments 1, 2, and 3 – except the furthest north counters at BW8 – have shown steady decline in vehicle counts over the last 15 years. Houstonians are changing the way they access jobs, schools, shopping, and civic life, and are driving less than they did in the past. The perceived need for car priority lane expansions is based upon the seriously flawed regional growth forecasts, the seriously flawed travel demand models, and inequitable goals, metrics, and scoping for this project.

3. The transportation systems in this corridor are desperately failing and need to be fixed.

Transportation systems in this area continue to kill and seriously injure large amounts of people, and this needs to be fixed. Transportation systems in this area have divided communities and left many people with less access east and west than they had had before the introduction of the freeway concept. Transportation systems in this area also needlessly encourage increased vehicle miles traveled, sprawl development, and long distance local travel. These things can be fixed if you use modern safe design standards optimized for safe design speeds and multimodal transportation for all elements of the project, and end the reliance upon clearly flawed travel demand models.

Jay Crossley

Comment 63:

This is not a time to be moving forward with Phase 3 as the water both downstream and upstream as well as the damage to our park and so much more have not been addressed.

Randall Baxley



June 26, 2020

Dear Transportation Policy Council members,

My name is Bakeyah Nelson. I am the Executive Director of Air Alliance Houston - a local nonprofit working to reduce the public health impacts of air pollution and advance environmental justice in the Houston Region. Air Alliance Houston believes that everyone has a right to breathe clean air and where you live, work, learn, and play should not determine your health.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns about the vote that will likely take place today. First, I would like to recognize the efforts by the City of Houston and Harris County to more closely examine the issues that have been raised about this project and taking steps toward mitigating some of those issues.

While we at Air Alliance Houston acknowledge that improvements to I-45 are needed, we strongly believe and ask you today to keep NHHIP in the broader Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) but remove it from the TIP funding window (2021-2024) until a fair and equitable path forward can be defined in partnership with residents and delineated in writing. To be clear, the vote to support funding for Segment 3 at this juncture will cement systemic racism into transportation planning for another generation. Furthermore, without written commitments to address the adverse and disparate impacts that are well documented in the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) draft environmental impact statement and community impact report, TxDOT is making known its discriminatory intent.

For some of you this request may seem extreme however, TxDOT has given us no reason to believe or trust that it will act on the express desires of residents or the City of Houston more broadly. For example, after a number of meetings with TxDOT where staff have made verbal commitments, Air Alliance Houston has yet to receive any document, in writing, outlining TxDOT's plans to mitigate the increased exposure to air pollution for children who attend schools within 500 feet of the highway.

The same is true for the City of Houston. TxDOT has offered nothing in writing to assure anyone on this committee that it will comply with the desires of local elected officials and the communities they are supposed to represent. It is my understanding that the Transportation Policy Council has the legal authority to make a motion to remove or defer the vote for funding the NHHIP at this time. With your vote, you can let your constituents know that TxDOT's "shoot now, ask questions later" approach to transportation planning is unacceptable.

This is a historic moment in time, a time when many across the country and throughout the world have shown leadership by taking immediate actions that demonstrate they can no longer be silent on racial injustice. It speaks volumes that the metropolitan planning organization serving one of the most diverse region's in the country has remained silent about the current state of reckoning with systemic racism. Even more troubling is that the representatives on this

committee are choosing not to pause and reflect on this massive project that will perpetuate the disregard of communities of color for decades to come.

In the absence of taking a stand for communities by making a motion to remove NHHIP from the TIP 2021-2024 window, it is critical the TPC move forward to establish a MOU that includes an explicit mechanism that prevents future funding from TxDOT unless TxDOT complies with the terms outlined in the MOU. Moreover, the MOU should include a requirement that TxDOT conduct a social impact assessment to determine how the project will disrupt social cohesion and to identify steps that can be taken to minimize the impact to residents.

I implore each of you to vote with courage and conscience rather than tradition. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Bakeyah Nelson
Executive Director



June 25, 2020

Houston-Galveston Area Council
Transportation Policy Council (TPC)
publiccomments@h-gac.com

Re: Vote on 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program & proposed segment 3 for NNHIP

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments. CEER is a unique advocacy collaborative of 25 different organizations that come from three main sectors: environmental justice, social justice, and conservation. CEER's mission is to raise awareness of the connection between pollution, place and the public's health. We are providing written and spoken comments on the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP), specifically the funding for Segment 3 of the highway expansion and the proposed memorandum of understanding up for discussion at the June 26th, 2020 TPC meeting.

CEER and our members work with neighborhoods all along the proposed segment 3 of the NNHIP, many of which are environmental justice neighborhoods. We stand in solidarity with these impacted communities who have clearly indicated that what they want is to not see the expansion move forward as planned. We also stand with our CEER members LINK Houston and Air Alliance Houston, who advocate for equitable policies and practices that break away from "business as usual" thinking. Now is the time to listen to community and act differently to produce a different outcome.

We urge you to **vote against including funding for Segment 3 of the NHHIP in the 2021-2024 TIP** because numerous comments to TxDOT, H-GAC, and Mayor Turner show significant concerns haven't yet been addressed. The conversation needs to continue and communities deserve more time.

An MOU to put agreements in writing with multiple stakeholders is important. We urge you to remember the most important stakeholder in that agreement: the people who have to live with this decision and will be impacted by it. Any MOU between the parties must include ongoing engagement with the public, elimination or significant efforts to address displacement and other negative impacts, and a consequence of halting the funding until TxDOT demonstrates progress in addressing these concerns.

CEER members are concerned that TxDOT is getting the green light to move forward with the IH-45 project without a meaningful commitment to address displacement, flooding, air quality, cultural and historic preservation, and a number of other concerns residents raised over the last several years.

CEER urges you to take on a climate justice lens when making this decision, which will have impacts for future generations. Climate Justice refers to the movement whose ultimate goal is to achieve Climate Equity. The fight for Climate Justice raises ethical and political concerns about who exacerbates climate change and who suffers the immediate, short-term, and long-term impacts. Climate Justice calls on those who have benefited from climate change to share resources with frontline communities in order to rectify damages and create conditions where negative impacts are not concentrated on marginalized communities.

You have an important choice to make. Do not repeat history and the racist policies and practices that have brought us to this moment. Vote to delay this project so we can do right by the communities that have spoken against it and are demanding better.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Iris Gonzalez', written in a cursive style.

Iris Gonzalez (she/her/hers)
Coalition Director

[Coalition for Environment, Equity & Resilience \(CEER\)](#)
2010 North Loop West, Suite 103
Houston, TX 77018
(713) 714-8442 Main Line
(713) 331-9913 Direct Line
iris@ceerhouston.org

23 June 2020

Commissioner Laura Ryan
Texas Transportation Commissioner
125 E. 11th Street
Austin, TX 78701

Sent via email: laura.ryan@txdot.gov

Mayor Sylvester Turner
City of Houston
PO Box 1562
Houston, TX 77251-1562

Sent via email: mayor@houstontx.gov

Re: North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP) relocation

Dear Commissioner Ryan and Mayor Turner:

Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP) cannot go forward as planned without significant improvements in the way the agency plans to treat the over 1,200 families who are displaced and the neighborhoods they live in.¹ The project, which will expand I-45 and reorient the highways that travel around downtown will have an outsized effect on the health, stability, culture, economics, and general well being of many of Houston's historic African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods. The disparate racial impact of the pending action compounds the widely acknowledged injustice that TxDOT inflicted upon Houston African-American neighborhoods when TxDOT first constructed the interstate highway system 50 years ago.

As TxDOT demonstrates at length in its technical documents, this project will once again have a disproportionately devastating impact on African-American, Hispanic, and low-income communities. In one instance, the Draft Cumulative Impacts Technical Report (CITR) indicates, "the project area largely comprises minority and/or low-income communities."² The need for affordable housing is also well documented, "there are only 18 affordable rental homes for every 100 extremely low-income renter households in Houston."³ While the Draft CITR cites the historic harms to the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards as a result of disinvestment and highway construction, it does not in any meaningful way

¹ http://www.ih45northandmore.com/docs7/NHHIP_Draft_EIS_April-2017.pdf

²

<http://www.ih45northandmore.com/docs13/Draft%20NHHIP%20Cumulative%20Impacts%20Tech%20Report%2012.19.2019.pdf>

³

<http://www.ih45northandmore.com/docs13/Draft%20NHHIP%20Cumulative%20Impacts%20Tech%20Report%2012.19.2019.pdf>

suggest that TxDOT intends to remedy the historic destruction and division of homes, economic centers, and community resources, even though TxDOT is supposed to “mitigate cumulative effects.”⁴

We support Mayor Turner’s suggestions for TxDOT to limit the right-of-way in Segments 1 and 2, as well as guarantee greater benefits for people who will be displaced. However, the Mayor has suggested that TxDOT go forward with Segment 3 as planned. Segment 3 alone will displace at least 916 families and tear through several of the Mayor’s Complete Communities, including Second Ward, Third Ward, Near Northside and Acres Home.⁵

So far, TxDOT and the City of Houston have failed to make adequate information available to the residents of the impacted communities for them to meaningfully participate in public discussion. Their reports, presentations, and surveys are hard to understand and rarely available in any languages other than English. TxDOT has not made clear the specifics of how it will treat the people the project will displace.

We represent over tens of thousands of people from numerous neighborhoods in Houston and Texas and we believe that the Uniform Relocation Act, which TxDOT is required to follow, does not go far enough to protect the people who will be displaced by the NHHIP. Furthermore, TxDOT does not plan to adequately mitigate the profound cumulative effects of highways to the region. As Mayor Turner has said, “This project must leave residents and communities whole.”⁶ This is why we expect firm and binding commitments from both TxDOT and Mayor Turner to ensure the following:

- 1. Long-term, plentiful, and deeply affordable housing**

“We need affordable housing. We need single family homes. We also need rental housing. Housing for all... We need to have options.” - Jessica Hulsey, Historic Second Ward resident and community leader

- TxDOT should do everything possible to keep people in their homes. It should not increase the right-of-way.
- As Mayor Turner writes, TxDOT should ensure that the availability of housing in all neighborhoods affected remains the same by funding the construction of replacement housing before the highway construction begins.⁷

4

<http://www.ih45northandmore.com/docs13/Draft%20NHHIP%20Cumulative%20Impacts%20Tech%20Report%2012.19.2019.pdf>

⁵ http://www.ih45northandmore.com/docs7/NHHIP_Draft_EIS_April-2017.pdf

6

http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/nhhip/docs_pdfs/Commissioner%20Ryan%20-%20NHHIP%20-%20Letter%20&%20Technical%20Appendix.pdf

7

http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/nhhip/docs_pdfs/Commissioner%20Ryan%20-%20NHHIP%20-%20Letter%20&%20Technical%20Appendix.pdf

- TxDOT should compensate for the historic loss of affordable housing from the original highway constructions in the mid-1900s.
- Replacement housing should be affordable to populations making below 60% and 30% AMI.
- TxDOT should ensure the one-to-one replacement of pre-Hurricane Harvey public housing units. Displaced public housing residents should have the option to stay in the same neighborhood or move to a different one if they choose.
- The architecture and design of the replacement housing should match the historic architecture of the neighborhood.

2. Community oversight and transparency

TxDOT and HHA should “Talk to people at least once a month to update us on what’s going on. Because right now I’m living out of boxes. A lot of us have been living out of boxes since the summer of last year.” - anonymous Clayton Homes tenant

- TxDOT should consult the undersigned groups and individuals to create a community advisory board made up of displaced residents to oversee the relocation process. They should meet publicly with TxDOT on a regular basis.
- A separate community advisory board should be established for Houston Housing Authority (HHA) properties.
- TxDOT and HHA should produce quarterly public reports on the relocation process beginning now.
- TxDOT should contract for an independent report on the relocation process after the project is complete.

3. Accessibility and flexibility

- As suggested by Mayor Turner, “Affected residents should be clearly notified of their rights, options and responsibilities, at least 180 days in advance”⁸ and additionally, residents should not be required to move during the school year.
- As Mayor Turner has suggested, security deposits, first/last month’s rent, rental applications, and other out-of-pocket expenses should be covered by TxDOT.⁹ This amount should total to a lump sum of at least \$3,000 per displaced family in addition to the comparable value and moving costs guaranteed under the Uniform Relocation Act.

8

http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/nhhip/docs_pdfs/Commissioner%20Ryan%20-%20NHHIP%20-%20Letter%20&%20Technical%20Appendix.pdf

9

http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/nhhip/docs_pdfs/Commissioner%20Ryan%20-%20NHHIP%20-%20Letter%20&%20Technical%20Appendix.pdf

- Displaced residents should be able to receive some financial compensation up front so that they can pay for expenses like security deposit and rental applications.
- TxDOT should provide case managers, social workers, or peoples' advocates to represent and counsel displaced people as they navigate the acquisition and relocation processes.
- People should be provided, free of charge, the service of a real estate agent and apartment relocation service to permit them to choose the neighborhood and home that best meets their families' needs.
- Homeowners and renters should be eligible to receive a just value for their homes whether or not they buy or rent a new home.
- TxDOT should ensure that the advisory services listed in the Draft Community Impact Assessment are made free and widely available and are well advertised.

4. **Historic preservation and economic development**

“To keep the historic look of the community would be to build a home that’s not straight up, like those high rises. To keep the schools open. To keep the culture of the community. The culture of the community is the village mindset... When people come back, it shouldn’t feel like a totally new neighborhood.” - Kendra London, Our Afrikan Family

- TxDOT should consult at length with a wide array of residents from communities such as Greater Fifth Ward, Greater Third Ward, Second Ward, Greater Greenspoint, Hidden Valley, Acres Home, Northside/Northline, Independence Heights, and Near Northside to ask how they want to preserve their communities' histories. TxDOT should fund these initiatives.
- TxDOT should finance repairs, soundproofing and air quality protection for all homes within 1,000 feet of the new right-of-way.
- TxDOT should fund economic development initiatives designed by residents in environmental justice communities that will be impacted by this project.

5. **Equitable treatment**

I want to “have the freedom of choosing the property that I want to live in... security is number one, the cleanness, the neighbors... the facility for the handicap...” - Mike Ahamandi, Clayton Homes tenant

- All relocation benefits available to displaced U.S. citizens should be made available to undocumented people.
- Property appraisals must account for rising home prices and gentrification.
- Displaced people should be compensated to an extent that they have the option to move to a different neighborhood if they choose.
- A “comparable” replacement home should be defined in the eyes of the person who is displaced.

- All written materials provided by TxDOT should be translated into all the languages spoken by community members along the route of the project or in determined areas of impact.
- All relocation staff should be culturally competent, demographically reflective of the communities they are working with, and speak the languages most comfortable for the displaced people.
- HHA must provide mobility counseling for HUD tenants administered by a qualified and experienced third party.
- Section 8 vouchers should be guaranteed up to 140% of fair market rate (FMR) to afford choice of housing and neighborhoods.
- The investment initiatives and mitigation being discussed for Independence Heights should be provided for all environmental justice neighborhoods in Houston.

All of these services and benefits are necessary to ensure that families who are displaced are given the financial resources and the right to emerge from their involuntary displacement in a sound financial position and in a home and neighborhood of their choice in which their family can flourish. The overwhelming number of affected persons are people of color. As those who suffered injustice in previous highway expansion projects, we demand that the City of Houston and TxDOT intervene so that these same racial injustices are not perpetuated or further entrenched. These requests we make in this letter are essential to ensure racial justice.

“How much longer will housing discrimination exist? This is just a small demand or request of what has existed for the past 70, 80 years.” - Reverend James Caldwell, Coalition of Community Organizations

The recent experience of the relocation of the Hillcrest community in Corpus Christi, while not perfect, represents a TxDOT freeway relocation plan that achieves many of these goals. The Mayor should insist that TxDOT at least model its treatment of Houstonians similarly.

We will have a virtual roundtable in the next few weeks to discuss this letter and invite the Mayor and Commissioner to join us.

Sincerely,

Our Afrikan Family
 Coalition of Community Organizations
 Houston Freedmen’s Town Conservancy
 Dr. Robert D. Bullard, National Black Environmental Justice Network
 Joetta Stevenson, Greater Fifth Ward Super Neighborhood #55
 Jessica Hulsey, Historic Second Ward resident and community leader
 Mike Ahamandi, Clayton Homes resident
 Mardie Paige, Independence Heights Super Neighborhood
 Texas Housers
 LINK Houston

Texas Campaign for the Environment
Air Alliance Houston
Raven Douglas, MOVE Texas Action Fund
Stop TxDOT I-45
Indivisible Houston
Sunrise Houston
West Street Recovery
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Carmen Cavezza
Jim Cavezza
Cassandra Cavezza
Dominicq Cavezza
Stefano Cavezza

CC:

mthiele@housingforhouston.com
president@housingforhouston.com
HOU-PIOWebMail@txdot.gov
ken.clark@co.galveston.tx.us
mark.henry@co.galveston.tx.us
David.Robinson@houstontx.gov
Abbie.Kamin@houstontx.gov
j.beckendorff@wallercounty.us
w.smith@wallercounty.us
Treid@pearlandtx.gov
Jbranson@pearlandtx.gov
matts@brazoria-county.com
larrys@brazoria-county.com
eliza.paul@txdot.gov
cbass@pasadenatx.gov
jrodriguez@pasadenatx.gov
craigbrown@galvestontx.gov
davidcollins@galvestontx.gov
brcombs@chamberstx.gov
cwtaylor@chamberstx.gov
david.douglas@co.liberty.tx.us
jay.knight@co.liberty.tx.us
Carolyn.Evans-Shabazz@houstontx.gov
Sallie.Alcorn@houstontx.gov
donald.smith1@TxDOT.gov
adam.jack@TxDOT.gov
Judge.Hidalgo@cjo.hctx.net
John.Blount@eng.hctx.net

district5@baytown.org
district4@baytown.org
carol.lewis@tsu.edu
jeross.rice75@gmail.com
Shashi.kumar@missouricitytx.gov
Clifford.brouhard@missouricitytx.gov
Larry.millican@leaguecitytx.gov
Greg.gripon@leaguecitytx.gov
carrin@carrinpatman.com
Tom.lambert@ridemetro.org
Narnold@fortusis.com
npicha@seabrooktx.gov
james.prestage@fortbendcountytex.gov
stacy.slawinski@fortbendcountytex.gov
Adrian.garcia@pct2.hctx.net
milton.rahman@pct2.hctx.net
Mark.keough@mctx.org
james.metts@mctx.org
proberts@texas-city-tx.org
dkneupper@texas-city-tx.org
rguenther@poha.com
saathoff@portfreeport.com
jeffrey.weatherford@houstontx.gov
maureen.crocker@houstontx.gov
Charles.wemple@h-gac.com
Jeff.Taebel@h-gac.com
twoolley@cityofconroe.org
cbogert@cityofconroe.org
jzimmerman@sugarlandtx.gov
jlane@sugarlandtx.gov

BRIAN BABIN, D.D.S.

36TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

BABIN.HOUSE.GOV

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE,
AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SPACE AND AERONAUTICS
REPUBLICAN LEADER

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

BORDER SECURITY CAUCUS
CO-CHAIRMAN

PRO-LIFE CAUCUS

MILITARY VETS CAUCUS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4336

2236 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-1555

203 IVY AVENUE, SUITE 600
DEER PARK, TX 77536
(832) 780-0966

812 N. 16TH ST.
ORANGE, TX 77630
(409) 883-8075

100 W. BLUFF DRIVE
WOODVILLE, TX 75979
(409) 331-8066

2004 N. CLEVELAND ST.
DAYTON, TX 77535
(832) 780-0966

June 22, 2020

Mr. Alan Clark
Director of Transportation Planning
Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC)
P.O. Box 22777
Houston, TX 77227-2777

Dear Mr. Clark and Members of the Transportation Policy Council:

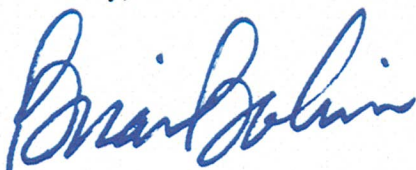
As the Member of Congress that represents the City of Baytown, I am writing in support of the City's request for additional federal funding as part of its Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) project to improve Garth Road. It is my understanding that the City is requesting additional federal funding to complete Phases A&B of its Garth Road project.

Garth Road is a congested critical arterial roadway within Baytown. The Garth Road corridor is home to the San Jacinto Mall, a project undergoing a \$100 million revitalization. Houston Methodist Hospital – Baytown on Garth Road serves as a regional medical hub. Garth Road is also home to many retail and small businesses. As it sits today, Garth Road needs additional improvements to meet current traffic demands. As the east side of Harris County and Baytown grow the demand will increase.

According to the City, *the project will completely reconstruct Garth Road from I-10 to Baker Road, add an extra travel lane in each direction, add a 10-foot trail on the east side of the road, improve drainage, add access management techniques to improve safety, improve water and wastewater utilities, and clean up the electrical and telecommunications utilities along the corridor.*

The of the City of Baytown's TIP request has my enthusiastic support and I strongly urge the (H-GAC) Transportation Policy Council give it all due consideration.

Sincerely,



Brian Babin, D.D.S.
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Brandon Capetillo, Mayor of Baytown

I-45 Public Comment

June 25, 2020

Trevor Reichman
401 Quitman St
Houston, TX 77009

Dear Members of the Transportation Policy Council,

It was Houston's bold move towards multi-modality and away from the car-centric suburbia that I grew up in, that wooed me back to Houston a couple of years ago. After living in the bicycle, pedestrian, and transit friendly city of Portland, Oregon and also getting spoiled spending time in America's most human centric cities such as New York and Washington D.C., Houston was never a city I thought I would return to, even though most of my family still resides here.

However, in 2018, I was surprised to re-discover a very different Houston than the one I grew up in. Houston's triumphant and ongoing efforts to re-centralize and re-densify the urban core, along with the extensive bicycle highway network and rail expansion, are the urban attributes that cinched the deal for my partner and I to relocate and buy a house in the Near Northside neighborhood in Central Houston. In the past 2 years, I have left my car almost permanently parked at home, and use the train and the bicycle highway daily as my primary sources for commuting. In those 2 short years, I have seen the user ship increase exponentially. On a sunny weekend, or during rush hours, I literally pass hundreds of other cyclists and pedestrians on the White Oak Bayou and MKT trails. On the Red Line train, which comes every 6 minutes during the day, the Texas stigma against mass transit is quickly fading, and the ethnic and income diversity of its growing ridership base is inspiring. Houston Metro is the most convenient, affordable, and reliable mass transit system I have personally have ever had access to. In other cities, I had been priced out of the urban core. These multi modal infrastructure investments represents the future of Houston, a stark contrast from its past.

I was extremely disheartened to learn about the plans to excessively expand the I-45 to the detriment of the urban core, and the historic and ethnic communities that will be displaced and further marginalized. We live a couple of blocks from the existing I-45, and although we won't be displaced, the expansion will turn my pocket neighborhood into a giant access road. After attending multiple meetings to find out those details, and with an open mind, I only have more skepticism and more questions that have not been answered. Mostly, why is this even needed, when demand for personal car use is trending down. We are in a prime window of opportunity to re-imagine transit in our city and the effects and footprint of that transit in an increasingly toxic and crowded world. At one meeting, as a primary selling point, the TXDOT officiates promised to increase the speed of traffic on I-45 by 5 mph...yes billions of dollars and decade of central city residents living in the midst of a construction zone, to increase the speed of suburban commuters by 5 mph, when in fact, it is in the central city where we want traffic to SLOW DOWN. Being that an increase in speed and the adding of lanes is proportional to the increase of deaths, this is counter to Houston's Vision Zero goal.

As we plan for the future of Houston, let's not perpetuate the car culture that has literally choked our city for decades. Let's rather continue to densify the Urban Core, thus keeping it affordable and incentivizing those who work in Central Houston to live in Central Houston too. Let's rather invest in Boulevards, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, mixed use initiatives, mass transit, and yes, let's also fix the streets and highways in a way that preserves and enhances our inner city, and bridges our neighborhoods and communities rather than divide them. Build it and they will come. It is up to us to all of us decide what to build and what will come. Let's not allow what we don't want to come, to be forced onto us by entities that don't live in our community, but only stand to profit from it.

Major concerns that are in my own backyard, which is only small segment of this massive project:

- The implications for the watershed, bayou flood zone, and White Oak Bayou bicycle trail and park.
- The viewshed of Downtown Houston from the Near Northside neighborhood and bayou green space and trail network. The view of the

city is one of the most celebrated and valuable assets of the Near Northside neighborhood.

- What happens to North Street, the local bridge between the neighborhood communities of The Woodland Heights and Near Northside? We need to add more local connectors, not take them away.
- What happens to the highway exit and entrance for Main Street (North of the I-10)? If this is removed, all that traffic will be dumped onto Quitman Street (my street). Quitman is slated for a road diet with pedestrian improvements and bicycle lanes in the next year or two. The traffic on Quitman is also often interrupted by the Red Line Train, which stops at Quitman and Main every 6 minutes in each direction. Quitman is not where we want the traffic from Main and I-45 to be rerouted to!
- Will the bicycle paths be interrupted during construction? These are not just recreational. These are the bicycle highways for thousands of bicycle commuters and there is no temporary redirect that is viable and safe.
- Who will be displaced? Who will live closer to more noise and more pollution? Who will see their neighborhoods cut off and overrun by cars?

Thanks for accepting public input, being that this is all funded by that public.

With sincere regard for my community and this planet,

Thanks for the opportunity to comment,

-Trevor Reichman

trevor.reichman@gmail.com

503-449-2084

LINK HOUSTON

Transportation Policy Council (TPC)
Houston-Galveston Area Council
3555 Timmons Lane, Suite #100
Houston, TX 77027

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Oni K. Blair

June 25, 2020

Re: Public Comment on Transportation Policy Council (TPC) June 26, 2020 Agenda Item #5

Dear Chair Clark and Members of the Transportation Policy Council,

My name is Oni Blair, and I serve as a voting member representing citizens interests on the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). I am writing regarding the June 26 agenda item #5, "Developing a Memorandum of Understanding for the future coordination on the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP)." I am writing to specifically request that the TPC use this opportunity to set clear, strong parameters for the memorandum of understanding (MOU). These parameters should call on TxDOT to directly address the adverse impacts on communities living adjacent to the project, especially eliminating or further mitigating displacement; include a funding consequence until TxDOT addresses the concerns; regularly engage the public throughout the project; and separate Segment 3 from Segments 1 and 2 in the remaining review and completion of processes under the National Environmental Protection Act.

I thank the parties – the City of Houston, Harris County, Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO), and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) – for their continued engagement on the NHHIP or IH-45 expansion.

As I stated at the June 17 TAC meeting, America is grappling with racial tensions and the real impacts of systemic racism. Every person on the TPC must understand that a vote on the NHHIP continues those very systems of oppression, disparity, and racial inequities. TxDOT's 2019 Draft Community Impacts Assessment estimates that NHHIP's Segment 3, which stretches from Downtown Houston to IH-10, would displace 919 homes. These homes belong to families and individuals living in a range of housing types – rented or owned, on the private market or public housing, as well as multi-family and single-family units. TxDOT estimates Segment 3 is 67% minority and that Segments 2 and 1 have minority populations in the 80 and 90 percentiles, respectively. In addition to the displacement of people, the NHHIP will have an outsized effect on the



health, community stability, culture, economics, and general well-being of many of Houston's historic African-American and Latinx neighborhoods.

In the 2019 Draft Community Impacts Assessment, TxDOT states, "After considering the benefits of the proposed project along with mitigation, the Build Alternative may cause **disproportionately high and adverse effects to minority or low-income populations**, but a substantial amount of these effects have been minimized through a variety of commitments and programs that will be implemented by TxDOT," ([Page 5-220](#)).

The statement asserts that TxDOT will address these adverse impacts, but when you read more closely, that is not clear. For example, in the same document, TxDOT proposes to implement 4 types of mitigations to minimize impacts that are "disproportionately high and adverse effects to minority or low-income populations," on 32 of the non-personal residential properties (Table 5-18 Community Facilities and Businesses Utilized by Environmental Justice Populations, p. 5-220-524):

- Advance acquisition of the property [17 of 32 properties];
- Communicate through Public Information Officer during construction [7 of 32 properties];
- Relocation assistant assigned to identify nearby property listings [5 of 32 properties]; and
- Temporarily move and re-establish bus stops in coordination with METRO [3 of 32 properties].

These 4 types of mitigations for the 32 identified properties are not offsetting mitigation measures; at no point does TxDOT offer a design change to avoid displacement altogether. Instead, since the 2017 DEIS, the agency's plans for displacement have increased in acreage.

These statements by TxDOT acknowledge the negative consequences of this project for predominantly Black people and Latinx people. The disparate racial impact of the pending action compounds the widely acknowledged injustice that TxDOT inflicted upon Houston African-American neighborhoods when TxDOT first constructed the interstate highway system 50 years ago.

There is still time for TxDOT to address these adverse impacts and for the TPC to play a historic role. The Houston-Galveston Area Council's staff has developed an agenda item providing an opportunity for TPC's voting members to ensure that TxDOT addresses the NHHIP's adverse impacts within TxDOT's scope and that other parties address the adverse impacts within their scope. The TPC can develop strong, clear parameters to protect communities while also advancing the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program. The MOU is also an opportunity to hold TxDOT accountable by including a funding consequence if TxDOT fails to fully address the significant and adverse impacts of this project. These adverse impacts should include those identified in numerous public comments to TxDOT, H-GAC, and the City of Houston, many of which Mayor Turner identified in his letter to Texas Transportation Commissioner Laura Ryan.

The people living alongside the highway deserve to be safe and have access to opportunity; not to bear the brunt of this project for another 50 years. Each person on the TPC has a responsibility

to do what's right for people who live alongside the infrastructure project, regardless of their skin color. The parameters that you set forth for the MOU will facilitate the development of a better project, one that more equitably addresses the needs of the people living next to the project corridor and the people from outside the region who may use the infrastructure.

As I noted during the June 17 TAC meeting, I am calling on the TPC to set clear, strong parameters for the MOU between the stated parties with these inclusions:

- The MOU must **delineate an agreement between the parties to specifically study and pursue alternatives outlined by Mayor Turner in his letter to Commissioner Ryan.**
- The MOU must **address the outstanding adverse impacts outlined in the Mayor's document, especially the displacement of people and businesses.** Specifically, the MOU should **include language that seeks to eliminate displacement of people and businesses or provide further mitigation to those who are displaced,** as the Mayor outlined in his letter.
- The MOU must **include a decision to halt or withdraw funding to TxDOT should the project fail to address the very real concerns of residents – taxpayers – who live adjacent to the project.**

Additionally, I am calling on the TPC to agree to that the MOU between the stated parties should include these considerations.

- The MOU must **include a statement requesting the parties to provide ongoing engagement with the public regarding the NHHIP.**
- The MOU must **urge TxDOT to separate further review and completion of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process for Segment 3 from that for Segments 1 & 2.** A new interlocal agreement between the parties pursuant to Texas Transportation Code, Section 201.209, and Chapter 791, Texas Government Code could accomplish this separation of the NEPA process for Segment 3. The new interlocal agreement could also set out TxDOT and the City's agreement on the agency's review of the City's recommendations, as briefly summarized in Commissioner Ryan's response. The NEPA provides TxDOT with considerable flexibility, and the law itself does not prevent a NEPA review having a single Draft Environmental Impact Statement but being completed as two separate Final Environmental Impact Statements and Record-of-Decisions. Segmentation is only improper if it is used to evade NEPA review—an issue not found here.

It is imperative that the TPC take action to address the real concerns that numerous stakeholders and residents have identified concerning the inequitable consequences of the NHHIP on Black and Latinx communities.

Thank you,



Oni K. Blair
Executive Director