

5C. LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN UPDATE

BACKGROUND

Over a million residents of the Houston-Galveston Metropolitan Planning Region are classified as limited in English proficiency (LEP). A person with limited English proficiency is one whose primary language is not English and who has trouble reading, writing, speaking, or understanding communication in English. The inability to communicate effectively in English is a significant deterrent to participation in the transportation planning process and can prevent access to valuable benefits and services and to understanding vital information meant for the public. Language assistance services ensure that individuals who do not communicate proficiently in English can have meaningful access to H-GAC’s transportation programs and activities.

The Language Access Plan assesses the need for language assistance services in H-GAC’s metropolitan planning area and describes how these services will be provided. The last update to the Language Access Plan was made in 2017.

CURRENT SITUATION

Work is underway to update the Language Access Plan. Staff conducted the “Four-Factor” balancing test to assess the need for language assistance for the community, and to decide what services would be effective in providing meaningful access for persons with limited English proficiency. The four factors considered were:

- (1) The number or proportion of LEP persons who are served or may be encountered during an H-GAC program or activity;
- (2) The frequency with which LEP individuals access H-GAC programs;
- (3) The nature and importance of H-GAC’s programs and activities in the lives of the people; and
- (4) The resources available to H-GAC and the cost of providing language assistance.

Staff also conducted the “Safe Harbor” test, recommended by the U.S. Department of Transportation, which guides when to translate an agency’s documents into non-English languages spoken by the public. In addition, staff launched the “Language and Engagement Survey,” to gather feedback on language use and best practices for achieving greater participation by members of the LEP population and other under-represented communities.

A public comment period began on July 22, 2024, and will close on August 21, 2024. A virtual public meeting will be held on August 15, 2024. The Language Access Plan update will be completed in September 2024.

ACTION REQUESTED

For information purposes.