

14. AERIAL GONDOLA TRANSIT SYSTEM FOR THE CITY OF SUGAR LAND

**BACKGROUND**

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During the City of Sugar Land’s Mobility Master Plan development and extensive public engagement efforts, the community has expressed the need to expand on the existing transit services that are available to residents and visitors. One way to address the need is through the City’s Microtransit Pilot project, which is set to start this fall and is meant to supplement Fort Bend County’s Commuter Park & Ride and Demand Response services with first mile/last mile transit connections, day-of ride requests, and increased availability within the service area zone. An additional way is with a traditional fixed-route bus service that circulates between activity centers. This type of transit does not work very well in a suburban environment like Sugar Land without the population density to support it. The community has been divided over the concept as well with many against traditional bus-type service operating on crowded streets. What if there was a better way such as a public transit system that travels above our congested roadways and doesn’t add to delay or take up lane space? A system that people would actually enjoy riding?

In addition, the lack of accessibility for people walking, bicycling, and rolling between activity centers prevents individuals from utilizing more active modes of travel. The intersection of SH 6 and US 59 is a major physical barrier for human powered transportation, forcing people to drive the short distance, or not venture across at all. Grade separation greatly improves comfort and safety, but the land required to construct a pedestrian overpass and keep it ADA compliant is not available, and the added distance one would need to make the crossing is impractical.

City staff reached out to Swyft Cities after reading about their aerial gondola system and their work with NCTCOG’s CERTT (Certification of Emerging and Reliable Transportation Technology) Program and asked them to conduct a similar study for Sugar Land to address active transportation barriers and public transit expansion. The result was a system concept for the City that would be constructed in three phases and would connect three of the five regional activity centers in the heart of the City.

**CURRENT SITUATION**

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An aerial gondola system would be a regionally significant local project and a huge asset to the City. Sugar Land would showcase the first of its kind elevated, on-demand, and point-to-point aerial public transit system in Texas, an innovative and low-impact solution to address traffic congestion, improve air quality, encourage active travel modes, and improve connectivity and mobility for anyone who lives, works, or plays in Sugar Land. Seeing such a system in operation, that uses very little energy, has zero emissions, has a minimal environmental impact, and with low operating costs, would transform how we think about sustainable public transit.

**ACTION REQUESTED**

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For information and discussion. No action requested.