



# Regional Focus

## Houston-Galveston Area Council Newsletter February 2023

### January Board of Directors Meeting

At its first meeting of the new year, on Tuesday, Jan. 17, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) Board of Directors approved an [amendment to the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Local Infrastructure Program Method of Distribution](#).

The amendment will reallocate a little more than \$2.3 million in declined or de-obligated funds from the initial grant to eligible entities in the region to help fund local projects addressing infrastructure damage from Hurricane Harvey. H-GAC has also developed an intended methodology to reallocate the funds, which was included in the approved amendment. More information about the amendment and the public participation period are available on H-GAC's [2018 Hurricane Harvey Disaster Recovery Funds Reallocation](#) page.



Additionally, the board recognized January as [Parks and Natural Areas Month](#) in support of H-GAC's annual [Parks and Natural Areas Awards program](#). This program spotlights those parks and natural areas projects in the 13-county region that serve as models for how these spaces can improve quality of life and provide recreational opportunities to people of all ages and abilities. The awards ceremony for the 2022 recipients will take place on Friday, Feb. 10 at the H-GAC second floor conference rooms. [Click here](#) to register to attend.

Later, board members recognized the service of outgoing members Sealy Mayor Carolyn Bilski and Conroe Mayor Jody Czajkoski. They also received updates on recent activities at the Texas legislative session from Intergovernmental Relations Director Rick Guerrero and operational activities at H-GAC by COO Onyinye Akujuo.

Finally, the board approved one [new appointment](#) to the Natural Resources Advisory Committee.

### Next Board Meeting: Tuesday, Feb. 21

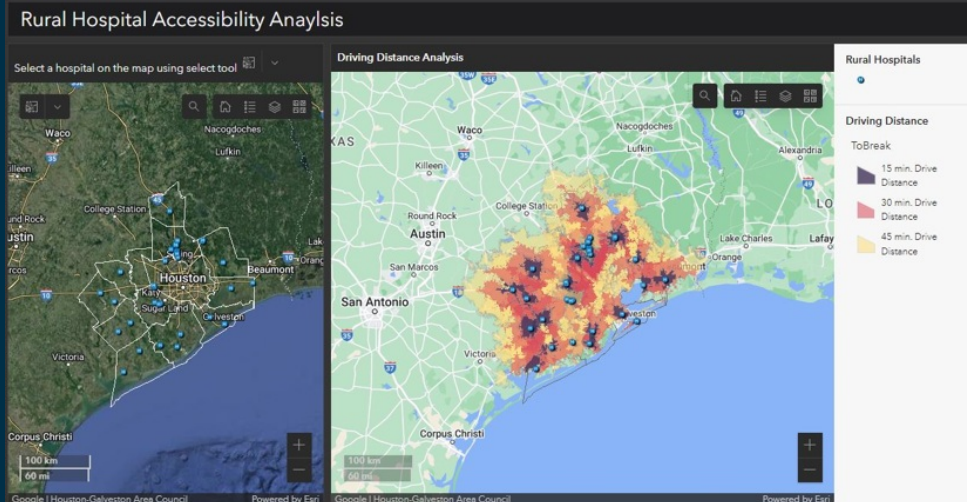
The next board meeting is scheduled for 10 a.m., Tuesday, Feb. 21. If there are any scheduling or location updates to this meeting, we will notify the public immediately. For more information on H-GAC's Board of Directors, past meeting agendas or minutes, or to find dates for future meetings, visit [the Board of Directors website](#).

### H-GAC Program Spotlight: Data Analytics and Research's Healthcare Analysis of the 13-County Region

At its January meeting, the H-GAC Board of Directors listened to a spotlight presentation by H-GAC's [newest department, Data Analytics and Research](#). One of H-GAC's major objectives starting this year is to increase access to quality healthcare across the 13-county region. The initiative will explore several healthcare aspects like bed capacity in outlying areas, raising awareness of mental healthcare needs and solutions, and telemedicine opportunities.

Jochen Floesser, director of data analytics and research, presented an analysis conducted by his team about the current state of healthcare in the region. The main takeaways were:

- The 13-county region's population is growing exponentially. **By 2040, it will have reached more than 10 million people. Of that 10 million, 27% will be aged 55 and older.**
- Currently, **a third of the region's elderly population has a disability**. This number is likely to increase as the region's overall population grows and ages.
- Even though the region is experiencing employment growth in healthcare (particularly in nursing, nurse practitioner, and outpatient care), **we currently have about a 20% gap in employment coverage to the population compared with the national average**. The current rate of employment growth is not enough to close that gap. If this trend continues, the region will suffer critical medical staffing shortages to serve the population, especially in specialty care.
- Central hospital systems are experiencing **far less staffing growth** than outpatient care facilities.
- As rural hospitals and medical facilities close, **many rural-area residents in the region are facing increasing barriers in access to medical care**, especially vulnerable and historically underserved populations. Driving times for rural residents to their nearest hospital or healthcare facility are increasing.



A screenshot of the Rural Hospital Accessibility Analysis chart depicting the approximate driving distance between rural hospitals and the areas they serve. Click to enlarge.

Due to these projections, H-GAC is discussing reviving the board's Healthcare Committee and subsequent working groups. These groups would take the lead on fostering regional collaboration, resources, development, and solutions to healthcare needs and issues. More information about this initiative will be shared in the coming weeks. Those seeking more information or who wish to stay up to date on H-GAC's progress may contact [Rick Guerrero](#), H-GAC's director of intergovernmental relations.

To learn more about the Data Analytics and Research Department's data models and forecasting tools, visit [datalab.h-gac.com](http://datalab.h-gac.com).

## H-GAC Announces New Board Officers, Discusses State of the Region at 2023 Annual Meeting



The state of the Houston-Galveston region is dynamic and full of possibilities. That was the key takeaway from the H-GAC annual meeting held on Jan. 20 at The Briar Club. Chuck Wemple, H-GAC executive director, discussed the unique opportunities and challenges the region's rapid growth presents to local governments and the residents they serve and how it will take a strategic, collaborative approach by local leaders, agencies, employers, community organizations, and other key stakeholders to meet these challenges and opportunities to ensure prosperity and quality of life for all communities.

Wemple also announced five key initiatives that H-GAC will focus on over the next three to five years in addition to its existing programs and initiatives: 1) water resources, 2) physical and mental health, 3) broadband access, 4) housing, and 5) providing exceptional customer service to local governments and communities across the region.



The newest officers for the 2023 H-GAC Board of Directors were announced and sworn in. Judge Trey Duhon of Waller County will serve as the new board chair, Houston City Councilmember Sallie Alcorn will serve as chair elect, and Judge Jay Knight of Liberty County will serve as vice chair. Wemple also honored outgoing board chair Sally Branson, Friendswood city councilmember.





Wemple presented outgoing board member and Matagorda County Judge Nate McDonald with the Tom Reid Award. The award recognizes excellence in regional leadership and honors individuals that served the H-GAC Board of Directors and its 13-county region by demonstrating superlative leadership to the Houston-Galveston area.

#### HOUSTON-GALVESTON AREA COUNCIL 2022 Annual Report



SERVING TODAY • PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

*Click the above image to read the report.*



*Click the above image to watch.*

Finally, H-GAC released the 2022 annual report and video, showcasing H-GAC's biggest milestones from last year that contributed to the growth and prosperity of the region.

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### Justin Bower Promoted to New Director of Community and Environmental Planning at H-GAC

H-GAC is pleased to announce it has hired Justin Bower as its new director of community and environmental planning. He began his new position on Jan. 30. Bower succeeds Jeff Taebel, who retired last spring after 35 years of service. Click on the image below to learn more about our newest director. Congratulations to Justin Bower on his new role at H-GAC!

# Congratulations, Justin!



## Community & Environmental Planning Director

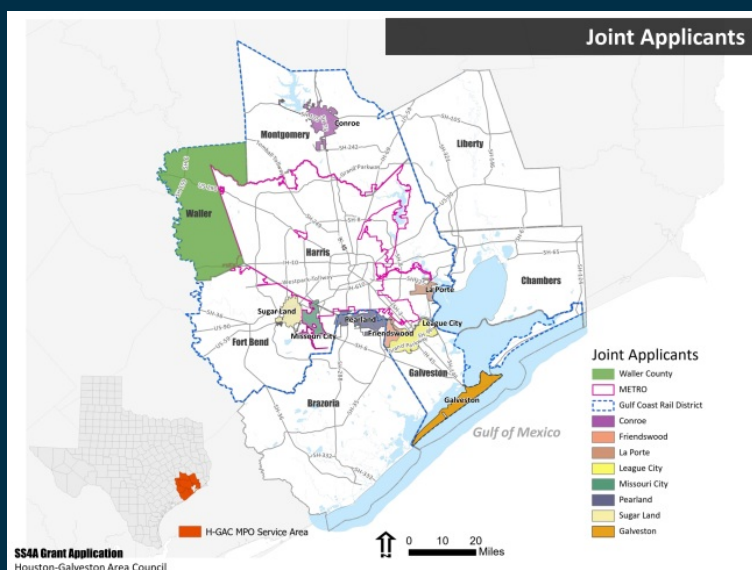
The Houston-Galveston Area Council is excited to announce Justin Bower as our new director of community and environmental planning. In his new leadership role, Justin will direct the agency's natural resources, disaster resilience, community planning, and public safety programs.

Justin holds a master's degree in urban affairs and public policy from the University of Delaware and has spent over 20 years leading natural resources and urban planning efforts for a variety of local government and non-governmental organizations. For the past 13 years, Justin has worked at H-GAC to further the agency's mission to support our local communities in improving water quality, flood resilience, and conservation efforts.

Justin has a passion for bringing together partners and resources to enhance our region's natural and community resilience. As part of a lifelong love of the natural world, he is actively involved in many leadership roles with natural resource and wildlife efforts in the region. Together with his wife and two young daughters, Justin enjoys exploring the diversity of our region's landscapes, wildlife, and communities.



## H-GAC Awarded \$4 Million Safe Streets for All Grant to Develop Safety Action Plans for 11 Local Communities and the Region



Map depicting H-GAC's Safe Streets for All grant application partners and the areas their Safety Action Plans will cover. [Click to view an enlarged version.](#)

H-GAC has been [awarded \\$4 million in federal funding by the U.S. Department of Transportation](#) through the [Safe Streets and Roads for All \(SS4A\)](#) grant program. The funding will support the development of a Regional Safety Action Plan with the goal of eliminating roadway fatalities and serious injuries in the Houston-Galveston region. It will also support H-GAC in leading development of localized Safety Action Plans for 11 local governments and agencies.

Learn more about this important grant award by reading our [press release online](#).

## TML Region 14 Members Are Invited to League's First-Ever Winter Meeting on Feb. 24, Which Will Include a Special Emergency

## Management Roundtable



## TML Region 14 Winter Meeting



Texas Municipal League Region 14 members and stakeholders are invited to attend the league's first-ever **winter meeting**, where the topic of focus will be on emergency management and its impact on municipalities. The meeting will take place from **3:30 to 9 p.m., Friday, Feb. 24 in the Texas Ballroom of the Embassy Suites Houston West - Katy (16435 Katy Freeway, 77094)**.

The event will kick off with a roundtable discussion moderated by Deer Park Mayor Jerry Mouton with a panel of experts. The discussion will center around criminal justice training and resources, homeland security and emergency management, workforce training, recruitment and retention and the role of TranStar during emergencies and disasters. This will be followed by a reception and dinner, where Chief Nim Kidd of the Texas Division of Emergency Management will be the keynote speaker.

To register, visit the event page at [h-gac.com/events/texas-municipal-league-meeting](http://h-gac.com/events/texas-municipal-league-meeting).

H-GAC is accepting sponsors for this event. [View our sponsorship packet](#) for information about the sponsorship opportunities available. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, click on the "Sponsor Registration" link at the bottom of the event page.

## H-GAC Will Release Final 2045 Regional Transportation Plan Update Report, Host Virtual Public Meeting in March



### Help Make Getting Around the Gulf Coast Region Better for Years to Come



On March 15, the final report for the [Regional Transportation Plan \(RTP\) Update](#) will be made available for public review and feedback. H-GAC will host a **virtual public meeting at 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 21**, to discuss the key points of the draft update, summarize public feedback collected during the visioning phases and how it was incorporated into the updated vision and goals of the plan, and to answer questions.

More information about the public meeting as well as the final report of the RTP Update will be posted in the coming days at [www.h-gac.com/RTP](http://www.h-gac.com/RTP). We encourage residents and area stakeholders to bookmark the page and check back frequently for updates as we get closer to the virtual meeting date and public comment period.

The public comment period will open on March 15 and remain open through April 15. To ensure accuracy of all public comments, H-GAC will not accept oral public comments, but we encourage written comments via the [RTP Update web page](#), email to [publiccomments@h-gac.com](mailto:publiccomments@h-gac.com), or by mailing P.O. Box 22777, Houston, TX 77227. Presentation for formal adoption of the update by the Transportation Policy Council is scheduled for April 28.

## Learn More about H-GAC's New Title VI and Environmental Justice Awareness Initiative Launching This Month at Webinar on Feb. 16

**Title VI and Environmental Justice Awareness**

### Connecting Communities

Thursday, February 16 | 9:30 AM – Noon

Brazoria • Chambers • Fort Bend • Galveston • Harris • Liberty • Montgomery • Waller

H-GAC is launching its Title VI and Environmental Justice Awareness Initiative this month. With the theme, "Connecting Communities," the awareness initiative looks to encourage meaningful involvement by historically underrepresented stakeholders while furthering the integration of Title VI and Environmental Justice principles in the transportation planning process.

Join us for the initiative's first event, a webinar titled ["The Role of Title VI and Environmental Justice in Transportation Planning."](#) The webinar takes place on Thursday, Feb. 16 from 9:30 a.m. to noon. Register at the H-GAC [Title VI program page](#) to attend the webinar and stay engaged as we accomplish this initiative.

## Commute Solutions Partners with the University of Houston-Downtown's Student Basic Needs Initiative

Commute Solutions recently attended the University of Houston-Downtown's Weeks of Welcome. As students return to campus for the spring semester, Francis Rodriguez, senior program coordinator, was on site to talk to students about their commute to campus.

On top of tuition, commuting is a major concern for students. With no on-campus housing available, we have had many conversations with students to explore the challenges they face when deciding how to get to campus. For some, a rideshare service is the only option, which can be costly.

Through our collaboration, Commute Solutions will help students find alternative commuting options that will save them time, money, and reduce stress. With most students driving alone during rush hour, encouraging



mode shift may help to reduce traffic and improve our region's air quality. Commute Solutions is proud to partner with UH Downtown and its Student Basic Needs Initiative, providing transportation information and resources to help make their college experience a success.

For more information about how you can partner with Commute Solutions visit the [Commute Solutions website](#).

## Commute Solutions Helps Employers Develop Flexible Work Policies at No Cost

Has your organization recently shifted the way it works? From in person to remote work? From remote work to hybrid work? Have policies, procedures, and training kept up? We can help.

H-GAC's [Commute Solutions](#) helps organizations implement flexible work strategies like telework and compressed work weeks to improve retention, hiring, and productivity. Services include helping to plan, develop, and implement a flexible work policy. This could entail developing surveys, conducting focus groups, and providing training. We are also happy to review your current policy and provide expert feedback to revise or revamp the policy and training materials you already have in place. All of this is at no cost to your organization.



Interested in learning more? Email Commute Solutions at [Commutesolutions@h-gac.com](mailto:Commutesolutions@h-gac.com).

## Parks and Natural Areas Summit and Awards Ceremony Will Take Place on Friday, Feb. 10

H-GAC will hold the [Parks and Natural Areas Awards recognition ceremony](#) from 10 a.m. to noon, this Friday, Feb. 10 at the H-GAC office (3555 Timmons Ln.) second floor conference rooms.

Award-winning projects serve as models for planning and project implementation for parks and natural areas in the region. Projects will be honored in four categories: Planning Process, On-the-Ground Projects Over \$500,000, On-the-Ground Projects Under \$500,000, and Programming. Participants will also hear about trends in parks and natural areas from industry experts.



[Registration is requested](#) but not required to attend. For more information, contact [Andrea Tantillo](#).

## Register Today for the Next Trash Free Texas Adopt-a-Spot Webinar

Register today for the next Trash Free Texas Adopt-A-Spot webinar from 9 to 10 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 23. The event will be online, and [registration](#) is required.

At this webinar, participants will explore how two resources, the [Trash Free Texas Adopt-A-Spot Map](#) and the [Texas Litter Database](#), can assist communities and organizations in building or enhancing volunteer litter cleanup programs.



This webinar is a part of H-GAC's [Trash Free Texas project](#). For this project, H-GAC has partnered with the [North Central Texas Council of Governments](#) and the [Meadows Center for Water and the Environment](#) to establish a unified, coordinated approach to litter abatement and community engagement in the six river basins in the Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston-Galveston regions.

For more information contact [Kendall Guidroz](#).

## H-GAC is Hiring

Home to more than 7 million people, the Houston-Galveston region is one of the fastest-growing and most diverse regions in the country. Making sure the region remains one of the nation's leading places to live, work, and prosper doesn't just happen - it takes planning and partnerships.

If you are looking for a career where you can help make a difference in urban, suburban, and rural communities, H-GAC has exciting opportunities for you. For more information or to apply for a job, visit [the careers page on H-GAC's website](#).



**Manager - Finance & Administration - Transportation**

**Principal Data Analyst - Socioeconomic Modeler**

**Manager - Clean Cities & Clean Vehicles**

**Principal Industry Liaison**

**Accounting/ Finance Coordinator**

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