



May 25, 2020

Mr. Bruce Bugg, Jr., Chair
Mr. Alvin New, Commissioner
Ms. Laura Ryan, Commissioner
Texas Dept. of Transportation
125 E. 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Houston Mayor Turner's Comments on North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP), submitted May 12, 2020.

Dear Commissioners:

The White Oak Bayou Association (WOBA) appreciates this opportunity to express our concurrence with, and support for, Mayor Sylvester Turner's comments and recommendations on the NHHIP provided in a letter addressed to Commissioner Ryan, dated May 12, 2020. The WOBA sincerely hopes that TxDOT will give Mayor Turner's comments serious consideration in the future development of this project, which will be, to use his words, "a once-in-a-generation investment that will shape the City of Houston for decades to come."

In multiple letters and public meetings over the past several years, WOBA has repeatedly raised our concerns regarding numerous potential adverse environmental impacts of the NHHIP, as proposed by TxDOT, including impacts to the bayous themselves and their adjacent parks and greenways. We believe that the Mayor's promotion of the "Vision C" alternative design concepts goes a long way toward addressing many of our concerns. Vision C, as a whole and in its key elements, has also been espoused by numerous other public officials, community and environmental groups, and individual citizens. We urge TxDOT to coordinate closely with the City of Houston and with Harris County in adopting the Vision C approach to the maximum extent possible.

Some of the particular Vision C concepts and elements that we specifically wish to endorse here include the following as outlined in the Technical Appendix to the Mayor's letter, prepared by the City' Planning and Development Department:

Footprint. We agree that the highway should be rebuilt within the existing footprint to the maximum extent possible. In our prior comments we have expressed our concern that significant widening of the roadways will adversely impact the bayou greenways, which at present are mere remnants of the open space that once existed along our city's waterways. In addition, wider roads will lead to increases in traffic and



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proportional increases in litter and runoff, further degrading water quality and exacerbating flooding.

Freight. As we have stated in prior comments, we agree that the concept of “shifting through-truck volumes away from town unless destined for downtown” makes good sense in terms of traffic management and by extension, potentially mitigating runoff and water quality impacts, as noted above.

Flooding. As stated in the Technical Appendix, the project “must not only reduce the incidence of flooding on the freeway but also reduce the flood risk in the surrounding neighborhoods,” and must be “part of a larger, watershed-wide flood risk reduction strategy.” We strongly agree that TxDOT’s design should incorporate applicable flood risk reduction design standards promulgated by the Harris County Flood Control District and that TxDOT should work with the city and county on completing the referenced comprehensive study of Little White Oak Bayou and its tributaries.

Connectivity and Local Streets. We agree that TxDOT needs to carefully analyze likely increases in traffic and provide for off-street bike and pedestrian pathways. Improved foot and bicycle access will enhance public enjoyment of the bayous and their greenways, which will in turn help to promote environmental stewardship and improvement. In particular, we support the creation of a pedestrian overpass to compensate for the loss of the North Street bridge.

Park Space and Urban Design. We agree that “the project should minimize impacts on parks and facilitate the creation of new green space.” We strongly support the development of “a continuous off-street trail network and greenway connecting all the neighborhoods along Little White Oak Bayou,” and urge that TxDOT “mitigate the impacts on the White Oak Bayou Greenway [especially the segment from Little White Oak Bayou downstream to Buffalo Bayou] ... to provide similar recreational space accessible by residents of the Near North Side.”

TxDOT Surplus ROW. We have previously advocated that TxDOT facilitate future green space expansion and improvements along the I-10 corridor as it approaches I-45 by conveyance of surplus rights-of-way to the City. Other ROW conveyances to the City noted in the Technical Appendix should also be pursued.

Conclusion. In summary, by adopting the Vision C recommendations from the Mayor and the City Planning and Development Department, TxDOT could go a long way in addressing numerous environmental concerns previously raised by WOBA and other groups and individuals. We have confined our comments herein to those environmental issues closest to WOBA’s core mission, but we also support much of what the Mayor has stated with respect to impacts on air quality, mobility and transit, and neighborhoods and housing. Therefore, as a member group of the Make I-45 Better



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Coalition, we strongly urge TxDOT to work closely with the City and the County to make the NHHIP a project for which future Houstonians will thank us rather than curse us.

We appreciate the Commissioners' consideration of these matters. Should you have any questions regarding our concerns, please call me at 713-775-7330 or email me at rsigurdlee@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert S. Lee".

Robert S. Lee, P.G.
President, White Oak Bayou Association

Cc: Eliza Paul, P.E., District Engineer, TxDOT, Houston District Office
Quincy Allen, P.E., TxDOT
Mayor Sylvester Turner, City of Houston
James Koski, Office of the Mayor, City of Houston
Margaret Wallace Brown, Planning Department, City of Houston
Karla Cisneros, Houston City Council District H
Abby Kaiman, Houston City Council District C
Hon. Lina Hidalgo, Harris County Judge
Rodney Ellis, Commissioner, Harris County Precinct 1
Anna Eastman, Member, Texas House of Representatives, District 148
Matt Zeve, Chief Operations Office, Harris County Flood Control District
Michael Skelly, Make I-45 Better Coalition
Dr. Sarah Bernhardt, President & CEO, Bayou Preservation Association
Ann Lents, Chair, Memorial Heights Redevelopment Authority / TIRZ 5
Charles Place, Managing Director of Capital Projects, Houston Parks Board
Dr. George Guillen, Director, Environmental Institute of Houston, UH Clear Lake
Pat Rutledge, Friends of Woodland Park