



Mr. Quincy Allen, P.E.
Texas Department of Transportation, Houston District
P.O. Box 1386
Houston, Texas 77251

Re: North Houston Highway Improvement Project – Draft Environmental Impact Study Comments
July 19, 2017

Dear Mr. Allen,

We appreciate the time that you and your team recently spent discussing the IH45 North and More Project with us as representative of Museum Park to address concerns specific to Museum Park. It was a helpful conversation, thank you. The Museum Park Super Neighborhood submits the following comments regarding the schematic design of the North Houston Highway Improvement Project as presented at the May 11th, 2017 public hearing. We support the efforts being made through the project design to minimize negative impacts on adjacent neighborhoods, including the depression and capping of the freeway in the Wheeler Station area.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our input and look forward to continued engagement with the design process. We also support the comments submitted by Midtown Management District and the IH45 Coalition that focus on the broader impact to Houston.

We look for this project to improve mobility across all transportation modes within the city, and to improve mobility on surface streets for all modes of transportation, whether people or engine-powered, and appreciate your efforts to do so. We appreciate that TXDoT has agreed to continue maintain the continuity of our important surface street connections and esplanades that contribute to Houston's evolving green space and linear park system, and certainly to the graciousness of Museum Park. These particular streets including Main, Fannin, San Jacinto, Caroline, Austin, and LaBranch are essential connections between the vibrant areas surrounding the Central Campus of Houston Community College and Midtown to several of Houston's important destinations including Hermann Park, cultural and faith institutions, and the 3000+ residential properties.

We respectfully request that TXDoT consider the following comments from Museum Park Super Neighborhood regarding the IH45/US 59 improvement project:

- We again appreciate TXDoT's commitment to bridging the areas of US59 being suppressed in Museum Park. Unfortunately, experience at Dallas' Klyde Warren Park has proven that disconnected segments, as planned between Caroline and Fannin, are problematic for many reasons.
- With the proposed reconfiguration of I69 at Wheeler Transit Station, there is an opportunity to improve multi-modal circulation, access to the transit center and plan for future capacity needs with the University Corridor and US 90A transit connections. We ask that TXDoT coordinate with City and METRO to ensure this area is designed to maximize future transit and development opportunities. The



Deck Park Cap at this location provides an opportunity for public and private investment to develop a Transit Oriented Development. TxDOT should actively engage in the development and implementation of the Wheeler Area Park Cap and related street and transit connections.

The NHHIP proposes to move the freeway below grade in this section, reducing noise and visual impacts along the border of Midtown and the Museum District and benefiting the prospect of development. The Museum Park Livable Center Study outlines this opportunity that can be envisioned soon since this is the first project where construction is expected to start as soon as 2020. However, details including ramps, bridges, and street connections will need to be worked out to enable the greatest potential for transit-oriented development around the station.

We appreciate you meeting with the city, METRO and stakeholder to discuss options and look forward to working with you to identify the design that improves circulation and accessibility for all modes of transportation around the Wheeler Transit Center.

We also request that this cap be designed to accommodate landscaping and program needs. Museum Park is committed to working with TXDoT to provide design concepts in a timely manner.

- To create continuity of the historic street grid as it currently exists, we request that the segment bridging Main to east of Fannin be connected to the segment bridging San Jacinto to Caroline. Having this surface area retained as it exists now is critically important in this intensely pedestrian area surrounding the METRO Transit Center.
- Please evaluate options to maintain the Blodgett connection from San Jacinto to Main St. This is a useful connection and very helpful to the bus operations at the Transit Center. With the redesign of the San Jacinto on-ramp to east side of street, this should be achievable.
- IH-69 exit to Main Street near Wheeler TC should be designed to allow improved pedestrian and bicycle connectivity and safe crossings as identified in Houston Bike Plan/METRO Bike & Ride studies.
- We ask that the bridges planned over Austin, LaBranch, and Almeda be designed to accommodate all modes of mobility including people walking and bicycle riders. We ask that these bridges be designed to accommodate green scape including trees. Museum Park is committed to providing design concepts to TXDoT in a timely manner.
- The current plan calls for a left turn lane on Caroline at Wheeler, reducing the green space of our beautiful esplanades. We see no reason for this additional turn lane and ask that it be eliminated from the design, and not implemented.



- The planting of anything green softens the impact of this large infrastructure project. Please landscape the walls of the dropped roadway similar to the area on US59 between Hazard and Shepherd using fig ivy or plantings even more environmentally beneficial.
- We think it likely that noise walls will be needed adjacent to residential areas in Museum Park along 59. If necessary, this additional level will add landscape opportunities. We request that this landscaping be similar to the noise walls that are currently in place on the segment of US59 towards Dunlavy.
- As currently proposed, the primary access to and egress from the SH 288 Managed Lanes or Toll Lanes would be provided on Chenevert Street south of Elgin, adjacent to the Houston High School for International Studies and Baldwin Park. Presence of the existing freeway ramps disrupt the neighborhood fabric and introduce unsafe vehicle speeds in a residential area. Please consider other options including connecting the SH 288 Managed/Toll Lanes to the SH 288 main lanes near Alabama or connecting to Hamilton and Chartres that serve as the frontage road along this section of the freeway.

In general, the project should improve traffic safety with reduced speed limits as freeway traffic approaches the city street network. All surface streets should be designed as complete streets, not freeway frontage roads. Roadway alignments and the project scope should allow for street trees and urban-sided sidewalks and high comfort bikeway consideration. The design of all structures should be high-quality and compatible with the surrounding urban and historic fabric.

We are coordinating and collaboration with the City of Houston Planning and Development Department. They also believe the North Houston Highway Improvement Project opens significant opportunities in the Wheeler transit station area for transit oriented development, work force housing open space and for improving mobility in the area.

The Planning Department has discussed working with Metro, Midtown Management District and others on a detailed study of the area and these opportunities. A timeline for this effort hasn't yet been established but it is understood that a study must be initiated quickly in order to inform the design of the TXDOT improvements.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to offer input into the NHHIP project and your willingness to consider measures to reduce the highway's impacts on it neighbors. We hope incorporating the comments into the Final EIS and design will improve the project and the quality of life of our stakeholders.

Sincerely,

Kathleen O'Reilly

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