

Contact: Molly Cook (713-502-4932)
stoptxdoti45@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, October 21, 2021

Transportation Advocacy Group of Houston (TAG) engages in special interest fundraising luncheon with the Texas Department of Transportation, forcefully removing a paid ticket buyer and ignoring picketers outside

The “TRUE State of TxDOT” is dysfunctional, archaic, and ignoring the communities they purport to serve.

Houston, TX – Today from 11am-1pm the Transportation Advocacy Group hosted their annual fundraiser: the ‘State of TxDOT’. The headline speakers for this fundraiser were TxDOT Houston District Engineer Eliza Paul and Texas Transportation Commission Commissioner Laura Ryan. By hosting a fundraiser in conjunction with and directly benefiting TxDOT, TAG acts not as true advocates for transportation in Houston, but as a highway construction special interest group. Their unconscionable alignment with TxDOT shows a willingness to destroy our city and our homes to line the pockets of those who stand to benefit financially from the highway.

TAG and TxDOT claim that they listen to community members, but their actions today reflect a larger pattern deliberately stifling voices of dissent. Two of our volunteers bought tickets to attend the luncheon; they were there to have conversation with the parties that stand to benefit financially from this freeway and present them with facts. The first volunteer was approached by Andrea French, TAG Executive Director, and four armed officers who confiscated her informational flyers. Ten minutes later she was asked to leave for taking a photograph in a public hallway and escorted off the property by one officer. One of the officers who asked her to leave flashed his gun at her. Our second volunteer was approached by a plainclothes officer who told him he was only welcome to stay if he didn’t hand out any informational flyers and “did not make a scene.” Our picketers outside were repeatedly asked to move back and otherwise ignored by TxDOT and TAG officials inside. How can TAG and TxDOT claim that they listen to Houstonians when they silence dissent so forcibly and publicly?

The *True State of TxDOT* is that while TxDOT plans to displace 1079 homes, over 300 businesses, 5 places of worship, and 2 schools in historic Black and brown neighborhoods along the I-45 corridor, this luncheon was held in a luxury hotel in one of Houston's wealthiest, whitest neighborhoods. TAG and TxDOT choose to court wealthy business interests instead of meeting with the communities this highway will affect. TxDOT chose to meet with the Downtown Management District THIRTY times before publishing their Final Environmental Impact Statement and conducted only ONE meeting in 5th Ward.

On its website, TAG claims that “at the core of everything TAG advocates, promotes, and endorses, is a commitment to Preserving Quality of Life.” Yet TAG continues to applaud and validate TxDOT 's plan to devastate historic Black and brown neighborhoods, increase road deaths, and critically damage air quality. There have been over 70,000 people killed on Texas roads since 2000. We ask: whose quality of life is TAG preserving?

Stop TxDOT I-45 is a group dedicated to stopping TxDOT's inequitable I-45 expansion, but we are not alone. The *True State of TxDOT* is affecting communities like ours in every Texas urban center. Across the state, opposition is growing against TxDOT's archaic insistence on widening highways and destroying communities. In Austin there is grassroots opposition to I-35; in El Paso, I-10; in San Antonio, I-1604; and Dallas is already enjoying the fruits of more thoughtful planning and more equitable transportation policy as TxDOT studies the removal of I-345. The opportunity to stop the I-45 expansion stands as the bulwark and standard setter for a new era of transportation policy in Texas, and across the United States.

TxDOT needs to listen to community members and step into a bold new era. TAG should be using their power and influence to make Houston more liveable and walkable for all of her residents, rather than maximizing their own profits to the detriment of the health of all neighborhoods.

For press inquiries please email stoptxdoti45@gmail.com or call Molly Cook at 713-502-4932. Community leaders can be available for interviews upon request. Please let us know if you would like to be connected.

(###)

We are a grassroots organization that is opposed to TxDOT's plans to expand the right-of-way of Interstate 45 (the North Houston Highway Improvement Project). We object to the plans because we value environmental justice, equity, and historic preservation. A few months ago, we were just individuals living across Houston. Now we are standing together, and we know it's not too late to save our city.