



LINA HIDALGO

May 19, 2020

Ms. Laura Ryan
TxDOT Commissioner
125 East 11th St.
Austin, TX 78701

RE: NHHIP – I45

Dear Commissioner Ryan:

Thank you for your extensive participation in the oversight of the proposed North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP).

Since the beginning of my tenure as County Judge, I have heard from concerned residents and organizations throughout Harris County about this project. The proposed NHHIP project is of significant importance to this region and will have long-standing impacts on the adjacent communities and on our region as a whole with respect to quality of life, flood control, and air quality.

In August of 2019, Harris County Commissioner’s Court unanimously passed a resolution citing the County’s goals for the project and, since then, County staff has worked to further those goals by participating in the work of the City of Houston’s Planning Department, including the community engagement and facilitation group processes.

As a result of that work, the City of Houston—based on feedback from residents, input from the Facilitation Group, and multi-agency collaboration with the County and METRO—has developed an alternative “Vision C” that would significantly improve the IH-45 corridor while keeping the infrastructure within its current footprint. I believe that this new alternative offers the best path forward for Harris County and the entire region, as it offers the following improvements to our communities:

- Allows residents and businesses to remain in place by minimizing displacement;
- Protects historical and cultural sites identified by community residents;
- Rebuilds the highway within the current footprint as much as possible;
- Constructs dedicated transit lanes in two directions;
- Installs Bus Rapid Transit Stations along the route of I-45, providing much-needed transit options;

- Brings I-45 North up to current safety design standards;
- Improves capacity through reconstruction of interchanges and ramps while not adding single occupancy vehicle lanes;
- Designs two-lane frontage roads as city streets;
- Provides flood mitigation and greenways on Little White Oak and Halls Bayous;
- Substantially mitigates flooding in Independence Heights;
- Saves costs to taxpayers; and
- Improves bicycle and pedestrian safety, especially at crossings over and under I-45.

To ensure that the above alternative delivers the improvements in a way that is beneficial for our communities, I request that TxDOT restudy the "Vision C" alternative for Segments 1 & 2. I also reiterate my request that the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and the subsequent Record of Decision (ROD) be delayed until Q3 or Q4 of 2020. Given the impacts of the COVID-19 disaster, this delay would give the County and its residents more time to engage with and offer feedback on this project prior to TxDOT issuing the FEIS and subsequent Record of Decision (ROD).

I thank you for your personal involvement in moving the NHHIP in a more positive direction and appreciate your consideration of my requests. I strongly believe that, if this project is to proceed, a vision that remains within the footprint of the existing highway, reduces flood risk, and improves transit options, will do right by current residents of Harris County and the future of the region. My staff and I, as well as County departments, are ready to work with you and others at TxDOT to continue to improve this project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Lina Hidalgo
Harris County Judge