



Commissioner Adrian Garcia

Harris County Precinct Two

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October 7, 2020

Commissioner Laura Ryan
Texas Transportation Commissioner
125 E. 11th Street
Austin, TX 78701

RE: NHHIP FEIS Comment Period Extension Request

Dear Commissioner Ryan:

Thank you for your extensive participation in the oversight of the proposed North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP). The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) recently posted the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the NHHIP on the project website. We expect posting the FEIS to the Federal Register is imminent, which will begin the minimum required 30 day waiting period before a record-of-decision per the National Environmental Policy Act. We appreciate TxDOT allowing comments on the FEIS. Our concern is that TxDOT provide adequate time for effective, detailed review and comments from the public.

We write to request that TxDOT extend the comment period to 120 days for the NHHIP FEIS.

As you know, the FEIS is 8,189 pages in three volumes: 380 pages in Volume 1; 5,949 pages in Volume 2; and 2,240 pages in Volume 3. All three volumes are important and need detailed review. Thirty days is inadequate time for our offices, other organizations involved in the project, and most importantly, our constituents who are the most directly impacted by the project, to review and supply comment on the FEIS.

Over the course of the last several years, we have consistently heard from concerned constituents and organizations about the importance of this project to the region and the significant impacts NHHIP will have on the immediately adjacent low-income residents and communities of color. It is in everyone's interest long-term for the NHHIP to be positively transformative for everyone – most especially our constituents in communities who are directly impacted. TxDOT and their partners must continue to listen to the directly affected constituents as their local knowledge and opinions will help the state create a better project that improves quality-of-life and avoids re-harming communities in ways similar to past injustices resulting from highway construction. Further, as we all continue to grapple with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic amidst a persistent digital divide, we ask that TxDOT mail every nearby residence and business a notice about the FEIS comment period with explanation of how to participate, including options for finding information and sharing comments in multiple languages.

As elected officials, we want to see a plan for the NHHIP that preserves the communities we serve and allows residents to remain in their homes, while improving safety and access via a multi-modal transportation network. We continue to support Mayor Turner's vision for the NHHIP because it was the product of genuine, thorough community engagement. The vision reimagines the NHHIP in ways that



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preserve and benefit Houston's communities. The new vision is based on realistic goals that prioritize people and community, increase safety, and improve the multi-modal transportation network.

As delineated in a May 14 letter signed by elected officials, we support an alternative that conclusively delivers these improvements to communities who live along the entirety of the project. As such, an alternative that addresses these concerns and provides clear mitigation strategies should be reflected in the FEIS:

- Allows residents and employees to remain in place by minimizing displacement of single-family, multi-family, and public housing homes and businesses (over 1,000 units are currently for displacement);
- Protects historical and cultural sites identified by community residents;
- Improve neighborhood-level air quality impacts;
- Protects greenspace and parks within each impacted neighborhood;
- Erects two direction transit lanes;
- Installs BRT Stations along the route of I-45;
- Brings IH-45 North up to current safety design standards;
- Designs two-lane frontage roads as city streets;
- Improves drainage 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.

We ask you to do all in your power to extend the comment period to allow local government and our constituents adequate time to review the FEIS for the NHHIP.

Best,

Adrian Garcia

Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 2