

## **TPC Public Comments January 22, 2021**

### **Comment 1:**

Friends of Woodland Park, Inc. comments on Segment 2 of I-45 Expansion Project

In 1914 Woodland Park was a 26-acre park in a neighborhood which included the communities of Germantown, the Woodland Heights and the Near Northside. In 1959 TXDOT acquired one third of the park to construct I-45 just north of downtown.

The remaining park is now entirely situated to the west of I-45 adjacent to Germantown and the Woodland Heights. The removal of the North Street bridge breaks the final link between the communities that were once one.

Additionally, Woodland Park has also suffered from other negative impacts from the construction of I-45. Pollution from noise, and freeway litter and run-off have become significant issues. With careful planning TXDOT could repair some of this damage and mitigate the negative impacts associated with freeways.

The Friends of Woodland Park, Inc. (FWP) was formed in 2007 as a non-profit dedicated to preserving the park's natural habitat as well as its unique historical significance to the city. We have worked steadily, in partnership with HPARD, to improve the park, improve access to the park, and to make the wooded areas around Little White Oak Bayou safe for park users. Since making the forested riparian areas accessible, Woodland Park has become a Houston Audubon Top 10 Birding Site within the city of Houston.

As stewards of Woodland Park, FWP respectfully offers several opportunities for TXDOT to improve the community around I-45 in Segment 2.

### **Accessibility and connectivity across I-45**

The loss of the North Street bridge removes easy access to Woodland Park from the east side of I-45. Using the proposed North Main deck as an alternate route for pedestrians and cyclists is unrealistic due to lack of infrastructure conducive to easy foot and bicycle traffic.

The Friends of Woodland Park (FWP) recommends:

- The construction of a well-lit and safe hike and bike path along Little White Oak Bayou as it flows under I-45, and
- A hike and bike bridge that crosses over the freeway.

Additionally, regular park users and the monthly Audubon birding groups routinely cross Little White Oak Bayou over the TXDOT culvert on the eastern side of Woodland Park. A means of crossing the bayou on the eastern side of the park is essential to access the southern reaches of the park adjacent to the freeway. FWP recommends either a footbridge over the bayou or a safe means of crossing over the newly planned culvert that conveys Little White Oak Bayou below I-45.

### **Connectivity to Moody Park**

FWP has worked with other entities to connect the Woodland Park community to the hike and bike trail system along White Oak Bayou. The natural progression is to connect, via hike and bike trail, Woodland Park to Moody Park.

With TXDOT cooperation the eastern extent of this hike and bike trail could be constructed from Woodland Park to Moody Park, and then continuing on to the proposed detention basins east of I-45 adjacent to the freeway.

### **Noise Mitigation**

Woodland Park already suffers from considerable noise pollution from I-45 as it passes the park. With raised lanes, well above grade, this problem will be exacerbated. FWP recommends state-of-the-art sound mitigation as well as the addition of trees on the eastern edge of the park.

### **Trash Abatement**

Little White Oak Bayou suffers from water-borne particulate, bacterial and trash pollution. TXDOT's plan to create detention basins upstream of the park provides opportunities for pollution control on Little White Oak Bayou.

FWP recommends:

- Installing heavy and floating trash collection systems either immediately upstream or downstream from the proposed detention basins.
- Creating wetland style detention ponds, thereby providing natural filtration for bacterial and particulate pollution.
- Installation of hike and bike trails from the detention ponds to Woodland Park, thus mitigating the dumping of heavy trash along Little White Oak Bayou between Moody Park and Woodland Park.

### **Hydrology**

With the modification of the Little White Oak Bayou channel as it crosses under I-45 serious consideration must be given to the changing impacts of flow particularly during storm events. In severe floods the Little White Oak Bayou stream bed within Woodland Park could suffer catastrophic events such as bank collapse and migration of geomorphic features that have long been part of the park, as documented from aerial photos dating back to the 1940's.

FWP recommends rigorous state-of-the-art stream flow modeling be used to minimize significant damage to the channel in future floods. The channel within the park has always been channelized and should remain as such. Channelizing the stream bed is not a solution.

### **Additional Considerations**

Greenspace stewards:

TXDOT, in alliance with FWP, White Oak Bayou Partnership, Bayou Preservation Association and HPARD, can assume a leadership position in the stewardship of fostering and maintaining a healthy native greenspace along the Little White Oak Bayou channel east of I-45 and into Woodland Park. Features such as this channelized bayou are a rare commodity in the Greater Houston area and the bayou with its greenspace is a much-needed point of natural environmental contact to the Near Northside community. Pollution abatement and hike and bike trail access must be part of TXDOT's consideration for this section of Segment 2.

North Main Deck Park:

In schematic renderings TXDOT has presented the cap over I-45 at North Main as a green and vibrant park space providing the opportunity to unite, once again, the communities east and west of I-45. Obstacles to this vision are funding and accessibility.

Without significant private/public funding the cap over I-45 will become a minimally constructed and minimally used space with all the problems inherent in underutilized urban spaces. The proposed addition of a metro station alone will not provide sufficient draw to attract visitors to the very extensive deck cap.

Accessibility to the park is also a very real consideration. Crossing three lanes of fast-moving access-road traffic is daunting at best and life-threatening when considering small children or slow pedestrians. Much more effort needs to be given to making the intersection not only safe but feel safe.

With consideration of these two essential elements the deck cap could easily become, at best, an under-utilized, minimally constructed park or, at worst, a visual blight of extensive dirty concrete.

The Germantown Historic District is in full agreement of the sentiments expressed in this statement.

Please contact the Friends of Woodland Park with any questions or clarifications. The FWP would be pleased to work with you on improvements to our park and the greenspace surrounding Little White Oak Bayou in this area.

Thank you,

The Friends of Woodland Park, Inc.  
Friendsofwoodlandpark.org  
Houston, TX 77009

## **Comment 2:**

Transportation Policy Council members,

Community members in the Greater Northside have worked incredibly hard over the last two years, alongside and in partnership with organizations and local government, to identify a more equitable version of the NHHIP.

Avenue is disappointed that TxDOT has not agreed to sign an agreement that would allow for the NHHIP redesign that the City of Houston, Harris County, METRO, and community members have requested.

In the event that TxDOT moves forward with a Record of Decision based on the current FEIS, we urge the TPC to suspend all funding commitments to the NHHIP until TxDOT produces a new preferred alternative.

Thank you for your time and your service.

Sincerely,

**LAILA KHALILI** (she/her/ella)  
*Community Advocacy Program Manager*  
**AVENUE**  
3517 Irvington Boulevard  
Houston, TX 77009  
P: (832) 930-3791  
[lailak@avenuecdc.org](mailto:lailak@avenuecdc.org)  
**WWW.AVENUECDC.ORG**  
*Building Stronger Communities*

### **Comment 3:**

The TxDOT is woefully inaccurate in its description of the NHHIP benefits. It uses as a base "Do Nothing" case, the useless traffic patterns from a 20-year-old H-GAC report designed to support Metro. Back then the Hardy was a ghost road and contributed little to solving congestion. Finally, under construction, this Hardy Downtown Connector project will make a huge contribution, carrying two lanes of traffic both ways, a contribution that is wrongfully appropriated by TxDOT.

For example, NHHIP claims that the trip from Crosstimbers to the convention center now takes up to 77 minutes and after NHHIP it will take only 19 minutes. Truth is, the 19-minute trip will actually be possible long before NHHIP is completed, on the Hardy Downtown Connector.

It also predicts that congestion on 610 Loop east of I-45, which now slows to 12 mph, will improve to over 50 mph. Well, of course it's slow now. Every commuter on the Hardy has to exit on 610 to get downtown and back. Truth is, long before NHHIP is finished those commuters and thousands of others from north I-45 will be flying over 610 and the 12-mph problem will have been solved, solved once again by the Hardy Connector, not the I-45 expansion.

In thousands of pages TxDot has not credibly estimated the most important part of its project, the congestion benefit. The Hardy connector, which is not even in the NHHIP budget, will bring just as many lanes downtown as the I-45 expansion will. Reductions in congestion will be half due to the Hardy, at 1/10th the cost, but to make its own project look good, TxDot claims all the benefit for itself.

This is not how the project should be evaluated. NHHIP should not proceed until after the Hardy Connector is finished. Only then can we get a credible projection of its true incremental benefit potential and make a good decision about proceeding.

Tom Schmal

# LINK HOUSTON

January 21, 2021

Transportation Policy Council (TPC)  
Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC)

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Dear TPC Members:

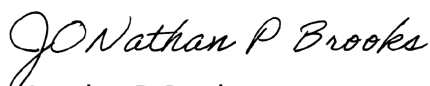
LINK Houston consistently participated in meetings about the memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP). We sincerely appreciate the earnest efforts of the chair of the MOU working group, Dr. Carol Lewis, who made certain the meetings were accessible to the public and that members engaged in open and fair discussion. The MOU process has been long and frustrating, for those of us on the outside listening in, and certainly for many of the working group members and their organizations. This is not a surprise, given the concept itself was novel and required significant negotiation.

We understand today's resolution will not require signatures of the five stakeholders but is instead a general TPC resolution. We support approving the resolution as it confirms TPC's commitment to continue to monitor the NHHIP's future and hold stakeholders accountable. One of the most fundamental elements of the resolution is establishing the expectation for defining an ongoing process for stakeholders to continue collaborating to address the project's impacts on communities and residents, people walking/biking/rolling, and people riding transit.

To be clear, while we support approving the resolution, LINK Houston is not satisfied. The NHHIP needs a stronger agreement, one that holds all stakeholders accountable to deliver a better and more equitable project, most especially the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). We hope that all parties negotiated in good faith. We hope that the MOU resolution reflects organizational views. All stakeholders must now hold themselves accountable to the intent and specifics in the document. The appropriate course of action remains for TxDOT to, in conjunction with the City of Houston, Harris County, METRO, and the public, develop new alternatives for the NHHIP and select a new preferred alternative for environmental study.

So, while we are not satisfied, we do see opportunities for continuing the process and identifying ways for stakeholders and the public to hold TxDOT accountable, including future TPC actions to withdraw or withhold funding if necessary. We also hope that TPC and the region's transportation stakeholders are learning and thinking about how to adapt future processes, plans, and projects in similar ways. Namely, engaging directly impacted communities earlier, more often, and more responsively to develop preferred project alternatives that realize improvements for everyone.

Sincerely,



Jonathan P. Brooks  
Director of Policy and Planning

