

Executive Summary

CITY OF BAYTOWN  TEXAS

LCI

LCI Master Plan

Federal Transit Administration Livable Communities Initiative



Prepared for Harris County

Prepared by The Goodman  Corporation

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Executive Summary

Economic History and Population Growth

Throughout most of Baytown's history, oil and gas has been the area's major economic industry. Oil was first discovered in Baytown in 1908 and, since that time, Baytown has led the nation in oil exploration and offshore drilling operations. Current major oil and gas companies located in or adjacent to Baytown include Exxon, Chevron Phillips, Bayer, and Amoco. The oil and gas industry has been a significant factor in the city's population increase. According to the City's history profile on its website, Baytown's population has increased from 20,000 people to almost 70,000.

In recent years Baytown's economic industries have diversified to include manufacturing, logistics, and education. Lee College is a major employer and considered one of the strength's of the community. It is a two-year community college that employs approximately 850 faculty and staff and serves over 9,000 students, offering two-year degrees, continuing education, adult literacy, and various vocational training programs. Lee College is accredited and prepares students for various professions and also for continuing their education at four-year universities.

History of Texas Avenue - The Central Business District

A Central Business District (CBD) can be a vital part of a community through the following:

- Provide a central point for commercial and retail activity;
- Provide a central location for community functions; and
- Establish a focal point by which the city will be recognized. A core area is essential to creating a sense of place and developing pride within a community.

Texas Avenue historically was that core; however, development patterns have had a negative effect on this community that has produced urban sprawl. Prior to the 1970s, Texas Avenue was a thriving area that included businesses, cafés, a movie theater, banks, and retail shops. Development patterns in the 1960s favored outdoor shopping centers. Garth Road strip center developments are a result of over-development of such shopping centers. This five-mile roadway is now considered a business district. The perception of residents, identified through a visioning workshop conducted in 2008, indicates that the city lacks a core area.

Texas Avenue's role as the CBD continued to decline with the completion of IH 10. Baytown's businesses and retailers preferred the access that IH 10 provided. The development of the San Jacinto Mall area near IH 10 became the favored business location. Residents also appreciated the new access to jobs and shopping opportunities in Houston.

The City chose to position its administrative functions and services along Market Street, which is a considerable distance from Texas Avenue. The City's administrative functions, local businesses, retail, and residents have spread themselves along every major corridor, leaving no opportunity for Texas Avenue to operate as a city center. Texas Avenue had been left abandoned and in a state of decline.

Revitalization through Smart Growth

The City and community stakeholders in recent years recognized that many parts of the community are deteriorating. Through a series of community outreach efforts and planning studies, Harris County, City officials, community stakeholders, the public, and historians have recognized the need to establish a community core within Baytown and evaluate redevelopment opportunities along Texas Avenue. Improvements to Texas Avenue could stimulate economic opportunities and once again establish Texas Avenue as the city center.

City and county officials are committed to revitalizing Baytown. The goal is to redevelop Texas Avenue in the nationally recognized Smart Growth framework. Smart growth is a concept that recognizes that sprawl does not work and that communities will be more successful if they encourage pedestrian-friendly environments and incorporate a mix of land uses. The smart growth framework encourages communities to strengthen their urban cores and provide a balance of commercial, residential, retail, and open spaces. In order to accomplish this goal, the City must attract businesses, residents, and retail back to Texas Avenue. Infrastructure improvements are needed that will create an attractive environment for pedestrians that also will appeal to businesses and retailers. Improvements necessary to creating this environment include installing pedestrian infrastructure, enhancing the streetscape, and investing in amenities such as pedestrian-oriented lighting and wayfinding signage. These improvements will promote the City's ability to create a desirable central location for community activities that contains access to housing, transit, jobs, retail, and entertainment.

Livable Communities Initiative

Through the efforts of Congressman Gene Green and the Harris County Community Services Department -Transit Service division, partners in eastern Harris County are studying how they can strengthen Baytown's sustainability through the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Livable Communities Initiative (LCI). The objective of LCI is to develop the community into a pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented environment that can be a model for the region for reducing the dependency on Vehicle-Miles Traveled (VMT).

This LCI study recommends improvements that encourage a pedestrian atmosphere by improving pedestrian access to transit, which will result in increased transit ridership, promote a pedestrian-friendly community, stimulate revitalization, and create an environment that is attractive to developers, businesses, and residents and will bring them back into the CBD.

Baytown is a strong candidate for a successful LCI model because it has internal structure in the CBD that can support a mixed-use environment and attract a high-density mix of white-collar and blue-collar jobs throughout a mix of retail, residential, restaurant, and mid-size and

corporate office space. The Texas Avenue and redevelopment area has been identified for mixed-use/infill development and, therefore, this study focuses on improvements in those areas that can assist the community in revitalizing the downtown area into a thriving city core. This study also evaluates the pedestrian environment along the fixed-route transit corridors and makes recommendations that will create an improved pedestrian environment to support a growing transit system and will result in increases in transit ridership.

This LCI study identifies improvements that will make the streets of Baytown safer, more convenient for pedestrians and transit users, and will result in attractive areas where people can live, work, and play with less reliance on their cars. Key features include the following:

- Increased density in the area through increased mixed use (commercial, residential, retail, and recreation);
- Designed to be pedestrian-friendly with improved image and sense of place and comfort; and
- Connected to major activity centers and accessible.

The recommendations directly relate to the goals for the local MPO 2035 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The resulting benefits will improve mobility, improve access to jobs and homes, promote alternative transportation choices, coordinate lands uses, and create a healthier environment for the residents and businesses of Baytown.

Study Area

This master plan encompasses the following study area:

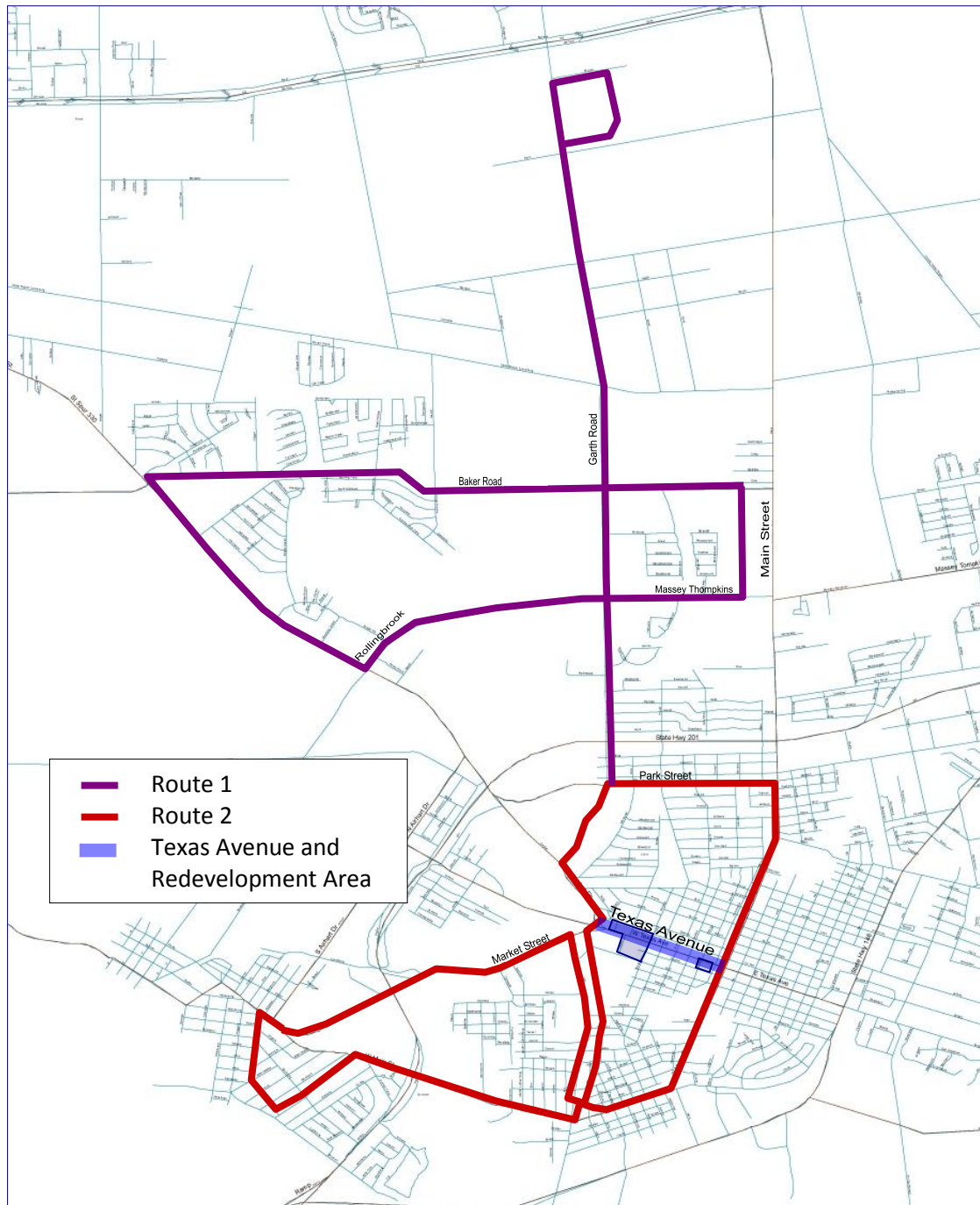
- Texas Avenue from Main Street to Lee Road
- Redevelopment Area
- Two transit routes (Route 3 was not in existence when the study was authorized):
 - Route 1 – San Jacinto Mall
 - Route 2 – Lee College

This master plan addresses many of the factors of concern raised during the 2008 visioning process conducted by HDR. These factors of concern include the following:

- Incompatible neighborhood developments
- Vacant and deteriorating buildings
- Crime and litter
- Lack of bike facilities
- Lack of pedestrian facilities
- Perceived poor image
- Lack of urban core



Figure ES.1 – Texas Avenue, Redevelopment Area, and Routes



The identified investments support creating a downtown area comprised of a high-density, mixed-use combination of retail, office, and residential facilities and places and uses that complement Lee College. Implementation of these recommendations will create an

environment that encourages pedestrians and promotes the type of thriving core the community desires. The result is to transform the Texas Avenue and Redevelopment Area into a safe, clean neighborhood that embraces Baytown's history, enhances the streetscape by incorporating artistic elements, and creates a city center that the residents can take pride in.

The identified investments along the fixed-route transit corridors will improve the pedestrian environment, making the transit option a more viable choice, and will subsequently improve the visual appeal of many of Baytown's major corridors.

Streetscape Recommendations

Improved Pedestrian Environment

The study effort considered the preferences for improvements from the public involvement process. Based on the public input, the study team developed the cost estimates and improvements preferred for each block face. The preferred improvements described in Chapter 9 were a result of the public meetings in which attendees were asked to select their preference for pedestrian and streetscape elements. The corridors were divided into three categories: Texas Avenue and the Redevelopment Area, Major/Commercial Corridors, and Low-Density Residential. Texas Avenue and the Redevelopment Area have high-density potential and are considered top priority for maximum treatment. Therefore, this study recommends the highest level of investments in this area. The fixed-route corridors were recommended to have Complete Streets treatments along the commercial and major corridors and to have moderate level of investments in low-density and primarily residential areas. The preferred elements were evaluated according to the corridor land use by corridor categories.

Texas Avenue and Redevelopment Area

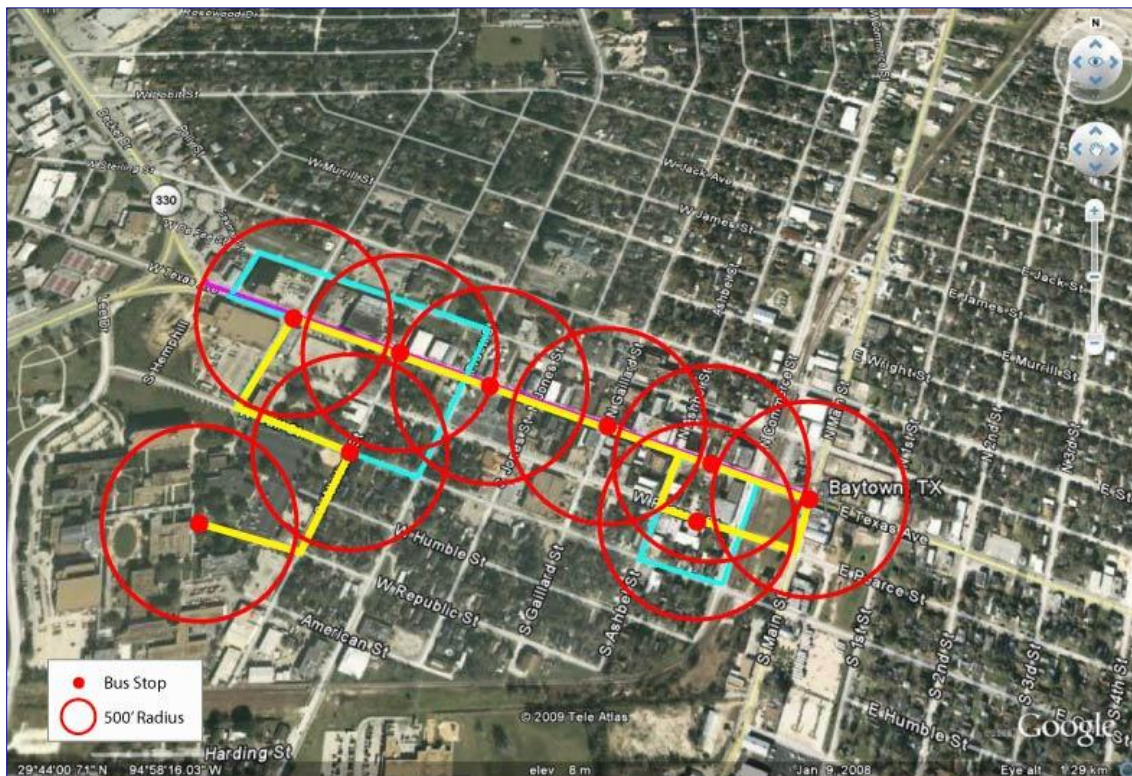
The Texas Avenue and Redevelopment area incorporates numerous pedestrian and streetscape amenities to support revitalization and attract the highest pedestrian potential. To develop the environment desired and attract new mixed-use commercial, retail, and residential properties, the recommendations for the redevelopment area include the following:

- implementing a design theme to develop a consistent image
- plaza with interactive fountain to establish a community gathering area
- pedestrian crossing signals
- pedestrian-oriented lighting
- bus shelters
- brick-paved sidewalks
- wayfinding signage
- benches
- decorative crosswalks at major intersections
- banners
- art

Transit Service in Downtown

To further enhance pedestrian/transit environment, and stimulate mixed-use development in downtown Baytown, a trolley service is proposed along Texas Avenue. The service is recommended to connect Lee College on the west side and the two downtown redevelopment areas. The transit route is illustrated by the yellow line in *Figure ES.2*. The proposed route is approximately 1.1 miles long with nine stops. Trolley stops are located at major intersections where current activities exist and where there is high potential for mixed-use redevelopment. Transit can be used to maximize the attractiveness of downtown as a place where residents have access to good jobs, retail, employment, recreational activities, entertainment, and restaurants. To increase the likelihood of redevelopment success for this area and to increase the perception of transit as a reliable mobility choice, the trolley operating hours should be extended later in the evenings, should include Saturday service, and should operate on a high frequency. By implementing a service with good access and frequent service, the transit service stands a higher chance of being successful and supporting the desired outcome to increase the density and attractiveness of the downtown redevelopment areas.

Figure ES.2 – Proposed Trolley Route (yellow line)



Capital Cost for Phase 1

The overall study includes the development of costs to bring the block faces within the Texas Avenue and Redevelopment Area as well as the major transit corridors into a condition that is considered satisfactory for pedestrian access to transit. Although the overall study area encompassed a much larger amount of improvements, Texas Avenue and the Redevelopment Area in downtown are identified as Phase 1. This determination is based on the area’s existing land use characteristics, current plans for investment by the City, and the areas high need based on prior planning efforts.

Table ES.1 – Phase 1 Transit and Pedestrian Access Texas Avenue and Redevelopment Area	
Block Face Improvement	Cost
Sidewalks	\$1,047,282
Driveways	\$431,214
Curbs	\$143,214
ADA Ramps	\$72,000
Pedestrian-oriented Lighting	\$2,338,060
Landscaping	\$882,028
Other*	\$483,584
<i>Subtotal</i>	\$5,398,097
<i>Contingency (10%)</i>	\$539,810
<i>Subtotal</i>	\$5,937,907
<i>Design Services (15%)</i>	\$890,686
<i>Subtotal</i>	\$6,828,593
<i>Project and Grant Management</i>	\$682,859
Total	\$7,511,452
Demolition costs are already included where necessary. *Other includes crosswalks, bus stops, signage, and decorative crosswalks.	

Funding and Letter of No Prejudice

FTA Livable Communities Initiative (LCI): Relationship to Federal Funding

As discussed, this plan was developed in accordance with FTA's LCI, which provides a framework for the design of streetscape improvements that enhance transit and pedestrian user access to transit facilities and services. Under LCI, pedestrian and transit access improvements are eligible within a 500-foot radius of a transit stop and within a 1,500-foot radius around a transit terminal. Improvements such as sidewalks, transit shelters, ramps, pedestrian-oriented lighting, street trees, and street furniture (benches and waste receptacles) are considered eligible by FTA for inclusion within a capital grant, if these elements demonstrate improved pedestrian/transit access. Although LCI does not have any specific funding source attached to it, the development of project components and qualification of costs in accordance with the program greatly enhances the fundability of a transit access-based urban revitalization effort. Within the LCI framework, funding for capital improvements could come from the federal Section 5309 Discretionary or Transportation Enhancements.

FTA Section 5309 Discretionary Program

FTA's Section 5309 Discretionary Program provides funding on an 80% federal/20% local share basis to fund eligible transit capital needs, including transit access and streetscape improvements developed in accordance with LCI. Congress selects the FTA Discretionary funds during its annual Transportation Appropriations process and also every six years under the Transportation Reauthorization process. Applicants must be eligible FTA grantees, such as a county, municipality, municipal management district, or transit authority.

FTA Letter of No Prejudice (LONP) Pre-Award Authority

In this case, the capital improvements are already planned by the local government and also may qualify as "local share match," provided that such eligible improvements are included in an FTA LONP. This tool allows local governments and transit authorities to advance project activities with local funds, building "local share" credit toward the overall project, and allowing for subsequent federal reimbursement should Discretionary, CMAQ Improvement Program, TE, or other funds be made available. Once issued by FTA, an LONP protects specific investments related to transit infrastructure for up to five years, provided the federal procurement procedures are followed for the phases of work for which future reimbursement is sought. This tool has been utilized effectively to protect local investment in infrastructure in advance of the receipt of federal funds in several Texas cities and transit-oriented communities where urban development/redevelopment has been a priority. Since an LONP is a practical tool for protecting local share value, it is therefore recommended that this plan be included within an approved FTA LONP.