

THE VISION

Published by the Houston-Galveston Area Council Transportation Department

Spring 2008

Subregional Planning

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) has launched a new "subregional" approach to transportation planning. The aim of this effort is to better link regional transportation goals with local plans, projects and development strategies. The subregional planning approach will also enable local communities better coordinate their planning with neighboring cities and counties. These plans will employ a "Transportation Toolbox" to promote more travel choices, better access and improved coordination of land use and transportation planning. This toolbox will include access manage-



ment, corridor improvements, goods movement, transit services, safety enhancements, and facilities for pedestrian and bicyclists.

To jumpstart this effort, H-GAC has received Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to provide planning services for subregions within the eight-county Transportation Management Area (TMA). H-GAC is seeking local governments, special districts and others willing to work with their neighboring communities, counties and other surrounding

continued on page 6

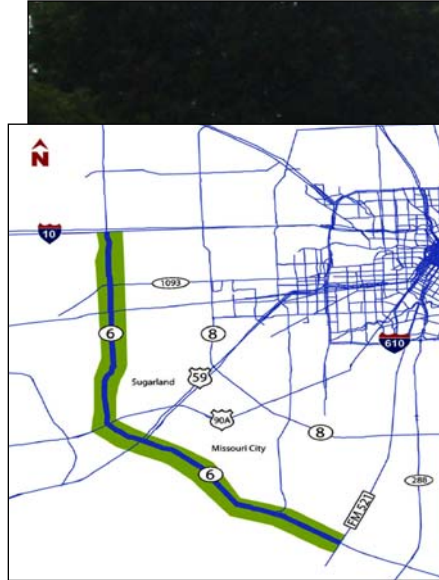


Photo and Graphics: H-GAC

Access Management and State Highway 6

The Houston-Galveston region is experiencing growth in jobs, housing, and number of vehicles. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Mar 2007, the population of Harris county alone has grown by 485,629 people between 2000 and 2006. That's a 14.28 percent change. Over the next 27 years, this growth will continue, and our population will increase by more than three million people. In an effort to manage the growing transportation demand, the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Houston-Galveston Transportation Management Area, H-GAC, has commissioned access management studies that take into account the operation of major corridors in the region. Studies completed to date include Westheimer, FM 1960, and all four-lane to six-lane major east-west corridors of FM 518. Currently, H-GAC, in partnership with TxDOT, the cities of Houston, Missouri City and Sugar Land and Fort Bend and Harris Counties, has commis-

sioned an access management study on SH 6, a six-plus-lane, major north-south corridor from FM 521 in Fort Bend County to IH 10 in the Houston area.

The purpose of the SH-6 Access Management study is to identify transportation measures that will improve public safety and traffic flow, reduce motorist delay, enhance air quality, and improve pedestrian and bicycle access. The study includes short, medium and long term goals for the corridor. Short-term improvements include raised medians, rebuilding of the signalized intersections, pedestrian amenities, dual turn-lanes, retiming of signals and coordination of signals after implementation of improvements. Medium-term projects include cross-access improvements and driveway consolidations. Long-term SH 6 projects include intersection, bicycle and pedestrian, transit, landscape improvements.

I-69 Update

Between February 4 and March 3, 2008, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) conducted 47 public hearings around the State on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) of the proposed Trans-Texas Corridor—specifically, the Interstate 69 portion along the Texas-Mexico border to Texarkana. Of the 47 public hearings, 15 were held within the Houston-Galveston region. The purpose of the public hearings was to give the public an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, to discuss issues

related to the Texas corridor DEIS, and to review and provide testimony on the I-69 DEIS.

TxDOT will submit public comments to the Federal Highway Administration with the draft environmental impact study for review this spring. The FHWA is expected to issue a response in winter. If the Federal agency approves the initial study, it will be refined to map out a more specific project route. According to Karen Othon, TxDOT spokeswoman, there is a possibility that strong public opposition to the project could result

continued on page 3

METRO and Cleaner Buses

In January 2008, the H-GAC Board of Directors approved a \$10,227,300 contract with METRO for funding of 100 Hybrid-Diesel buses. Over the next year, METRO plans to replace older, dirtier diesel buses with the cleaner, more fuel efficient diesel-hybrids. With this large-scale project in place, METRO is helping to reduce harmful Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) by 99.91 tons per year (tpy) in our region. This is a significant reduction of harmful pollutants that helps to improve the air quality problems in our region.

In addition to the diesel hybrids, METRO has also received grant funding for \$3,480,000 to repower (replacing old engines) 64 diesel buses with cleaner burning 2008 engines. Through this project, more than 44.78 tpy of NOx will be reduced.

Katy Park & Ride

To help alleviate traffic congestion, METRO has expanded its commuter service in Katy with the addition of the 222 Grand Parkway Park & Ride.

On Monday, January 28, 2008 service began from the METRO-designated parking area at the Cinemark Theatre lot, located just north of I-10 West/Katy Freeway at 1030 W. Grand Parkway North.

The 222 Grand Parkway Park & Ride will provide direct service between the Grand Parkway and downtown Houston. Buses will depart every 15 minutes between 5:30 a.m. and 8:15 a.m. and return every 15 minutes between 3:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

For a service schedule or more information, call (713) 635-4000.



City of Sugar Land Hike and Bike Trails

In January 2008, The City of Sugar Land's Hike and Bike Trail Plan was adopted by the City Council. The Plan is a high priority in the City's Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan. The Master Plan identifies off-street and on-street routes for bicyclists and pedestrians. The main goal is connecting neighborhoods to parks, schools, libraries, shopping areas and other neighborhoods.

The development of such a plan included input from a citizen task force, residents, levee improvement districts, homeowners' associations, City staff, City Council, and the Parks and Recreation Policy Advisory Board. The Plan features more than 150 miles of trails and sidewalks to be implemented in phases over the next several years. Working with the City's consultant, task force members voted on the most desirable sections and staff identified routes along roadways, drainage channels, levees, and easements throughout the City.

With unanimous approval and recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Policy Advisory Board the Planning and Zoning Commission, the City Council adopted the plan. Because citizen input is an important part of the Master Plan Process, a citywide meeting was held at the end of March to receive public comment. The Hike and Bike Trail Plan can be found on the City of Sugar Land Web site, www.sugarlandtx.gov.



Around the Region

H-GAC is launching a new outreach effort to further engage the public with regional transportation related issues. The goal is to initiate a dialogue with the public that opens new lines of communication. H-GAC



wants to hear what the public has to say about ideas and projects that directly affect them and to find out what transportation issues are most important to people throughout the region.



The first set of public meetings this April will focus on current major products and studies, including access management, proposed TIP amendments, and subregional planning.

The next set of quarterly meetings will be held in July 2008 and will cover a variety of transportation topics. The meeting locations are to be determined. For information about current and future public meetings, visit www.h-gac.com/transportation.

I-69 Update

continued from page 1

in the halting of the plan by the State. As a result of public comment to date, the report recommends continued environmental studies on the corridor focused on utilizing existing highways first before introducing new corridors as a secondary option.

All comments from the public hearings must be received by April 18, 2008 to be included in the official record. Detailed maps of the Recommended Preferred Corridors and Upgradeable Facilities Maps are available

Coming Up ...

Quarterly Public Meetings

April 9, 2008

City of Tomball Community Center
221 Market Street
Tomball TX 77375
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

April 10, 2008

Sugar Land Civic Center
Wedgewood South Room
226 Matlage Way
Sugar Land TX 77478
10:00 a.m. – Noon

Wolfe Elementary School Cafeteria
(Copperfield Area)
502 Addicks-Howell Road
Houston, TX 77079
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Fresh Air Friday

Jones Plaza, downtown Houston
April 11, 2008
11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Advancing the Choice

Stafford Center
Stafford, TX
June 18, 2008

Clean Cities Meeting

H-GAC, Conference Room B
June 25, 2008
2 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

AERCO

H-GAC, Conference Room B
May 7, 2008
2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

SH 6 Public Meeting

May TBD

Flex in the City

George R. Brown Convention Center,
1001 Avenida de las Americas
Houston, Texas 77010
May 13, 2008
8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

SIP Update

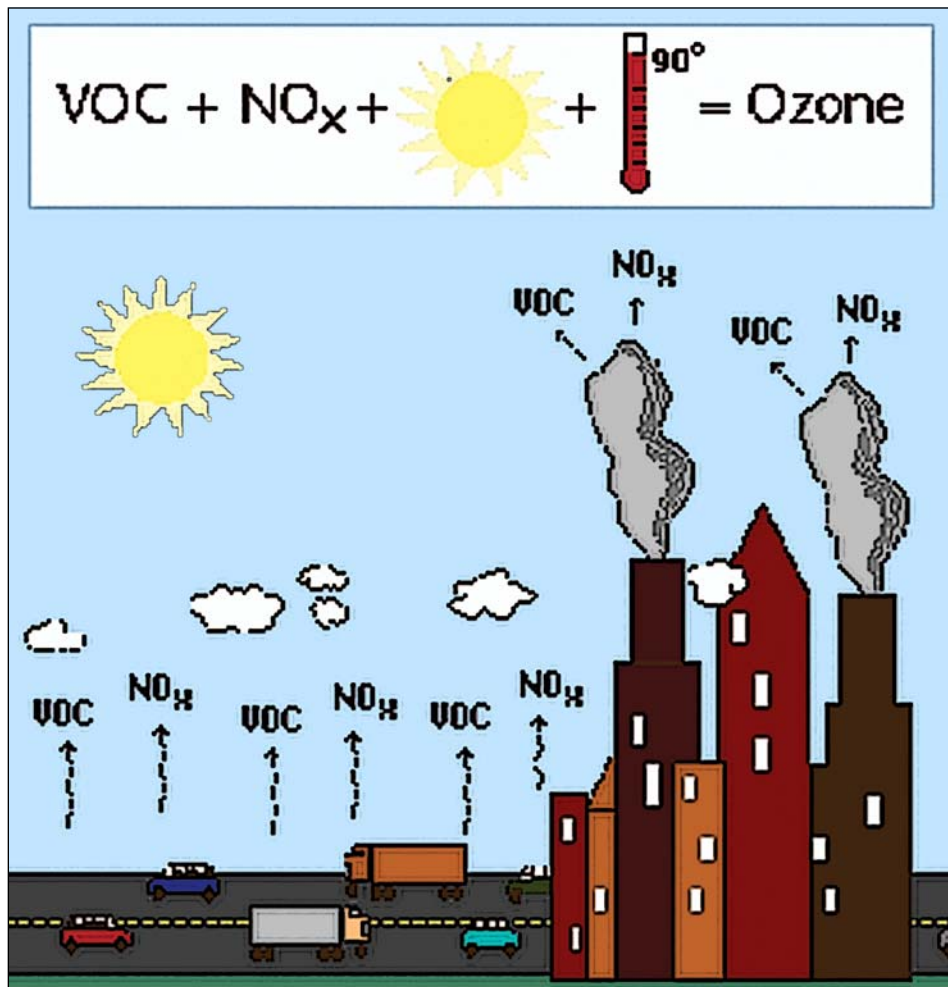
The Houston-Galveston-Brazoria (HGB) region was classified as being "moderate" nonattainment of the 8-hour ozone standard and was given a maximum attainment date of June 15, 2010. However, due to a 2007 request by Texas Governor Rick Perry, the region will likely be reclassified as a "severe" nonattainment region with a maximum attainment date of June 15, 2019.

H-GAC is working with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to prepare control measures for on-road (cars, trucks, and buses) and non-road (construction, aircraft, locomotive, lawn & garden, marine) sources in the HGB area for the upcoming 2019 deadline. The schedule establishes several rounds of review and comment to obtain as much public input as possible. Please check the website <http://www.h-gac.com/taq/airquality/sip/road/default.aspx> for upcoming stakeholder meetings.

8-Hour Ozone Standard

On March 13, 2008, EPA announced its latest rules designed to strengthen the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for ground-level ozone. EPA states that this new standard will result in improved protection of public health protection and as well as sensitive trees.

The current standard for ground level ozone limits the 8-hour average ozone concentration in the air to 0.084 parts per million (ppm). The new more stringent standard reduces the maximum concentration of ozone to 0.075 ppm (75 ppb).



Ozone is being formed in the troposphere by a chemical reaction between nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the presence of sunlight and high temperature, and in high concentrations is considered a pollutant, a constituent of smog. The troposphere is the lower layer of the atmosphere, not to be confused with the upper atmosphere (stratosphere) that is where most of the ozone resides and plays a beneficial role by absorbing most of the biologically damaging ultraviolet sunlight.

Ozone Related Health Effects

- ◆ Difficult in breathing, shortness of breath.
- ◆ Aggravated/prolonged coughing and chest pain.
- ◆ Increased aggravation of asthma.
- ◆ Increased hospital admissions and emergency room visits.
- ◆ Premature aging of the lungs
- ◆ Illness such as bronchitis and emphysema.
- ◆ Growing evidence suggests association with premature death.

Transportation for Tomorrow

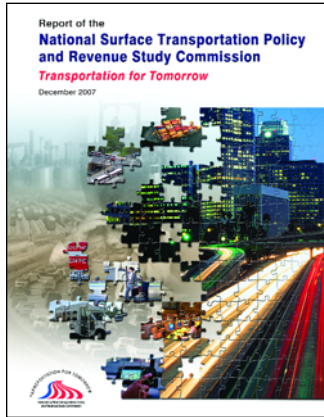
A report entitled *Transportation for Tomorrow: Report of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission*, includes detailed

recommendations for creating and sustaining a preeminent surface transportation system in the United States. In order to achieve such a goal, the Commission believes a significant increase in funding from all sources will be needed to upgrade the region's existing surface transportation system to a state of good repair and create a more advanced system defined, in part, using benefit cost analysis and performance-based outcomes. This means that significantly more investment will be needed from State and local governments, as well as from the private sector. Included in the list of recommendations from the Commission is:

- funding for projects that reduce congestion in metropolitan areas
- increasing the market share for freight rail
- making significant increases in highway investment as part of developing a robust surface transportation network
- Flexibility should be given to use tolls to fund new capacity on the Interstate System, as well as the flexibility to price the new capacity to manage its performance.
- Flexibility should be given to implement congestion pricing on the Interstate System on both new and existing capacity in metropolitan areas with populations greater than one million

The Commission also included a somewhat controversial recommendation of

increasing the State fuel taxes and other highway user fees. The Commission cited that the gas tax has been a staple of highway finance at both the Federal and State levels for 80 years and public acceptance of this mechanism, its ability to raise considerable revenues,



and its low administrative cost have been positive attributes. Raising the fuel tax could generate about \$1.9 billion nationally for each one cent increase. The Commission expects that States and local governments will have to raise additional revenues as part of the effort to

increase investment in our surface transportation system.

Since January 2005, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has issued a series of notices of rescission of federal-aid apportionments to states. The latest Notice of Rescission was issued on March 4, 2008. The notice advises that \$3.5 billion of unobligated federal-aid highway funds previously apportioned to states are being rescinded. For the state of Texas, the amount rescinded

by the March notice is approximately \$258 million. The total amount of rescissions for the state of Texas is approximately \$924 million since 2005.

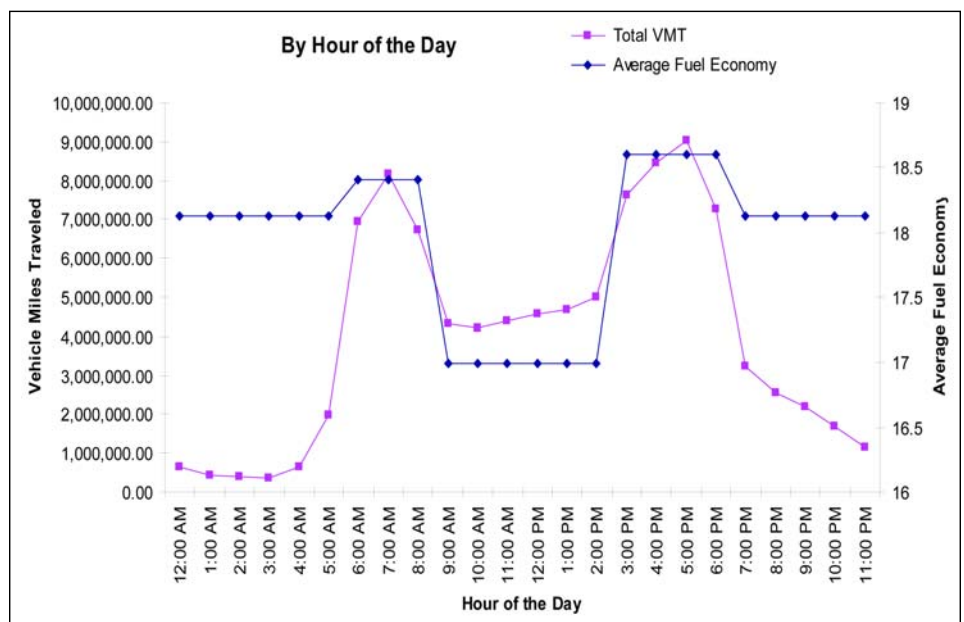
The uncertainty of federal funding in conjunction with escalating construction costs has already resulted in significant delays in the construction of planned projects for the region. To view a list of the most recently delayed projects visit <http://www.h-gac.com/taq/tip/default.aspx>.

To review the report, visit www.transportationfortomorrow.org.

Fuel Consumption Report

The Houston-Galveston Area Council has partnered with Mayor White's office from the City of Houston to collaborate on a 2007 regional fuel economy study. The study aimed to determine how much fuel was consumed daily by time of day, vehicle type, and roadway type. In addition, the study seeks to better understand the region's fuel economy and travel pattern characteristics.

For further information, please visit the website at <http://www.h-gac.com/taq/airquality/studies/default.aspx>.



Montgomery County Transit Plan

Montgomery County has a current population of over 390,000 and is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. It contains a diverse population that lives in higher income urbanizing areas (such as the Woodlands vicinity) emerging centers near Conroe and lower density rural communities. Despite Montgomery County's overall prosperity, there is a sizable group of people in the County (approximately 40,000) that are elderly, disabled, or low income with limited mobility options. Recent surveys and research indicate that many of the elderly, disabled and low income individuals are not able to take many needed trips. In addition, findings show a large portion of localized work trips and commuter travel occurs northward into Walker County. In order to address the various needs of the county, a draft transit plan was developed.

Recommendations from the plan include a county-wide demand response system (dial-a-ride) and a commuter express service connecting the Woodlands Town Center and Sam Houston State University with a stop at Montgomery College (and possibly Conroe) along the route. Improved coordination among existing transportation service providers is also recommended in the plan, and efforts are already being implemented to expedite that process between the Brazos Transit District (BTD) and the Friendship Center.

The transit plan is phased to provide incremental expansion over a multi-year time period. It is considered to be financially and operationally feasible. More than half of the needed \$6 million to fund the expanded transit system plan (at maturity) is already available in current financial resources within the

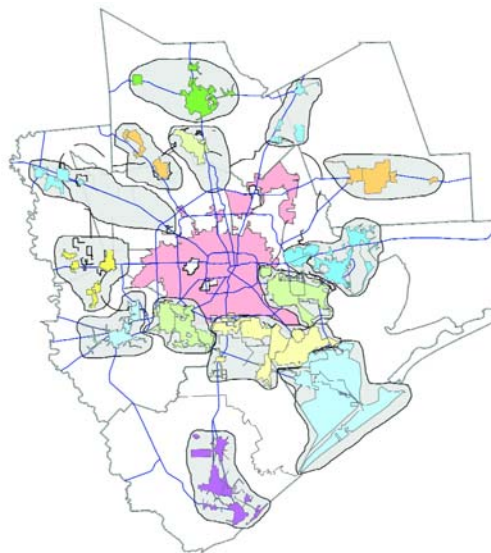
County. The transit plan was developed by H-GAC staff in conjunction with the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) and the URS Corporation. A copy of the draft plan is available at www.h-gac.com/transportation. For comments or questions regarding the plan, please email publiccomments@h-gac.com. The public comment period is open March 5-April 18.

Subregional Planning

continued from page 1

legal subdivisions to improve their transportation system's mobility, connectivity, and access.

H-GAC is currently seeking local partners that are willing to collaborate on transportation plans that meet the goals of their communities and of the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan



Potential Subregional Planning Areas

(RTP). H-GAC will provide consultant and public outreach support; while the subregional partners will be requested to provide the 20 percent local cash match, staff time and meeting facilities. H-GAC hopes these subregional plans will together form the basis of future RTP's and will result in more sustainable and efficient transportation investments.

For further information contact Jeff Taebel at 713-993-4560 or Jeff.Taebel@H-GAC.com.

What's New With NuRide?

NuRide is an online



community where you

can find people going your way and share a ride, travel whenever you like on your schedule, earn rewards from corporate sponsors, and save on gas, tolls and parking. NuRide continues to attract both employers and employees interested in its innovative ridesharing service. A hybrid blend of internet technology and carpooling, NuRide has been a rousing success since its inception in June 2005 in the Houston-Galveston area.

Now in its third year, NuRide has

exceeded each yearly goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the region. In year three NuRide has the grand goal of reducing 25 million VMT. Thus far, in 2008, H-GAC has seen a sharp increase in membership with the NuRide rideshare program attributed to NuRide's "Houston-Galveston Area 10,000,000 Miles Rideshare Challenge" kicked off in January. During the chal-

lenge, each NuRider taking a trip is automatically entered into the drawing for prizes awarded at every million mile mark, with the grand prize as a hybrid car at 10 million miles.

As of February 2008, 735 organizations (employers) and 7,931 members registered with NuRide. For more information on the NuRide program, contact Daniel Tighe at 713-397-1550 or visit www.nuride.com.

A Letter from the Transportation Director Houston-Galveston Area Council

“Partnership”

The cornerstone of transportation system planning and development is “Partnership.” Maintaining today’s infrastructure and building for the future requires the pooled resources of agencies at all levels of government and the private sector as well. This newsletter highlights several examples of local governments, the State and the public working together to improve the transportation system that we all rely on.

H-GAC is undertaking a subregional planning initiative that is designed to develop partnerships between local governments and their citizens that will give them additional tools to improve their communities. The subregional partners will cooperatively identify transportation strategies for their areas that advance their local land use and economic development goals. As vital partners in regional planning work, these subregions will bring a local perspective to all aspects of the regional transportation plan.

Access management studies offer other good examples of partnerships in action. The recently completed SH 6 Corridor Access Management Study was funded and guided by six local partners and the Texas Department of Transportation. It identified low-cost strategies to quickly improve traffic flow and reduce crashes along SH 6 from IH 10 to FM 521. There was significant public involvement in the development of the study’s recommendations.

There is a call to action for mobility and improved air quality taking place in our region and around the United States. It is imperative that our surface transportation system and regional air quality standards continue to improve and meet the needs of people. In order to answer this call to action, a change in traditional transportation planning, funding, and delivering of projects must occur.

The transportation challenges facing our region can be daunting. As population and employment grow, the demands on the system grow. New facilities and a variety of modes of travel will be required to meet the region’s travel needs. Only through partnerships between governments, residents, and businesses will we be able to identify and develop strategies that enhance our economy, environment, and overall quality of life.



Alan C. Clark

Transportation Director
Houston-Galveston Area Council

Upcoming Meetings

H-GAC Board of Directors

April 15 10:00 A.M.
May 20 10:00 A.M.
June 17 10:00 A.M.

Transportation Policy Council

April 25 9:30 A.M.
May 16 9:30 A.M.
June 27 9:30 A.M.

Technical Advisory Committee

April 9 9:30 A.M.
May 14 9:30 A.M.
June 11 9:30 A.M.

Regional Air Quality Planning Committee

April 24 1:30 P.M.
May 29 1:30 P.M.
June 26 1:30 P.M.

All meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held at the H-GAC conference rooms on the second floor at 3555 Timmons, Houston, Texas 77027. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, H-GAC will provide for reasonable accommodations for persons attending H-GAC functions. Requests should be received at least 24 hours prior to the function. For additional meeting information call 713-627-3200.

THE VISION Staff

Editor: **Michael Fuller**
Staff: Tarsha Hardy
Rosalind Hebert
Stephanie Lee

We encourage your comments at any time.
Please contact:

Alan C. Clark
MPO Director
Houston-Galveston Area Council
P.O. Box 22777
Houston, TX 77227-2777
phone: 713-627-3200
fax: 713-993-4508

Find us on the Internet!
www.h-gac.com/transportation

THE VISION

Houston-Galveston Area Council
Transportation Department
P.O. Box 22777
Houston, Texas 77227-2777

PRSR STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Houston, TX
PERMIT NO. 1855

Address Correction Requested



The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) is a voluntary association of local governments and local elected officials in the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning Region. The Gulf Coast Planning Region consists of Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, and Wharton counties. Organized in 1966, H-GAC provides a forum for the discussion of area-wide concerns, promoting regional cooperation through comprehensive planning and services to local governments.

2008 Breathe Easy! Award Presented to Commute Solutions

On March 26, 2008 the Commute Solutions program received the 2008 Breathe Easy! Award by the Greater Houston Partnership. Precinct 2 Commissioner Garcia and Greater Houston Partnership Chairman Dan Wolterman presented the award.

The Commute Solutions Program exemplifies our region's efforts to promote alternate modes of transportation in order to reduce vehicle miles traveled. This program was identified in the Houston Regional Air Quality Task Force's report to Mayor White as one of the non-industry recommended principles for cleaner air.

The Principles for Cleaner Air Report calls for a public forum to be held each year to educate the community on emissions reductions and improvements in air quality as well as the public's role in helping deliver cleaner air. The Task Force encourages continued transparent and open dialogue with accurate and objective communication from elected officials, business, industry, regulators, and the public through various public mediums. This event is the first in a series of annual, area-wide forums to discuss these topics.

For more information about Commute Solutions, visit www.commutesolutions-hou.com

