

Livable Centers Program Metrics

H-GAC established a Livable Centers Advisory Committee, composed of local experts in the fields of planning, urban design, transportation and economic development, to assist in the development of metrics for evaluating project proposals. These metrics are described in the following document which contains four sections: general requirements for all Livable Centers projects, the prioritization process for Livable Centers studies, study deliverables, and the prioritization process for Livable Centers implementation projects.

Please note that these metrics have not yet been adopted by H-GAC's Transportation Policy Council as official project selection criteria. However, they can be used by potential sponsors to gain an understanding of the desired outcomes for future Livable Centers projects to be considered for inclusion in H-GAC's Regional Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

For more information or questions concerning H-GAC's Livable Centers Program, please contact:

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Livable Centers Project Requirements

Goals Statement: The goal of H-GAC's Livable Centers Program is to facilitate the creation of walkable, mixed-use places that include residential and commercial components, provide multi-modal transportation options, improve environmental quality, and promote economic development.

All projects must meet the following requirements in order to be accepted for funding consideration:

Project Readiness: The project scope of work, timeline for completion, and budget will be examined for feasibility and reasonableness. Specifically, projects must address the following elements:

- Projects must clearly articulate the goals and vision of the proposal and how these goals relate to local/regional planning efforts. This description should discuss the need and purpose of the project as well as the desired outcomes.
- Projects must clearly delineate a timeline for completion.
- Projects must identify stakeholders (public and private) that will be involved and demonstrate how coordination among these stakeholders will be achieved.
- Projects must demonstrate a commitment to provide at least a 20% funding match for the project cost.
- To the greatest extent possible, projects should aim to leverage private investment and use additional funding resources where available.
- The sponsor's record of successful implementation of past TIP studies/projects will be examined.

Areas of Interest: Projects must be located in one of the following areas of interest:

- High density areas with mixed land uses and a traditional street grid system, such as the Urban Core.
- Regional Centers: areas of concentrated employment or other major trip generators.
- Town or Village Centers: concentration of housing, retail/office and civic destinations within walking distance of a community gathering place and a good pedestrian network.
- Transit-Oriented Development: high density mix of uses within walking distance of, and with good access to, a transit facility.
- Corridor: roadways that are classified as major collectors or higher that increase multi-modal accessibility and connectivity to major centers or transit facilities.
- Emerging Centers or Corridors: those areas that are experiencing strong growth and could develop as regional centers.

Additional Guidelines: Fulfilling Livable Centers Program Goals: Describe how the project will address and advance the Livable Centers Program Goals within the project area. The description must address the four major goals but not necessarily all sub-goals. Goals of the Livable Centers Program:

1. Create multi-modal travel choices by facilitating a range of transportation mode opportunities:

- Improve pedestrian/bicyclist/transit user safety.
 - Increase accessibility and circulation for all modes.
 - Reduce the length and number of trips needed to be made by single-occupancy vehicles by concentrating development that would otherwise require multiple trips.
2. Create quality, walkable, mixed-use places:
 - Strengthen community identity through quality design.
 - Create public spaces for the community.
 - Recognize the tradition, character, and culture of the area.
 - Revitalize historic areas where they exist.
 - Provide residential housing serving the full range of economic groups.
 3. Improve environmental quality:
 - Improve air quality by making transit, walking/bicycling trips more feasible.
 - Incorporate the environment into the planning process by preserving green space and natural resources.
 4. Promote economic development:
 - Promote value by serving as a catalyst for investment and development.
 - Leverage private investment to achieve a balance of land use types.
 - Promote efficient use of infrastructure.

Design Principles:

Projects containing design elements should be compatible with design criteria within H-GAC’s Livable Centers Best Practices Guide, City of Houston Urban Corridors criteria (if project is within City of Houston Urban Corridor area), and/or other local guidelines where applicable. Projects are encouraged to incorporate the following design principles:

- Incorporate pedestrian amenities throughout the project area such as sidewalks, shade, lighting, trees, and landscaping.
- Development in the project area is encouraged to be pedestrian-oriented and scaled with a mix of uses.
- Utilize access management and safety elements including cross-walks, medians, driveway consolidation throughout the project area.
- Use the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process and design guidelines for project developments throughout the project area.
- Use the LEED ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design - Neighborhood Development) standards in the project area.
- Emphasize identity through design through elements in the project area such as signage, public art, and streetscape elements that create a sense of identity.
- Parking in the project area should be encouraged to be in the rear of the development through use of build-to-lines. Shared parking, on-street parking and parking garages should be encouraged. Convenient bicycle parking and bicycle access should be included where possible.

Definitions: ‘Project’ refers to the study or transportation investment being proposed for funding consideration. ‘Project Area’ refers to the area surrounding the proposed project site in which the project applicant hopes to leverage benefits and investments. Project area is no greater than ¼ mile around project site.

Livable Centers Studies: Prioritization

Project Prioritization: In the event that multiple eligible projects are received in excess of available funding, study projects will be prioritized for funding according to the following factors:

1. **Project Impact (20%):** The potential impact of the study will be measured by the required goals statement that clearly identifies the need and purpose of the study along with the desired outcomes. The area of interest, project scale, and regional significance of the study will also be considered.
2. **Ability to Implement (20%):** The ability to implement the project will be measured by the level of commitment demonstrated, including: the sponsor's ability to successfully complete the project in the allocated time, stakeholder involvement, prior TIP implementation record, and the potential for identification of Livable Centers implementation projects.
3. **Fulfilling Program Goals (60%):** The ability of the project to fulfill the Livable Centers program goals will be evaluated using the following methodology:
 - Create multi-modal travel choices by facilitating a range of transportation mode opportunities (25%):**
 - Project will improve connectivity with existing neighborhoods and developments.
 - Project will provide an accessible pedestrian/bicyclist environment.
 - Project will strengthen accessibility to transit.
 - Project will improve pedestrian/bicyclist safety.
 - Create quality places (15%):**
 - Project has the potential to positively transform a project area.
 - Project outlines a community engagement plan.
 - Project will facilitate or incentivize an improvement in the range of housing options in the project area. **(Projects meeting this criteria will receive 5 extra points).**
 - Improve environmental quality (10%):**
 - Project has the potential for air quality improvements from mode shift.
 - Project seeks to integrate green space and preserve natural resources.
 - Promote economic development (10%):**
 - Project efficiently uses existing infrastructure.
 - Project goals statement outlines potential for project to serve as a catalyst for investment and development.

Livable Centers Study Deliverables:

The Livable Centers study should result in a plan that addresses the following elements:

1. A description of the study process and methodology.
2. An analysis of the study's major outcomes. In addition to addressing the major program goals of the Livable Centers program, the study should:
 - Address the potential for development at an urban and pedestrian scale that is supportive of multi-modal transportation in the project area.
 - Address the consistency of the project with local planning efforts and show the commitment and ability to implement the proposed study results through an implementation plan.
 - Demonstrate the continuity of the project area's street network and connectivity to other centers as well as the impact on pedestrian/bicyclist safety.
 - Demonstrate how the project will facilitate a range of transportation modes.
 - Demonstrate how the project will facilitate or incentivize a balance of development options and land use types for residents of multiple age groups and economic levels within the project area.
 - Demonstrate how the project will strengthen community identity in the project area through use of compatible, quality architectural and landscape design and preservation of significant historic structures and/or natural features.
 - Demonstrate coordination with stakeholders.
3. Maps and supporting graphics to demonstrate study outcomes, including but not limited to existing and future land uses, existing and proposed transportation facilities, street design and pedestrian improvement cross-sections, and parking plans.
4. A fiscal feasibility analysis of the plan's recommendations and a proposed implementation plan, including:
 - A description of transportation infrastructure investments (i.e. Livable Centers implementation projects) that will support the goals of the study. Description should include proposed project scopes, cost estimates, and priority.
 - An analysis of the potential market feasibility of the proposed projects including an analysis of the area's demographics, major trip attractors within the area, current state of development in the area, an estimation of future development in terms of gross floor area and the level of current and future transit service.
 - Identification of leveraging of public and private investment and any potential partnerships for implementation of identified goals and projects.
 - Identification of any policy changes or changes in codes/ordinances needed at the local level to accomplish the goals of the study and complete the implementation plan.
 - A description of the public participation process and stakeholder participation and support.

Please note that not all studies will address all elements. H-GAC staff will work with the project sponsor to determine the appropriate plan inputs.

Livable Centers Implementation Project: Requirements and Prioritization

Requirements for Eligibility:

- Projects should be identified in a Livable Centers planning study or be otherwise consistent with local comprehensive planning efforts. Sponsor must show that the proposed implementation project will be possible under existing codes/ordinances of the local government. Projects identified in a Livable Centers study implementation plan or a study meeting the minimum requirements of Livable Centers studies will receive priority.
- The project scope of work should discuss the larger planning vision that will be facilitated or incentivized in the project area through the transportation investments. Specifically the scope should discuss the types of development they hope to leverage/incentivize through the investment. The project sponsor should be able to document partnerships and/or potential investment by developers in the project area.
- The project should address how the transportation investment will support or generate more compact and pedestrian scale development.
- Ability to Implement: The project sponsor must be deemed able to implement the project. The ability to implement will be measured by the level of commitment demonstrated, including the sponsor's ability to successfully complete the project in the allocated time, stakeholder involvement, prior TIP implementation record, and projects, actions, or studies that have been undertaken in the project area to implement Livable Centers program goals.

Project Prioritization: In the event that multiple eligible projects are received in excess of available funding, implementation projects will be prioritized for funding according to the following factors:

1. **Project Impact (30%):** The potential impact of the project will be measured by:
 - **Density:** Project is located in an area that meets the minimum recommended activity density threshold per acre (determined by analysis of population and employment density based on center type) **or** the average floor area ratio of surrounding development meets minimum threshold.
 - **Transit:** Project is located within ¼ mile of current or planned bus service and/or ½ mile of current or planned rail service. (A sliding point scale is possible based on the total number of transit rides available per weekday). Projects that demonstrate a potential for future connection to a transit system, through density levels and transit supportive design, may also receive point consideration.
2. **Fulfilling Program Goals (40%):**
Create multi-modal travel choices by facilitating a range of transportation mode opportunities (20%):
 - Project improves connectivity with existing neighborhoods and developments, measured by the street grid density (in street centerline miles per square mile) or intersection density within a ¼ mile radius from the perimeter of the project site boundary.

- Project provides an accessible pedestrian/bicyclist environment, measured by pedestrian or bicyclist LOS (level of service) or pedestrian/bicyclist network gap coverage.
- Project improves pedestrian safety including providing sidewalks and crosswalks that meet or exceed minimum standards, reducing conflict points with vehicles, and/or reducing in risk or severity the number of auto/pedestrian crashes.

Create quality, walkable, mixed-use places (10%):

- Project utilizes best design practices for Livable Centers.
- Project engages the community.
- Project recognizes the tradition, character, and culture of the community.
- Project facilitates or incentivizes the revitalization of historic areas where they exist.
- Project facilitates or incentivizes housing serving a range of economic groups in the project area.

Improve environmental quality (5%):

- Project has quantifiable air quality improvements through reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) or changes in mode split.
- Project uses LEED ND standards for implementation.
- Project integrates green space and preserves natural resources.

Promote economic development (5%):

- Project efficiently uses existing infrastructure.
- Project has documented partnerships and/or potential investment by developers within the project area.

3. Cost Effectiveness (30%): Based on the potential impact of the project to reduce vehicle trips and the potential for development leverage, calculated by H-GAC according to the following methodology:

- Measure potential return on investment (ROI) in project area through a comparable benefits analysis showing the fiscal benefits of the potential investments and/or,
- The cost of the project will be compared with the anticipated benefits. Project benefit may be measured quantitatively in terms of VMT reduced (vehicle miles traveled) and/or change in mode split by the project investment.

Post Implementation Benchmarking: (To be conducted by H-GAC in coordination with project sponsor)

- Measure the impact of the project investments on the project area over time by tracking new developments through: building permits for new construction and rehabilitation, changes in residential and commercial square footage, property valuation, rental and lease price per square foot, demographic shifts and/or business start ups by size and type.
- Measure the impact of the project investment on transportation by examining before and after mode share, average VMT in project area, and pedestrian/bicyclist safety levels.