

Creation of High Capacity Transit Task Force for the Long Range Transportation Plan

Background

Although the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) envisions reconstruction and capacity improvements to many of the region's thoroughfares, freeways and toll roads, future growth and the resulting travel is expected to surpass our ability to meet regional mobility needs by relying solely on increased roadway capacity.

The current RTP includes future high capacity transit investment in a few major transportation corridors. Although the RTP is a financially constrained plan, only limited funding is available early in the RTP for construction and operation of additional high capacity transit projects. As a result, the RTP does not contain a broad, long term consideration of high capacity transit as a solution to current and future congestion issues in our region.

Task Force Charge

As part of on-going work for the next RTP, staff recommends the Transportation Policy Council create and participate in a Task Force charged with investigating the need and opportunity for high capacity transit in the Houston-Galveston region.

Building on previous planning work performed by H-GAC, METRO, the Gulf Coast Rail District and others, this Task Force would be charged with addressing the following questions:

1. What is the importance of high capacity transit to the region's future? How will it support regional mobility, growth and quality of life?
2. What current and future travel corridors would benefit most from new high capacity transit services?
 - a. Which of these are likely to have benefits in excess of their expected construction, operations and maintenance costs?
 - b. Apart from development costs, what other factors may constrain or enhance the opportunity for development of high capacity transit services regionally or within specific corridors? Factors to be considered may include: right of way constraints/opportunities; environmental constraints; impact on adjacent communities; opportunities for Private/Public partnerships; and, vehicle automation.
3. What are the opportunities to obtain additional federal, state or other funds that could be used to develop and sustain high capacity transit projects? Case studies should be developed which examine: the role of state, federal, local and private investment; proposed local funding mechanisms; and how community and state legislative support was created.
4. Develop recommendations regarding high capacity transit recommendations for the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan as well as coordinate with regional transit authorities on long range planning efforts and funding opportunities.

Work Product and Time Frame

The findings and recommendations of the Task Force shall be summarized in a report to the Transportation Policy Council and considered in the development of the Regional Transportation Plan. The work of this Task Force will commence during May 2017 and should be completed by the end of August, 2018.

Task Force Composition

The High Capacity Transit Task Force should be directed by a chair and two vice-chairs appointed by the Transportation Policy Council. The three task force officers should be TPC members representing:

- transit providers,
- the City of Houston, and
- residents of the region outside of the City of Houston.

Membership to the Task Force will be extended to every TPC member and transit provider. Other potential key stakeholders may be invited to participate as members based on the concurrence of the three task force officers.

Task Force Support

H-GAC staff will provide staff support to the Task Force. The work of the Task Force will enhance but not replace the efforts of the Technical Advisory Committee and its relevant subcommittees which will make critical contributions to the work of the Task Force.

As this effort is intended to inform and be informed by the work of transit providers, local governments and TxDOT, H-GAC will seek the collaborative, active participation of planning staff from these agencies in the development of information supporting the Task Force charge.