

Public Meeting Oral Comments

I'm going to read what I wrote and I've adjusted some things as I've listened to other people. But my name is Karen Loper. I am on the Board of Directors of the International Management District which takes in businesses and neighborhoods in the area called Alief. But more importantly I've been a resident of Alief for over 40 years. I'm talking about in favor of the project 300489, the IMD Bikeway. We are an underserved community. We've said that for years to everybody who will listen to us but I'm going to give you one example. On the City of Houston web site on the list of parks, every park in the city of Houston, we have four parks in Alief. That's 1 percent of the total parks in the entire city. The proposed hike and bike trail that we are in support of would develop direct access to three of those parks in one county regional park. Let me give you an example of why this is important. Hackberry Park is at the west end of the proposed hike and bike trail. It has a splash pad, it has exercise equipment, it has a community building among other amenities. But none of the parks east of it have those facilities. So if people live east of Hackberry Park, they have to get in a car, drive down Bellaire or Beechnut and then Dairy Ashford, three of the busiest streets in our whole community. And what about the people who do not have cars or have access to cars all the time? They're going to walk down to three of the busiest streets in Alief or ride their bikes. And many of our places don't -- many of those areas don't have sidewalks so it is a real problem, it's a safety problem. And so I believe that the trail will allow safer and quicker access to Hackberry Park; and conversely, the people who are at Hackberry or live in that immediate area and they want to go to Art Storey Park, Beltway 8, they can walk down the trail and be right there instead of fighting with the traffic on Bellaire and the Beltway to get to Art Storey Park. You're not going to send children on their bicycles to compete with Beltway traffic to get to that park. I looked at your scoring and we scored zero in barrier elimination. And I submit that there are barriers other than freeways, major streets, bayous, et cetera. Heavy traffic is a barrier for many people. Providing direct access to four parks, each of which has different and limited facilities is removing barriers for a lot of people. If you -- if they live east of Hackberry Park and want to go to a splash pad, the only place they can go is Hackberry. If they can just jump a trail and either ride their bicycles or walk as a family down to that park, it's a lot safer and it's a removed barrier for them. We have an awful lot of people who do not have multiple cars or maybe even one car in their family. They live in apartments and they are--they're just challenged so many ways and we need to provide them access to our parks as well as all of our other families. So it also would make accessing those parks safer by keeping those same people and the children off of unsafe roads. We scored low in safety too. I think that's a safety issue. I also see that we got a zero in facility connections and this is the one that puzzles me the most. And I've heard seen some explanation about what facilities are. Well, having a proposed trail does connect what few--and I want to stress few--facilities we have. Our parks, our library, goes by many of our schools, not to mention in the middle of neighborhoods. Those -- those are what we have. We don't have a huge number of facilities to connect to, just a straight line, and I think it would have a huge impact. Not having this trail means that the entire Alief area will not be linked. I keep hearing the word "linking" as to other trails. We won't be linked to anything. This would get us linked to the Bayou Greenway Project and the West Chase Trail. We would have some place to go. We could go all over the city virtually. But not having it will keep us having no trails and we have virtually no trails now.

Karen Loper (public meeting, 8-11-15)

My name is Natali Hurtado and I'm the Director of Services for the International Management District. I'm here to strongly advocate for the international hike and bike trail that would run from Art Storey Park to Dairy Ashford. This trail is a much needed amenity in the Alief area because as it stands, the community is scarce with regard to green space in comparison to other parts of Houston. The International District has worked throughout the years to see this project come to life. In these years we have worked with multiple community partners, the Alief Super Neighborhood, apartment complexes, social organizations and business owners, all of who feel that the hike and bike trail would complement all of our efforts in trying to revitalize the Alief area. We truly feel that our District is a unique part of Houston and we seek any opportunity to showcase it. By getting this hike and bike trail underway, it will allow for our area to be connected regionally to the greater system of trails that the City of Houston has

promoted successfully. The Alief community is an area in which walking and biking is a major mode of transportation since many of the residents do not own their own vehicle. I can't tell you how many times I've come across elders attempting to utilize a traffic congested roadway as a walking path to get to their area of interest. By bringing a trail to the area, it would help those very same people get to where they need safely. Additionally, many of our area youth walk to school on the busy roadways. This too can help eliminate dangerous scenarios a child may encounter in their route to school. I'll end by emphasizing that the Alief area has been overlooked for many years with regard to these major hike and bike projects. We too want to have a resource for our residents to live healthy, active and safe lives within their community. In supporting this project, you will allow us to get one step closer in making Alief and the International District an area that is great to live, work, and play.

Natali Hurtado (public meeting, 8-11-15)

My name is Francisco Garcia, Program Director with Texans That Gather and a long-time resident of the Alief community. The reason that I'm here today is to speak in support of the International District hike and bike trail that would run across the community of Alief. There's several reasons why but I'm not going to go too far into detail. I work primarily with apartment complexes setting up resource centers. One of the things that we do recognize is that children usually use these main streets, high traffic areas to cross -- get to and from school. But along the way, you have several parks that are between their schools. And being able to connect to hike and bike trails would provide children a safer access to being able to get to school, get to a local park, encourage family participation of wellness and exercise if you have a hike and bike that runs right through the back of their neighborhood. Also primarily to provide more access and opportunity for healthier living in our community. As mentioned before, we are very limited in some of the resources that we receive in our community. Also interested in finding out with H-GAC what are the things that you do look at. And for us, rating a zero, what is it that the community will need to do to start to ask the right questions or hold the folks that make these decisions accountable and responsible to make sure that we get some dollars into our district? So I vow to be able to come and get more informed but not only that, bring this information back to the community so that -- as you see, five or ten show up. Next time you'll see 15, 20, maybe 30 and 40, so that we can really stress to H-GAC that we really need this funding in our community. So I look forward to learning more and I look forward for y'all seeing our presence a lot more.

Frank Garcia (public meeting, 8-11-15)

I'm here in support of 300489. I'm the Executive Director of the International Management District. We're not just a stakeholder. We are a funding partner on this project. In case anybody wanted to know that, we are a major match donor of this project. I'm not going to lament the issues of the past. It is very frustrating to have a project that has not changed in four years that was ranked very high because of all the things that have been said here today and because of all the things that it is. There's no question it is an underserved area, it is a trail that's much needed, it would be the only trail in the whole Alief area. I'm talking about 59 to West Park to Highway 6 to the Beltway. That is 21 square miles. No trail. There's something wrong with that. We've put all this initiative into the Greenway Projects. And Andy Icken and I have always lamented -- and I've talked to Joe about this -- the fact that everybody has to get into a car and drive to Art Storey Park. Why can't they walk there? Or the other people, why can't they walk to Hackberry or walk up to the brand-new, soon-to-be-built \$40, \$50 million Alief community center and library. This will connect to it. So there's something wrong here in the scoring because it doesn't match up. How does a project like this that has not changed, that scored high, was funded -- and we're not going to get into why it didn't happen at the City -- but now we've come today with the same project and it scored low, almost to the bottom. There's something not right in the exercise of the scoring system that makes absolutely no sense. And that's where I'm coming from. This does not make sense.

David Hawes (public meeting 8-11-15)

My name is Kevin Kebede. I'm the Executive Director of the YMCA of Greater Houston, Alief location. I'm here in support of the International Management District by ways, all of the points that some of my colleagues have made, I echo and also would like to emphasize the fact that there is an opportunity to leverage property investment as well on this project as well as the gentleman that spoke earlier. Any opportunity that we have to eliminate (inaudible) in our community or in our city, we want to take advantage of those. Being someone that runs a youth serving organization, one of the few in our service area, our facility is overrun with opportunity to develop youth. And I think that opening up the greenways and access to the greenways will give our students, 50,000 students worth in our very small condensed community, more access to safe space that they can use to develop and grow.

Kevin Kebede (public meeting, 8-11-15).

And we all know what it's going to be, it's the International Management Trail Project. This project is crucial to the Parks Department, it's crucial to this community and this neighborhood. This project was on-line, as David mentioned; through various reasons we lost it, we're back again. It connects three parks, as we talked today, it puts us from Hackberry, takes us down past Alief, which will have a connection up to it, it takes us then to Boone, it takes us into Art Storey. Once we get into Art Story, that park picks and that's part of the BG2020 project and that project takes us all the way up Brays one way and all the way down the other way. It's a crucial connection for us. It connects us to an elementary. I don't know how we missed points in this process and how we don't understand the value of this trail project and what it does for the Alief community. The Alief community, we never say park poor, we say has a need for parks. But this one has the potential to connect three parks, which is pretty amazing, with a fourth connection that is coming out of the BG2020 to take it up, as you heard, up to Alief on purpose. And Alief has a process where we're looking at re-envisioning a health center, a new library in the area, and also a home community--new community center. It's a huge piece of this small piece of city but has very few resources.

Joe Turner (public meeting 8-11-15)

Comments Received Via Email

As a Hastings High alumni and a long time resident of Alief, I think it'd be awesome and really hope that we will have a 2 mile hike and bike trail built along Alief. I believe this will bring positive growth to the area and help raise the value of the community which I strongly believe we need. For over a decade, I have watched businesses grow all along Bellaire and Beechnut. During the weekends, Houstonians from all across come to Bellaire to visit the Asian markets, restaurants and bakeries. Alief is growing to be more than just a tourist attraction for foodies and we should help nurture Alief to the future it may bring.

Tara Le-Nguyen; Vivien Sugar

Please approve the hike and bike trail project. In a nutshell, the Alief area has been waiting too long for a trail to be brought to our community. We are an area in which greenspace is scarce and we have no connectivity to the regional transit and trail system. Alief would benefit greatly from this public hike and bike trail. Kids would have somewhere to go besides the streets, and it would move Alief in the right direction to get people moving and healthy.

Katie Grothaus

Please continue to support this project. It is greatly needed in the Alief area. It would increase property values and provide access to recreational area for youth.

Peggy Peranen; Lynn Brielmaier; Bob Andrew