



Houston-Galveston Area Council's

VISION FOR TOMORROW

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What is Vision for Tomorrow?

Vision for Tomorrow provides a guiding framework for the region based on emerging issues, opportunities, trends, and local values. The vision represents a shared ideal for how the region could function in 2035, moving beyond jurisdictional boundaries and encompassing the needs of rural, suburban, and urban areas alike.

Achieving the vision requires the cooperation and participation of all levels of government, numerous public and private organizations, and individuals across the 13-county area. The Houston-Galveston Area Council's mission is to serve as the instrument of local government cooperation, promoting the orderly development of the region and the safety and welfare of its citizens. Vision for Tomorrow helps guide these partners by identifying specific priorities, actions, and available tools that can move the region toward its desired goals.

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How to read Vision for Tomorrow.

The document is organized into four topic areas: Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, and Quality of Life. Each topic area is presented with a unique set of challenges and opportunities. However, we must consider them together rather than in isolation because we find the most opportunity for progress when we can see the interconnections between the topics.

Each topic area includes the following information:

Challenges and Opportunities

A description of key issues that should be addressed and, conversely, the opportunities presented by such issues.

Priorities

The most critical initiatives for achieving the vision.

Action Steps

Specific strategies that communities can pursue to make measurable progress toward achieving the vision.

Transect

Photos from the region's "transect" demonstrate how various issues and strategies can be addressed throughout the diverse areas of our region—from small towns and rural areas to dense urban centers, and everything in between. These photos appear across the top of each main topic page.

H-GAC Tools

The document concludes with specific strategies and implementation tools available through H-GAC in the areas of finance, policy and plans, and information and training.



The Houston region contains a rich array of ecosystems that attract an equally diverse group of plant and animal communities. Numerous species inhabit these ecosystems, from the Prairies and Piney Woods to the Coastal Wetlands. Just as wild species have made this place their home, people from around the world have continually sought out the Houston region as a desirable place to live. While our environment is ideal for building communities and supporting economic activity, there is also great benefit from leaving key areas in their natural condition. Erosion control, water filtration, pollution clean-up, and habitat space for plants and animals are basic functions of land that serve both humans and wildlife.

**Natural
Environment**



The residents of the H-GAC region have the freedom to enjoy a remarkable diversity in their natural environment, their recreational pursuits, their jobs, and their homes. Newly-built suburban developments, farm and ranch houses, multi-family structures, beachfront villas, and vintage Victorian homes are just a few of the residential building types that people call home. Whether living in a new or older home or in a rural or urban area, all residents expect access to basic utilities and services. By planning these services on a regional scale, we can ensure efficient water supply, waste disposal, and transportation systems to benefit every household. Even with a wide variety of residential living choices across our region, we can plan for all areas to receive adequate levels of public services.

Built Environment



The Houston-Galveston region is privileged to have a diverse economy that fuels the growth of the area. From the region's ports, which serve as our gateway to the rest of the world, to the energy industry, which keeps us running, to our medical community, which tends to our health—our region is home to industries providing a solid foundation allowing other economic sectors to thrive. Continuing our region's economic success in an increasingly competitive global economy requires careful planning, programs that train local workers, and investments in our region's quality of life to attract talented workers from other areas.

Economy



In the region's center, the Houston Grand Opera gives a world-class performance to an inspired audience. An hour away, hundreds gather in a small town to celebrate the local culture and abundance of a farmers' market. This rich diversity offers residents and visitors the opportunity to pursue a variety of activities that create a high quality of life. Though residents of the region have different ideas about the specific elements contributing to a high quality of life, most will agree that it starts with safe neighborhoods, good schools, and access libraries, public facilities, and medical care.

Quality of Life

MORE THAN

80%

**of population growth
is expected to occur
outside of Beltway 8.**

Forecasters expect the 13-county H-GAC region to grow by 3.5 million people from 2005 to 2035.* That is like adding the population of the City of Los Angeles to the region. This dramatic

growth presents both challenges and opportunities. How will growth and demographic trends impact the natural environment, the built environment, the economy, and our quality of life?

*Forecasts used in this document are from the 2035 H-GAC Regional Growth Forecast unless otherwise noted. H-GAC serves a 13-county region for non-transportation regional planning and serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation planning in the 8-county region. Thus, some transportation data is available only at the 8-county level.

Natural Environment

Residents, governments, and businesses increasingly recognize the centrality of the natural environment to our region's overall quality of life. Taking steps to reduce the impact of the region's growth on natural resources and wildlife habitat will become increasingly important as the region's built footprint continues to grow. Green building, energy conservation, low impact development, and the use of best management practices will help in these efforts.

Land Use and Housing

As the baby boomer population ages, our region will see an increase in the number of older residents. This will require careful planning to ensure that there is adequate access to health facilities and other resources. Our region's changing demographics will result in more demand for areas that provide access to employment centers, retail choices, entertainment facilities, and transit options.

Transportation

With the expected population growth there will also be a significant increase in the number of vehicles on our roadways. Our region cannot build itself out of traffic congestion and will need to expand the focus on alternative strategies, such as reducing the extent of driving by bringing jobs and homes closer together and providing alternatives to driving alone, such as transit, ride-sharing, bicycling, and walking.

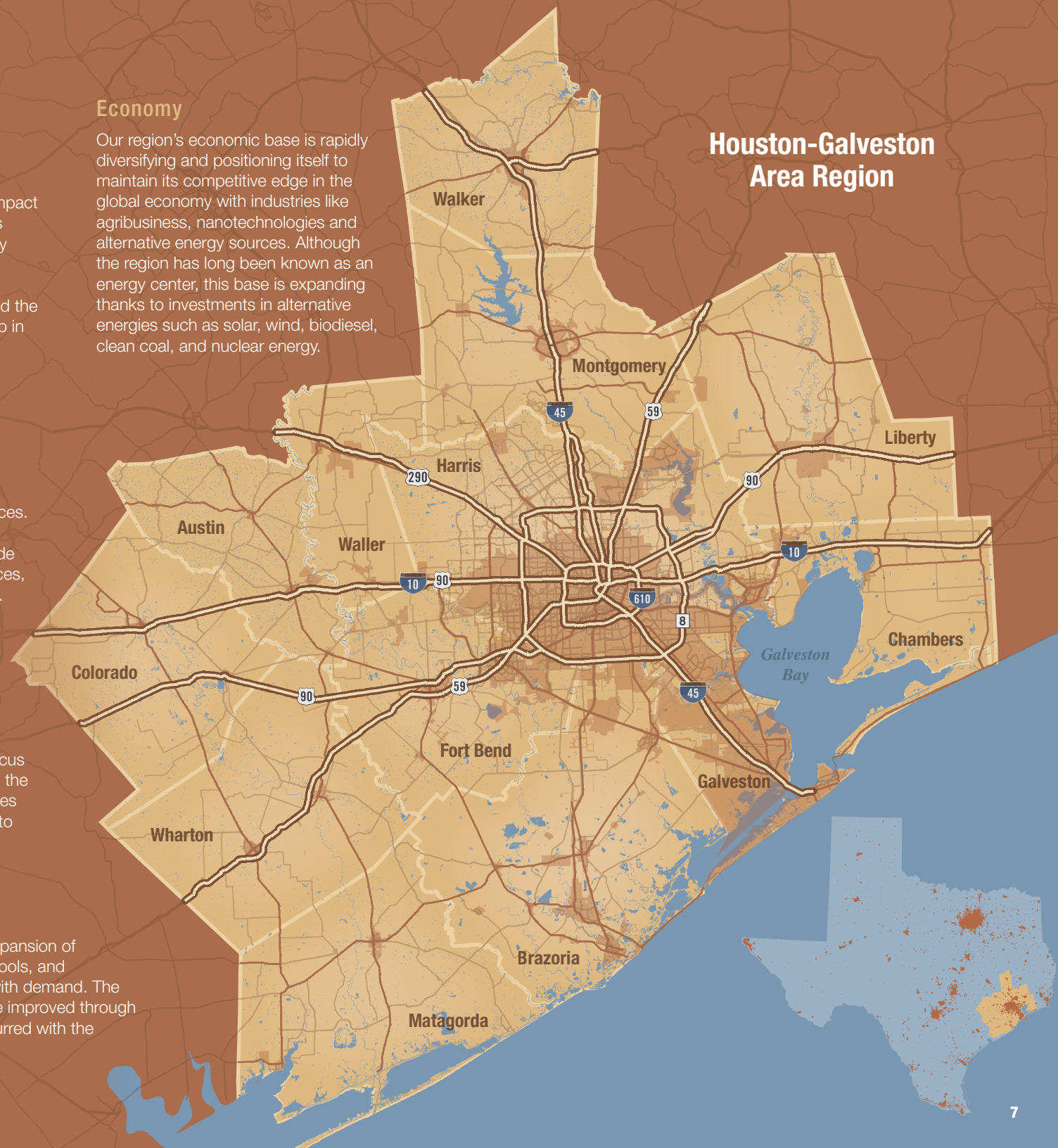
Infrastructure and Facilities

Our region's growth will necessitate the expansion of infrastructure, including roads, transit, schools, and wastewater treatment plants to keep up with demand. The efficiency of some types of facilities can be improved through regionalization, as has largely already occurred with the region's solid waste landfills.

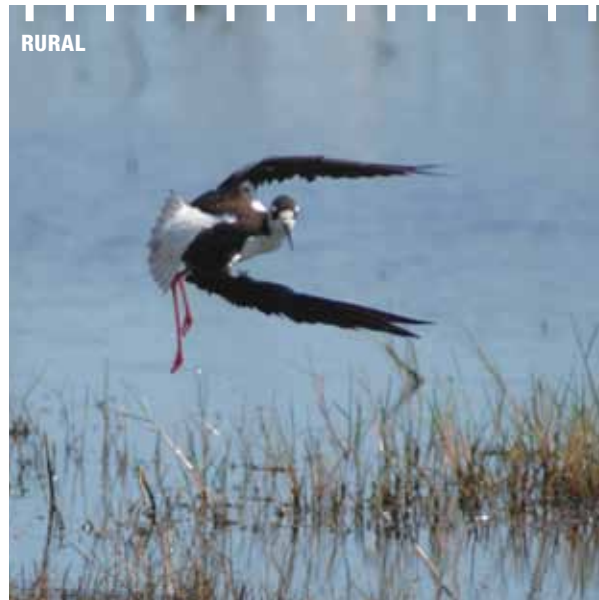
Economy

Our region's economic base is rapidly diversifying and positioning itself to maintain its competitive edge in the global economy with industries like agribusiness, nanotechnologies and alternative energy sources. Although the region has long been known as an energy center, this base is expanding thanks to investments in alternative energies such as solar, wind, biodiesel, clean coal, and nuclear energy.

Houston-Galveston Area Region



The region's inland and coastal water resources support recreation, tourism, industry, and commercial fishing, while also providing ecological and aesthetic benefits that enhance our quality of life.



Nature Preserve



Detention Ponds

Natural Environment

WATER & AIR

Combining regulations and best management practices helps to control many problems that can degrade water quality or reduce water availability. Our air quality affects the health of plants, animals, and people. Forty-nine million people use our airports each year, and we can estimate that on any given day we will drive almost 155 million miles on our region's roads. The Port of Houston is the second largest in the country, and our region is home to 13.5 percent of the nation's refining capacity. While this is a testament to our achievements, this economic activity also results in air quality challenges. Innovative solutions must be created to effectively manage our water and air resources and improve the quality of life for our citizens, both environmentally and economically.

Challenges & Opportunities

Water Quality

- **Challenge:** Insufficient staff and resources exist for maintenance of sanitary and storm sewer systems, as well as monitoring and enforcement of associated discharges.
- **Opportunity:** Local governments have the opportunity to enhance current practices through public participation, such as water quality monitoring and reporting.
- **Challenge:** The water quality benefits provided by wetlands and other riparian habitats are lost when these habitats are developed.
- **Opportunity:** Education about water quality benefits of these habitats can lead to additional efforts to protect, create, and restore wetland habitat.

Water Supply

- **Challenge:** Cost and environmental considerations make it increasingly difficult to build new reservoirs for expanded surface



Bayous



Flood Control



Rain Garden

water supply and distribution. Groundwater is constrained by subsidence concerns.

- **Opportunity:** Local governments can expand programming and public education to implement water conservation and water recycling practices more widely across the region.

Flood Risk Reduction

- **Challenge:** The rainfall volume in the region requires significant land resources to store and carry flood waters.
- **Opportunity:** Joint use of drainage facilities for recreation and water quality features can provide necessary infrastructure and also quality of life benefits.
- **Challenge:** The region is vulnerable to hurricanes and tropical storms, as well as localized flooding from heavy rain.
- **Opportunity:** Recent hurricanes and tropical storms provide an opportunity to develop and rebuild communities that are better able to sustain themselves during future storm events.
- **Challenge:** The region's wetlands, which provide valuable flood protection, are being lost, both through natural and man-made processes.

- **Opportunity:** Increased awareness regarding the ecological benefits of wetlands, including flood protection, can help increase protection of this environmental resource.
- **Challenge:** As growth continues and the extent of impervious surfaces increases, the risk of flooding may also increase.
- **Opportunity:** The region has an opportunity to employ best management practices, such as low impact development and restoration and protection of wetlands, which may minimize the impact of increased flooding.

Air Quality

- **Challenge:** Though sources of air pollution fall into three categories—stationary, area, or mobile—H-GAC only has authority to help with mobile sources through voluntary programs.
- **Opportunity:** There are a variety of strategies that can significantly reduce mobile sources of air pollution including HOV lanes, arterial traffic flow improvements, park and ride lots, transit infrastructure and service improvements, bicycle facilities, ridesharing, and clean vehicle programs.

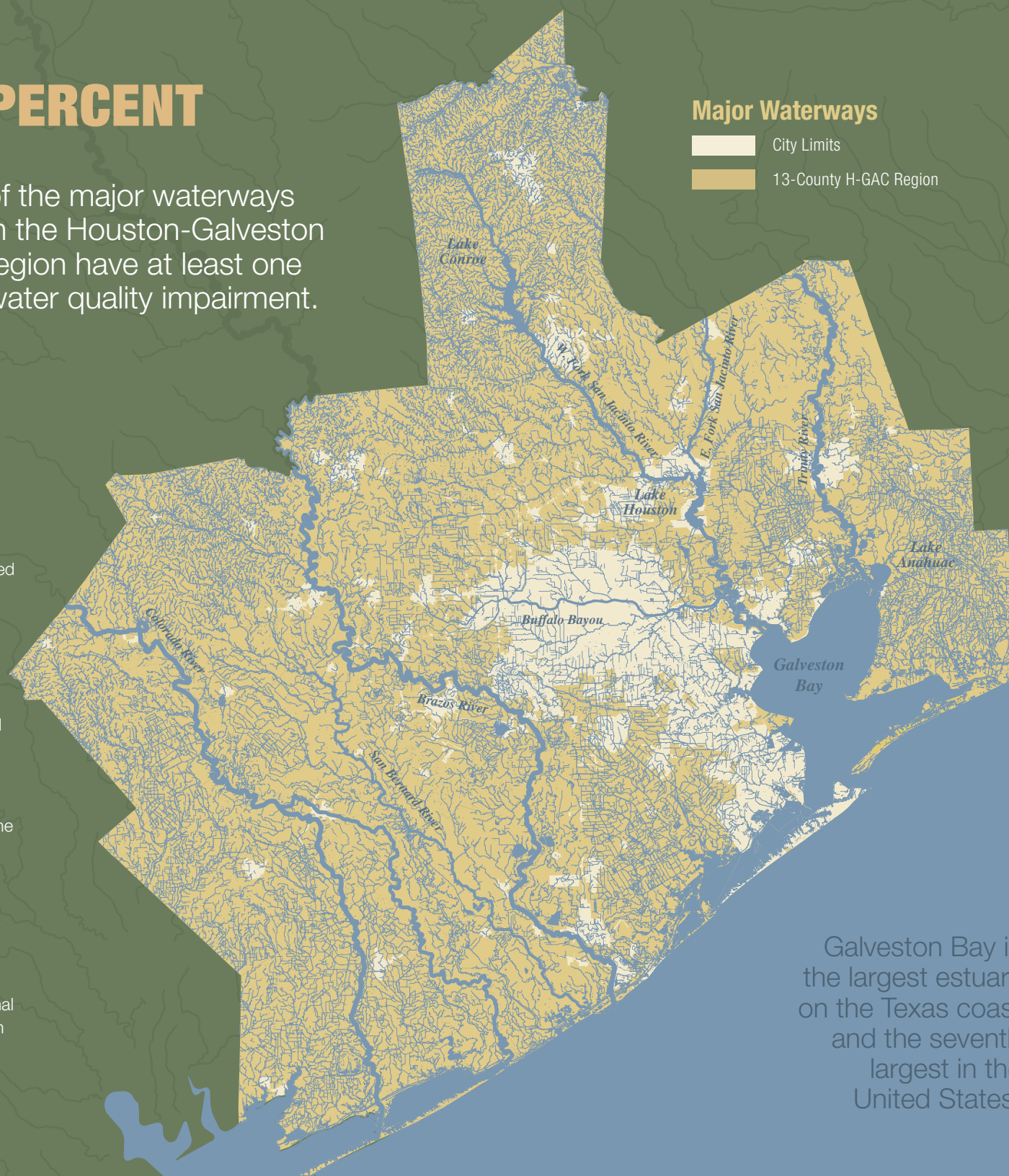
82

PERCENT

of the major waterways in the Houston-Galveston region have at least one water quality impairment.

FACTS

- From 2009 to July 2010, H-GAC's AirCheckTexas program repaired and replaced 14,000 polluting vehicles.
- 82 percent of the major waterways in the Houston-Galveston region that have at least one water quality impairment.
- Despite improved technologies in identifying flood risk, approximately one-third of flooded homes are outside the regulatory floodplain affecting homes that do not have flood insurance.
- 496,000 additional residents living in hurricane evacuation zones by 2035.
- 1,311,000 additional residents living in floodplains in the 8-county area by 2035, which will necessitate additional storm water infrastructure.
- 269,107,500 additional gallons of water will be used in the region each day. This additional water usage will also require the construction of new wastewater treatment plants. The number of new facilities required will vary greatly depending on their capacity.



Galveston Bay is the largest estuary on the Texas coast and the seventh largest in the United States.



Priorities

- Achieve and maintain safe and clean waterways.
- Ensure a sustainable water supply for the region's needs.
- Encourage use of best management practices and low impact development techniques in floodplains.
- Invest in necessary storm water infrastructure that both manages flood risk and creates recreation opportunities.
- Work toward safe and clean air, even with rapid growth.
- Broaden availability of funding for regional flood control measures.

Action Steps

Water Quality

- Prioritize impaired waterways to focus resources and future studies.
- Develop standards for proper maintenance of sanitary and storm sewer systems.
- Promote the use of source protection techniques, such as wellhead protection areas and watershed management.
- Implement stricter permit controls and pollution prevention best management practices for streams with elevated bacteria levels.
- Protect, create, and restore wetlands.

Water Supply

- Provide support to communities in coordinating long-range water supply planning.
- Create community awareness and education programs that promote water conservation and rainwater harvesting.
- Invest in infrastructure and develop incentives to utilize greywater for appropriate uses, such as irrigation.
- Protect recharge zones, water sources, and riparian and wetland buffer areas.

Flood Risk Reduction

- Utilize land use planning and best management techniques, such as low impact development, to reduce potential for flood damage.
- Strengthen and enforce local ordinances to regulate land use and construction in flood-prone areas.
- Educate floodplain administrators about incentives that exist for improved floodplain management through the National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System.
- Improve coordination among drainage districts and floodplain administrators and help create appropriate entities where they do not exist.

Air Quality

- Reduce emissions from on-road mobile sources.
- Plant and preserve trees for shade and pollutant removal.
- Utilize alternative transportation and trip reduction programs to reduce traffic congestion and vehicle emissions.
- Encourage land use patterns that reinforce walking, bicycling, and transit use.

As the region's population and economy evolves, providing reliable and affordable energy supplies will be important.



Conservation Area



Recreation

Natural Environment

LAND & ENERGY

Our region encompasses many different ecotypes, including tidal wetlands, bottomlands, other riparian areas, coastal prairies, water bodies, upland forests, agricultural lands, post oak savannah prairies, and protected lands/parks. These ecotypes provide value to the communities within our region. Therefore, it is prudent that we manage growth to protect our landscapes and ecological integrity. By safeguarding and preserving these natural features, open spaces, and agricultural lands, we benefit from wildlife habitat, economic opportunities associated with farming and tourism, flood control, pollution prevention, and recreational opportunities. Innovative waste management practices can help preserve and restore the land and help to prevent nonpoint source pollution.

In addition, our region's ample natural resources allow us to develop a broader energy portfolio. The H-GAC region has a great assortment of energy options available to power its future, including renewable energy alternatives such as solar, wind, geothermal, and biofuels.



Tree Planting



Community Garden



Green Roofs

Challenges & Opportunities

Resource Conservation

- **Challenge:** Relatively low landfill tipping fees, compared to other parts of the U.S., often eliminate financial incentives to find alternative uses for recyclable materials.
- **Opportunity:** With regional coordination, local governments can pool their recyclable materials to create a viable market within the area.
- **Challenge:** Infrastructure for handling special waste (household hazardous waste, used electronics, tires) does not exist in all parts of the region, and there are many underserved areas.
- **Opportunity:** Communities throughout the region have the opportunity to anticipate future growth and plan for solid waste facilities that will provide safe and convenient access for citizens.

- **Challenge:** Growth in previously undeveloped areas may jeopardize environmental resources that provide a variety of ecological and quality of life benefits to the region.
- **Opportunity:** Preservation of high-priority environmental resources, in conjunction with growth in areas already served by infrastructure, can help the region grow in a more sustainable manner.

Energy

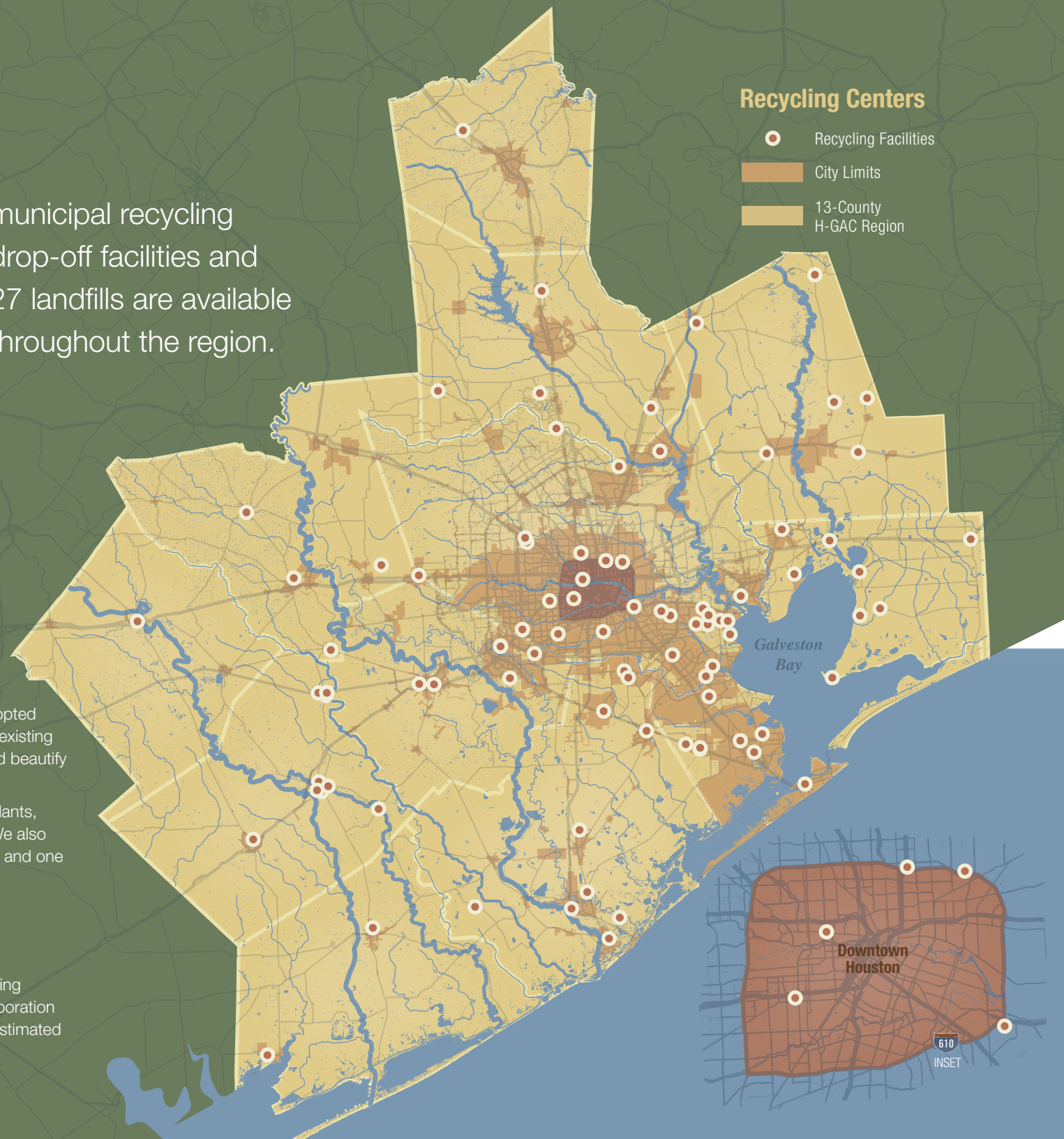
- **Challenge:** There is a geographic disconnect between areas where energy is produced and areas where energy is needed.
- **Opportunity:** As energy options expand, the region can consider prospects for local production, including biofuel, wind, or solar.
- **Challenge:** Developing renewable energy sources can adversely affect the natural and built environments, including visual impacts and potential disruption of bird migration.
- **Opportunity:** The H-GAC region has the potential to develop renewable energy sources in an environmentally-sensitive way to serve as a model for other parts of the state and nation.

MORE THAN 80

municipal recycling
drop-off facilities and
27 landfills are available
throughout the region.

FACTS

- Within the H-GAC region, 21 cities have adopted tree and landscaping ordinances to protect existing trees, increase the number of new trees, and beautify their communities.
- The region hosts five large-scale biodiesel plants, including two of the largest in the country. We also have more than nine fossil fuel power plants and one nuclear power plant.
- Plans are in place to develop clean coal and cellulosic ethanol facilities, and expand the Matagorda nuclear power facility.
- In 2010, H-GAC conducted energy purchasing through the H-GAC Energy Purchasing Corporation for over 200 local governments, saving an estimated \$58 million.





Priorities

- Conserve natural resources and create a sustainable future.
- Preserve high priority environmental resources.
- Reduce energy consumption.

Action Steps

Conservation

- Elevate natural resource protection as a key criterion for site selection in development planning.
- Adopt local government zero-waste policies by 2035.
- Develop incentives that encourage the development of infill sites rather than greenfields.
- Implement a Buy Recycled policy.
- Promote paper recycling and disposal of household hazardous waste and used electronics.
- Utilize recycled materials as an alternative to other materials.
- Reinvest in existing recycling infrastructure.

Preservation

- Re-develop closed landfills for recreational spaces.
- Implement local development regulations, especially to protect valued resource areas.
- Identify high priority environmental resources for preservation.

Energy

- Create community awareness and education programs that promote responsible energy decisions.
- Adopt ordinances and building codes that require and reward energy efficiency.
- Increase awareness of renewable energy options.

The way we use our land directly impacts our daily lives and how we are able to utilize our infrastructure.



Agriculture



Traditional Main Street

Built Environment

LAND USE

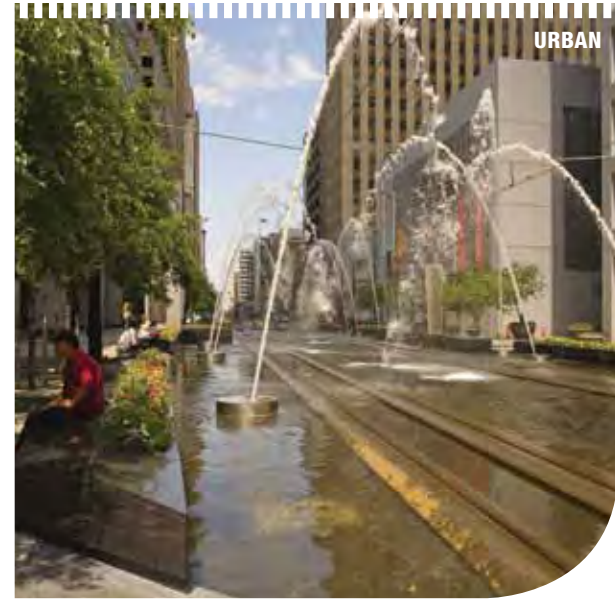
Whether we're preserving agricultural land to produce local food for the region or adding homes to major employment centers to improve the jobs-to-housing balance, the pattern in which we build on and use our land will be a key to sustainability. Building in areas that are already served by infrastructure—also known as infill development—can reduce costs to government. Local governments can also invest in and encourage the development of Livable Centers, which are safe, convenient, and attractive areas where people can live, work, and play with less reliance on their cars.



Planned Communities



Mixed Use



Urban Center

Challenges & Opportunities

- **Challenge:** Low-density development patterns leave few alternatives to driving cars. Retrofitting to improve connectivity and allow for alternate travel modes can be expensive.
- **Opportunity:** Demographic trends suggest that a larger share of future housing demand may be satisfied through infill, mixed-use, or transit-oriented developments.
- **Challenge:** A large share of the region's growth is occurring in areas that have minimal land use and planning tools available.
- **Opportunity:** Coordination among developers, neighboring cities, and county officials can help ensure that growth in these areas is efficient and ties into existing or planned public utilities and infrastructure, including wastewater treatment plants and waste disposal facilities.
- **Challenge:** There is a perception that larger lots and single-family homes are preferable to mixed-use developments and increased density.
- **Opportunity:** Education about the trade-offs of different development types and technical assistance in appropriate siting can accommodate preferences for a wide variety of development patterns.
- **Challenge:** As growth pushes the boundaries of urban development outward, agricultural land, open space, and other natural resources may disappear.
- **Opportunity:** Growth in rural areas presents opportunities to foster local economic development, which can be balanced with programs to strategically preserve ecologically-significant lands.

40 PERCENT

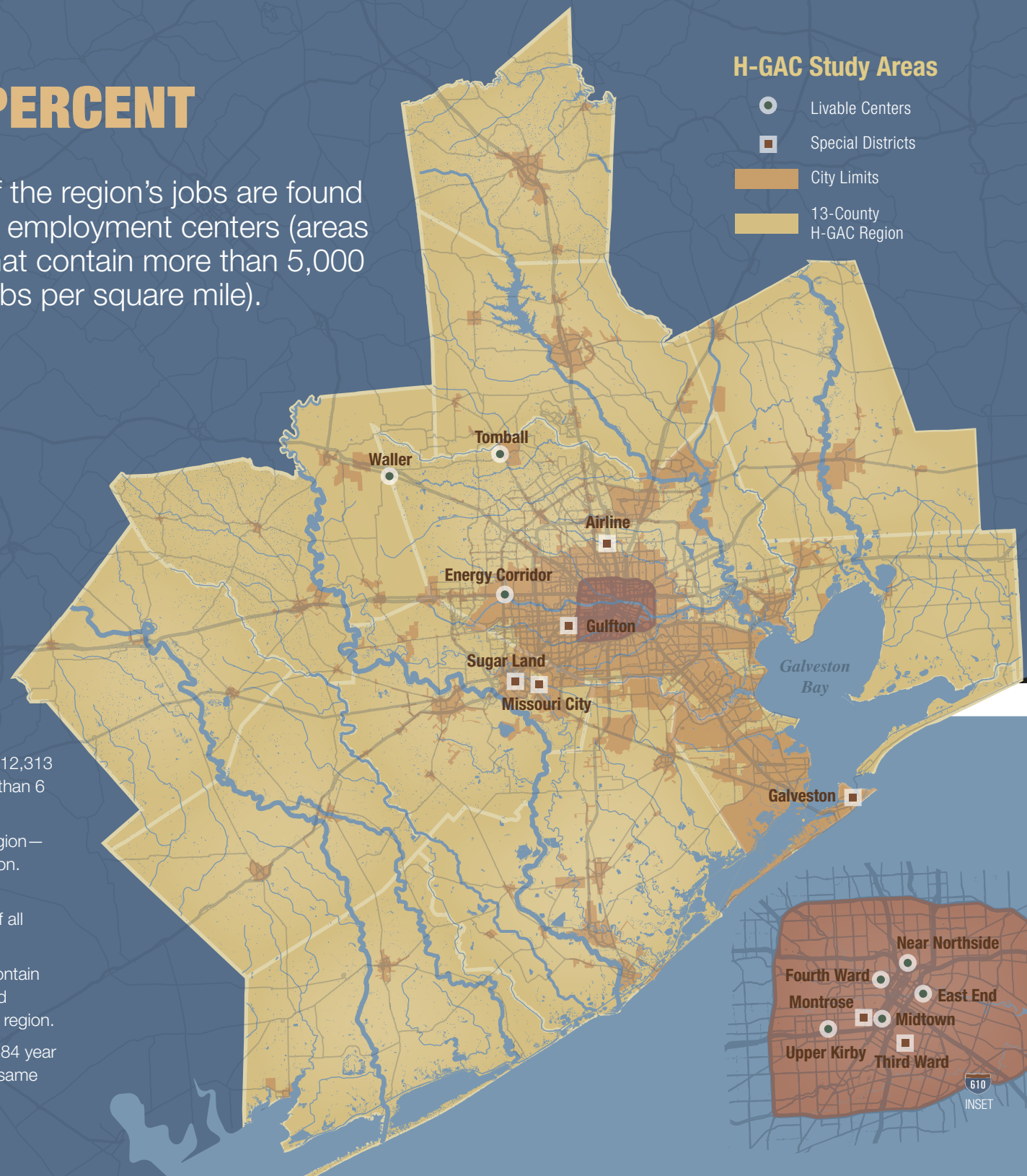
of the region's jobs are found in employment centers (areas that contain more than 5,000 jobs per square mile).

FACTS

- The 13-county H-GAC region covers over 12,313 square miles of land and is home to more than 6 million people as of 2010.
- There are 134 incorporated cities in the region—home to 58% of the region's total population.
- 306 square miles of currently undeveloped land that will be developed by 2035, 4% of all remaining undeveloped land.
- Five of the region's employment centers contain more than 20,000 jobs per square mile and account for more than 250,000 jobs in the region.
- 272% growth rate from 2007-2035 for 80-84 year olds in the region. 24% growth rate in the same period for 35-39 year olds.

H-GAC Study Areas

- Livable Centers
- Special Districts
- City Limits
- 13-County H-GAC Region





Priorities

- Create attractive, walkable, mixed-use places.
- Reinvest in existing downtown areas and other pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.
- Encourage development patterns that support walking, biking, and transit for daily trips.
- Preserve green space, agricultural lands, and sensitive ecotypes.
- Adopt policies to encourage a range of housing types to meet the diverse preferences and needs of all residents.
- Increase the efficiency and safety of utilities and infrastructure.
- Educate citizens and developers to accommodate changing land use preferences.

Action Steps

Forecasts

- Ensure land use forecasts reflect changes in demand for detached single-family housing.

Funding

- Leverage public investments in infrastructure and streetscaping to serve as a catalyst for private investment and development.

Livable Centers

- Encourage local jurisdictions to adopt policies and ordinances that promote well-designed, walkable, mixed-use places.

Transportation

- Coordinate land use planning with transportation project planning, including light rail lines and other non-auto investments.

Downtowns

- Identify incentives that local jurisdictions can provide to spur infill development, redevelopment, and reinvestment in downtown areas.

Changes in land use and community design can reduce automobile dependency by making some trips possible by walking, bicycling, or transit and by improving accessibility to jobs, homes, and services.



Rural Highways



Recreational Trails

Built Environment

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a basic component of our everyday lives, allowing us to get to work, school, home, and all activities in between. The ability to get around (mobility) and to reach our desired locations (accessibility) are key contributors to quality of life, and mobility issues consistently rank high on the list of concerns for people in the H-GAC region.

Widely scattered destinations—the prevalent development pattern in the Houston-Galveston region—reduce overall accessibility and require many people to devote more time to commuting and other trips. Satellite cities, town centers, and mixed-use developments enhance accessibility by bringing various destinations and services together.



Park and Ride



Pedestrian Activity



Light Rail

Challenges & Opportunities

- **Challenge:** The regional growth forecast shows demand for vehicle travel will double by 2035. Additionally, the movement of goods may triple in volume during this same period.
- **Opportunity:** Reducing the demand for vehicle travel requires shifting strategies from policies and investments that primarily accommodate expanded vehicular travel to those that seek to provide more—and practical—alternatives to vehicle trips.
- **Challenge:** Traditional transportation finance mechanisms are eroding. Meanwhile an ever increasing share of available funding is needed just to maintain the current system.
- **Opportunity:** A greater emphasis on land use planning, subregional planning, and coordination may be more cost efficient and yield development outcomes that more closely align with the region's vision.
- **Challenge:** High fuel costs, plus safety and air quality issues increase the need for creative solutions to mobility challenges.
- **Opportunity:** Shifting variables will encourage local jurisdictions and regional agencies to work together more closely to use resources efficiently. Ideally, this collaboration will produce lasting partnerships and joint solutions that will strengthen the region's commitment to transportation innovation and excellence.

64

PERCENT

increase in bicycle
lane miles by 2035.*

FACTS

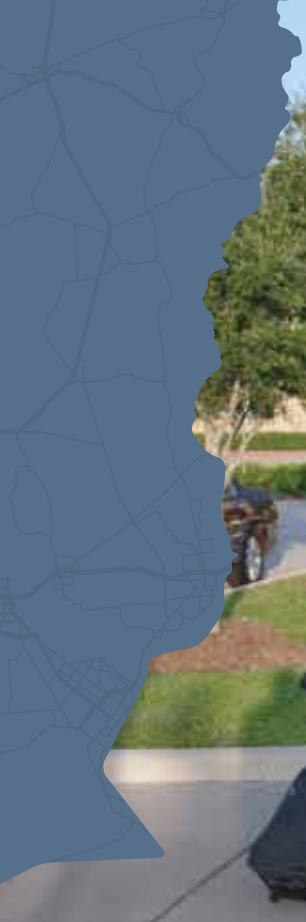
- The current 8-county transportation system includes 947 miles of bikeways, eight miles of light rail, 149 miles of HOV and managed lanes, and 24,035 lane miles of highways and roads.
- Approximately 1.8 million vehicle trips are made in our region every day.
- Fixed-route and on-demand transit services are provided by seven entities in the region.
- Transportation is a major driver of the economy, with the ports being leading providers of jobs in the region. Transportation is also the number one household cost in the region.
- 3,962 new lane miles of projects identified in the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) update. In 2009 there were 24,035 lane miles in the 8-county region.
- 275,000,000 projected daily miles of travel in the 8-county region in 2035, a 72 percent increase from 2010 (166 million daily miles of travel).
- 40.7 percent of respondents to the 2010 Houston Area Survey would prefer to live in an urban, walkable neighborhood.
- 89 miles of fixed guideway transit contained in METRO's 2035 Long Range Plan.

*Anticipated

Regional Bike Routes

- Bike Routes
- Road Network
- City Limits
- 8-County H-GAC Region





Priorities

- Improve access to jobs, homes, and services.
- Increase transit options.
- Improve mobility and reduce congestion.
- Coordinate transportation and land use, increasing pedestrian and bicycle opportunities.

Action Steps

Multi-modalism

- Offer greater travel choices by promoting street connectivity, creating pedestrian and bicyclist facilities, and filling transit gaps inside and outside the METRO service area.

Mobility

- Support policies that reduce demands on the transportation system, especially peak period travel and single-occupancy vehicle trips.

Operation Management

- Maintain roadways, selectively increase road system capacity, and focus on operation management, such as traffic light synchronization.

Land Use

- Connect existing and planned centers and promote roadway designs appropriate for the context of the surrounding community.

Funding

- Align local plans and priorities with regional transportation funding.

Safety

- Promote access management measures along corridors to improve safety.

The region will need to ensure it has a skilled workforce to meet the changing demands of existing and emerging businesses and industry.



Farming



Education

Economy

More than 121,000 employers currently provide jobs for more than 2.2 million workers. With regional population forecasts showing a doubling of the workforce by the year 2035, we will need to recruit, retain, and expand industries and employers that provide quality jobs for the growing population.

To maintain a vital and sustainable economy in the future, the region must focus on recruiting and retaining a diverse suite of industries, which will strengthen our competitiveness in the global arena. Understanding our region's unique strengths, capitalizing on subregional economic clusters, and collaborating on workforce development are critical elements of enhancing our region's economic prospects and attractiveness for new investment.



Tourism



City Center



Medical Center

Challenges & Opportunities

- **Challenge:** Meeting the demand for skilled workers and a better educated workforce, coupled with the need to expand and upgrade facilities, such as ports, is a challenge for the industrial engines of the region, particularly manufacturing, health care, education, and petrochemical industries.
- **Opportunity:** By elevating quality of life as a fundamental priority, the region can remain competitive and attract the workforce needed to sustain the regional economy.
- **Challenge:** The region's economy will need to adapt to a world-wide transition toward alternative energy resources, such as fuel cells, wind energy, natural gas, and solar.
- **Opportunity:** The region's internationally-recognized energy sector is in a prime position to develop and export alternative energy products and technologies. Promotion of natural gas as an alternative energy resource is another opportunity.
- **Challenge:** The region's ability to sustain and grow a skilled workforce is compromised when school drop-out and performance rates exceed national levels.
- **Opportunity:** Decreasing school drop-out rates will not only create a high-quality future workforce but improve the quality of life in the region.

23

FORTUNE 500 FIRMS

headquartered in the Houston area.

FACTS

- Job growth affects the built environment. It takes:
 - 1.3 jobs to fill one housing unit.
 - 1 job to fill 300 square feet of office space.
 - 1 job to fill 500 square feet of retail space.
 - 1 job to fill 625 square feet of industrial space.
- 1.5 million new jobs that will be added to the region by 2035.
- Ship channel-related business supports more than 785,000 jobs in Texas, worth about \$118 billion per year.
- The H-GAC region ranks first in the nation in the share (37%) of earnings coming from self-employment.
- \$71 billion value of exports in 2008 from the Port of Houston, the second busiest in the nation.

Top 3 Employment Sectors by County Percentage

The solid bars identify the percentage of jobs in the largest employment sectors. The hollow orange bars represent the other sectors not included in the top three.





Priorities

- Support existing businesses and retain workforce.
- Grow a diverse economy and tax base.
- Raise awareness of the links between quality of life and the ability to attract and retain talented workers and leading-edge employers to the region.
- Foster and retain an adequate supply of well-educated and skilled workers.
- Coordinate economic development efforts in the region.
- Promote fuel flexibility.

Action Steps

Labor Demand

- Partner with the region's businesses, educational institutions, civic organizations, and community leaders to find solutions to current and future education and labor needs of the region's vital economic sectors.

Balanced Growth

- Promote rural economic development to ensure balanced regional growth.

Information

- Provide relevant economic and business data to support economic development activities.

Education

- Provide access to education and workforce training opportunities to all segments of society.

Infrastructure

- Provide adequate and reliable infrastructure (housing, transportation, energy, water supply, wastewater treatment, and waste disposal) to support emerging and existing economic sectors.

Regions perceived as having a high quality of life are able to attract jobs, people, and economic investment. Our development decisions can shape our communities, the local environment, and overall quality of life.



Historic Preservation



Farmers' Market

Quality of Life

Quality of life involves everything in our natural and built environments that contributes to our well-being, including access to safe neighborhoods, schools, parks, hospitals, cultural and recreational facilities, and social and emergency services. Quality of life is also about building good human relationships that value participation, communication, collaboration, and partnership.



Green Schools



Gathering Spaces



Performing Arts

Challenges & Opportunities

- Challenge:** Providing safe, affordable, and attractive housing for all residents is increasingly difficult, especially in rural communities where an adequate supply of workforce housing is essential to the local economy.
- Opportunity:** Providing quality housing that meets the needs of residents will improve quality of life and result in economic benefits to the community.
- Challenge:** As the baby boomer generation ages, local governments will need to provide quality aging services. Particular needs include a diversified housing stock and adequate health care facilities.
- Opportunity:** Investment in the services needed to support an aging population will provide economic development opportunities for communities.
- Challenge:** As development pressure increases in the region, natural resources and important historical structures are at a greater risk of being adversely impacted or lost entirely.
- Opportunity:** As more communities recognize the importance of natural and historic resources for quality of life, these assets will be identified as factors for promotion and preservation in long-range planning strategies.
- Challenge:** Even after the implementation of health reform through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, it is estimated that 600,000 persons in the Gulf Coast Region will remain uninsured.
- Opportunity:** Encourage development of primary care medical homes through multiple sources including private non-profit, governmental, and private initiatives.
- Challenge:** Costs for park development or enhancement can be expensive.
- Opportunity:** Many local governments in the region have passed parkland dedication ordinances that require developers to include park space in residential developments or pay a fee in-lieu to contribute to local parkland development. There may also be opportunities for flood management facilities to provide recreation opportunities.

MORE THAN





3,000

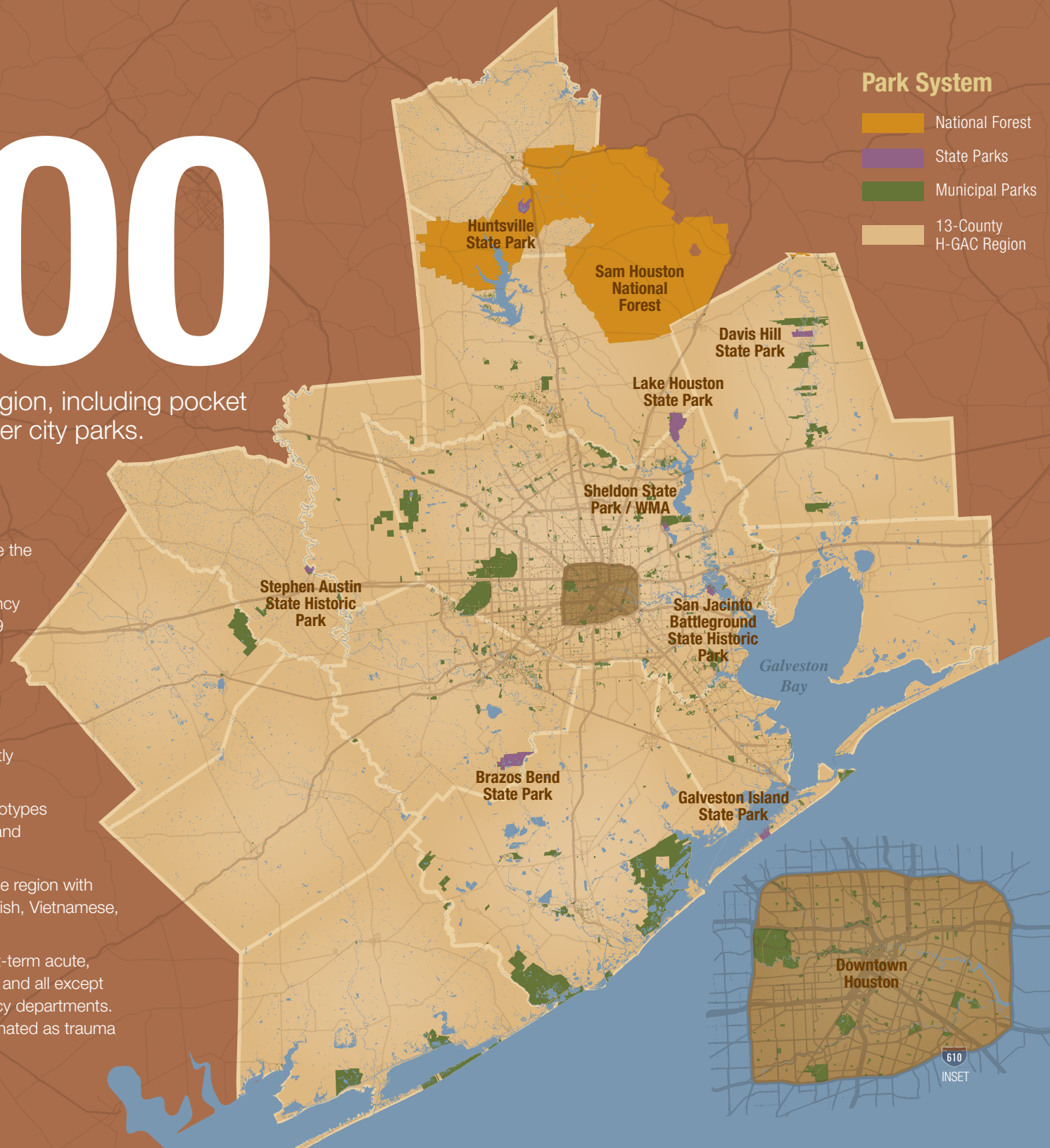
parks in the region, including pocket parks and larger city parks.

FACTS

- Approximately 80 9-1-1 EMS providers serve the entire region.
- In 2009, the Houston-Galveston Area Agency on Aging delivered 694,652 meals to 8,689 older Texans.
- In 2009, H-GAC provided more than 100,000 contact hours of law enforcement training to 2,800 peace officers.
- H-GAC's Workforce Services aims to directly place 47,500 applicants in jobs every year.
- The H-GAC region is home to 6 diverse ecotypes that provide green space, nature viewing, and recreation opportunities.
- There are over 150 languages spoken in the region with the primary languages being English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin Chinese, French and Urdu.
- The region is served by 126 (includes short-term acute, long-term acute and psychiatric) hospitals, and all except psychiatric hospitals have formal emergency departments. Of the 129 regional hospitals, 31 are designated as trauma centers (5 Level I, 12 Level III, 14 Level IV).

Park System

-  National Forest
-  State Parks
-  Municipal Parks
-  13-County H-GAC Region





Priorities

- Strengthen communities through greater emphasis on parks, services, and quality neighborhood design.
- Protect natural, historic, and cultural amenities.
- Plan effectively for growth and an aging population.
- Provide ready access to primary care and preventive health services for all people.
- Ensure that the region is adequately prepared for natural and man-made disasters.
- Develop strategies to proactively plan for increased open space and parks.

Action Steps

Historic Preservation

- Protect historic resources through creation of historic districts, preservation ordinances, and public/private partnerships.

Parks and Open Spaces

- Create park standards for new residential developments, requiring set-asides for future parklands. Encourage partners to collaborate on park and open space planning, including coordination with floodplain management agencies to take advantage of potential joint-use opportunities.

Aesthetics

- Create design standards and designate roads as scenic highways to protect views and limit visual degradation, for example, from sign proliferation.

Safety/Security

- Apply design principles in the planning process which emphasize safety.

Emergency Management

- Develop, execute, and evaluate regional emergency management plans and standard operating procedures.

Trauma/Health Care

- Coordinate emergency dispatch and response between jurisdictions.

Aging

- Provide housing and supportive services specifically designed for older residents.

Primary Care

- Promote workforce development and clinical sites for adequate and accessible primary and preventive health care.

H-GAC TOOLS

Through H-GAC's various programs, local governments have access to many tools that may benefit planning for future growth. The list organizes the tools for each main topic by funding opportunities, plans and programs, and information and training.

Natural Environment: Water and Air

Funding Opportunities

- Clean Cities/Clean Vehicles Program
- AirCheckTexas

Plans and Programs

- Clean Rivers Program
- Water Quality Management Plan
- Watershed Protection Plans
- Implementation Plans for Total Maximum Daily Load Studies
- Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Houston-Galveston Area Evacuation and Response Recommendation Report

Information and Training

- GIS Data Clearinghouse
- Texas Stream Team
- Clean Waters Initiative
- Regional Flood Management Handbook
- Technical assistance to local governments on flooding, stormwater management, on-site septic systems, and water quality management practices
- Commute Solutions

Natural Environment: Land and Energy

Funding Opportunities

- Community Trees Grant Program
- Solid Waste Management Grant Program

Plans and Programs

- Solid Waste Management Plan
- Energy Purchasing Corporation

Information and Training

- Shoreline Protection Ordinances
- Urban Forestry Program
- Cooperative Purchasing Services Program – HGACBuy /Green Procurement and Energy Purchasing Corporation
- Regional Recycling and Conservation Guide
- Eco-logical Regional Decision Support System
- Regional roundtables on environmental enforcement, recycling, and public outreach
- Regional contracts for household hazardous waste, electronic recycling and debris removal and clearance services

Built Environment: Land Use

Funding Opportunities

- Livable Centers Program
- Pedestrian/Bicyclist Special Districts Program

Plans and Programs

- Regional Transportation Plan
- Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan
- Subregional Planning Initiative
- Livable Centers Program

Information and Training

- Socio-Economic Modeling: Growth forecasts for population and employment
- GIS and Aerial Imagery: Land use and land cover data
- Technical assistance to local governments on visioning processes and long-range and strategic planning

Built Environment: Transportation

Funding Opportunities

- Transportation Improvement Program
- Clean Cities/Clean Vehicles Program
- Drayage Loan Program

Plans and Programs

- Regional Transportation Plan
- Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan
- Transportation Safety Program
- Livable Centers Program

- Houston-Galveston Area Emission Reduction Credit Organization
- Clean Air Action Program
- Regional Aviation System Plan
- Eco-logical Regional Decision Support System
- Subregional Planning Initiative

Information and Training

- Access Management Studies
- Mobility Studies
- County Transit Plans
- Commute Solutions
- Regional Commuter Rail Connectivity Study

Economy

Funding Opportunities

- Small Business Administration 504 Loan Program
- Downtown Public Spaces Grants
- Community Trees Grants
- Rural Enterprise Revolving Loan Fund
- Workforce Solutions

Plans and Programs

- Gulf Coast Economic Development District
- Houston-Galveston Area Local Development Corporation
- Workforce Solutions - Gulf Coast Workforce Board

Information and Training

- Regional Industry Cluster Analysis for the Gulf Coast Economic Development District
- Monthly Economic Digest

- H-GAC Regional Review Committee - Texas Community Development Program
- Workforce Solutions Education and Training and Provider Network

Quality of Life

Funding Opportunities

- Livable Centers Program
- Downtown Public Spaces Grants
- Community Trees Grants Program

Plans and Programs

- Area Agency on Aging Program
- Regional Health Services Policy Council
- Regional Criminal Justice Community Plan
- Homeland Security Program
- Transportation Safety Program
- Workforce Solutions

Information and Training

- Parks and Natural Areas Best Management Practices Recognition
- River, Lakes, Bays 'N Bayous Trash Bash®
- Sustainability Workshops
- Regional Law Enforcement Training
- Technical assistance to local governments on 9-1-1 and regional emergency communication, homeland security, and criminal justice planning
- Workforce Solutions Education and Training and Provider Network
- Web-based Park Locator Tool



As the region prepares for significant growth over the next several decades, the priorities and action steps highlighted in this document can **help local governments foster regional growth in a way that sustains the basic values we all share.**

While the document is divided into four elements (natural environment, built environment, economy, and quality of life), we hope it illuminates the benefits of a holistic planning approach that ties together all these fundamental traits of a successful region.

Bringing it all together. Galveston Bay

Galveston Bay offers a great example of our region's multi-faceted approach to managing a unique resource that benefits so many. This expansive and resilient bay is the largest estuary on the Texas coast and the seventh largest in the United States, making it a crown jewel of the area's natural environment. It supports recreation, tourism, industry, commercial fishing, and trade through shipping. At the same time, it provides substantial ecological and aesthetic value, which promotes a sustainable and healthy quality of life for residents both close by and many miles from its shores. Our region's built environment is also greatly impacted by the proximity of Galveston Bay, whether through the development of attractive communities nearby, the transportation and recreational paths that offer public access to it, or the infrastructure that is necessary to handle storm drainage and cleanse urban discharges into the bay. Significantly, the ecological value of Galveston Bay contributes directly to a vital economy when considering the array of jobs and businesses it supports, as well as eco-tourism and recreational pursuits that bolster local tax bases.



NEXT STEPS

With proper planning, the H-GAC region can enter the future with renewed vigor, ready to capitalize on fresh opportunities. Through partnerships and a commitment to translate plans into reality, our communities and the entire region can achieve the priorities presented in this report. We must be flexible enough to adapt in an environment that is constantly in a state of flux, while maintaining our region's vision for tomorrow.

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