

2018 TIP Call for Projects

Little White Oak Bayou Regional Greenway

Planning Factors Narrative and Planning Coordination

Oct. 26, 2018

7. Planning Factors - Barrier Elimination (Active Transportation) (Max 20 Points)

1. Does the proposed facility provide safe and convenient routes across barriers such as freeways, railroads, and waterways?

There are three major barriers separating the communities around the Little White Oak Regional Greenway project from surrounding resources: Interstate 610, Interstate 45 and Little White Oak Bayou. The bayou runs north-south paralleling highway I-45 for much of its course through the Near Northside and Independence Heights neighborhoods. I-45 is slated for expansion under the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP). The project will increase the footprint of the highway along Little White Oak Bayou and have negative impacts for the surrounding communities. Impacts include sound and air pollution as documented in TxDOT's Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The combination of the bayou and the highway make pedestrian travel from east to west difficult and force pedestrians to use heavily trafficked highway underpasses. These intersections can often be poorly lit and hard to navigate. Since I-45 is flanked by high-speed vehicular access roads, pedestrians must cross additional travel lanes before reaching safer sidewalks beyond.

The proposed greenway improves crossings of the highway in four key locations. The first is between Woodland and Moody Park. It will connect the residents of the Greater Heights area with Moody Park and tie into the existing White Oak Bayou Greenway to the south, facilitating pedestrian access to Downtown Houston. The second extends the greenway north of Moody Park and under I-45 at Patton Street.

The third key highway crossing is at the I-610 and I-45 interchange. This underpass is currently a bottleneck for floodwaters because Little White Oak Bayou is channeled in a culvert under the highway interchange. Providing better pedestrian access will be possible if TxDOT daylights the bayou. Daylighting the bayou and increasing surrounding detention as part of the NHHIP project would also alleviate flooding.

The fourth key connection improves the intersection of Crosstimbers Street at I-45. It connects the proposed greenway to the west of I-45, with the Northline Transit Center (TC) to the east. The Northline TC provides Red Line light rail service to Downtown Houston.

Because Little White Oak Bayou is heavily channelized with development closely adjacent, the greenway trail system crosses the bayou several times to take advantage of the available open space on either side. The proposal crosses Little White Oak Bayou providing safe access across the Bayou in 9 locations.

The proposed greenway provides public access to Little White Oak Bayou and provides over 11.8 miles of off-street greenways.

2. Does the proposed bicycle/pedestrian facility close a gap in the existing bicycle network that aligns with a regional bikeway?

Narrative, MAP: overview

The Little White Oak Bayou Regional Connector Greenway itself is a new regional bikeway. Furthermore, it connects to two existing regional bikeways: White Oak Bayou and Halls Bayou Greenways. It also closes two major gaps in the existing off-street bicycle network in Houston. To the north, the greenway connects to the existing Ella Trail, an off-street greenway that nearly reaches Halls Bayou. The proposal then completes that stretch of greenway after Ella Trail to meet Halls Bayou further north. To the south, the greenway reaches White Oak Bayou Greenway from Moody Park.

The Little White Oak Bayou Greenway is also shown in the *Houston Bike Plan (2017)* and the *Near Northside Complete Community Action Plan*. The proposed project provides four important connections to shared on-street bikeways planned in the *Houston Bike Plan (2017)* as short-term retrofit projects. These future connections occur at Cottage Street near Moody Park, at Stokes Street north of the I-610 interchange, at Deerfield Street near the Northline TC, and finally at Werner Street near Victoria Gardens Park. Other minor connections provided in the *Houston Bike Plan* include the existing Enid Street dedicated on-street bikeway segment, the planned dedicated on-street connection at Patton Street, and the planned shared on-street bikeway connector to Kerr Park.

The Little White Oak Bayou Regional Connector Greenway provides a north-south route that better connects the larger network of bikeways planned on either side of I-45 and I-610.

8. Planning Factors - Expands or Improves Bicycle & Pedestrian Connectivity to Employment/Schools/Medical Facilities/Transit Stops/Other Points of Interest (Max 50 Points)

1. Does the facility directly connect to or within 1/4 mile of employment?

The proposal increases access to employment within ¼ mile through three strategies. The first is to connect to the existing and planned pedestrian greenway infrastructure that provides access to Downtown Houston. The proposal expands the Little White Oak Bayou Greenway segment from Moody Park to Woodland Park, explored in Houston Park's Board *Little White Oak Connectivity Study*, which connects to White Oak Bayou Greenway.

The second strategy connects pedestrians directly and within ¼ mile walking to commercial corridors with Metro bus service. These commercial corridors include Irvington Boulevard, Crosstimbers Street, North Shepherd Road and East Tidwell Road.

The third strategy is to connect to two transit centers: North Shepherd Park and Ride and the Northline Transit Center. These connections facilitate additional access to jobs across the city via bus and light rail.

2. Does the facility directly connect to or within 1/4 mile of a school or university?

Narrative, MAP

The proposal connects to 5 Houston ISD schools within ¼ mile walking distance: Martinez Elementary, Jefferson Elementary, Roosevelt Elementary, Head Start Academy, and Wesley Elementary. Roosevelt Elementary school includes a vanguard magnet program and Head Start Academy hosts grades 6-8. Jefferson elementary is also a SPARK park which allows afterhours access to play areas for surrounding residents.

The route also helps broaden access to other academic resources such as University of Houston Downtown, Houston Community College on the other side of the Northline shopping and transit center, and AVANCE-Houston, the non-profit job training center located on the western side of I-45 (pending its relocation due to the NHHIP).

3. Does the facility directly connect to or within 1/4 mile of medical facility?

Narrative, MAP

The proposal is within ¼ mile of the United Memorial Medical Center on West Tidwell Road, the North Shepherd Health and Wellness Center, National Intervention Radiology Partners, and MD Family Clinic. It also reaches a number of local clinics and practitioners within a ½ mile walking distance. These include Fulton Medical Clinic at Fulton and Irene Street and Thomas Street Health Center at Thomas and Paschall Street in Near Northside.

4. Does the facility directly connect to or within 1/4 mile of Transit Center or Transit Stop?

Narrative, MAP

Along the length of the greenway, the project connects directly to two transit centers: North Shepherd Park and Ride and Northline Transit Center. At the Northline Transit Center, the red line light rail provides frequent service to reach Downtown Houston and destinations along Fulton Street in Near Northside. The project also connects to bus lines with route numbers 26 Kuykendahl-Greenway Plaza-Uptown, 27 W Bellfort-Westwood-TMC, and 56 Scott, 23 Clay W 43rd, 79 W Little York, 40 Telephone Heights, and 45 Tidwell. The greenway is within a quarter mile of many stops along these Metro bus lines providing opportunities to access jobs and resources throughout Houston.

5. Does the facility directly connect to or within 1/4 mile of other points of interest?

North of I-610, the proposed greenway is within ¼ mile of Stuebner Airline Park and Lincoln Park and Community Center in Acres Home, Victoria Gardens and Kerr Park north of Independence Heights, and McCullough Park on East 40 ½ Street in Independence Heights. South of I-610, the project reaches Moody Park and Community Center as well as Woodland Park and White Oak Bayou Greenway further south. Moody Park includes a swimming pool, gymnasium, weight

room, and numerous sports fields. Increasing pedestrian access to larger parks provides more equitable distribution of public open space in this area of Houston.

Little White Oak Bayou Greenway will be an extension of Houston's open space network. In conjunction with the expansion of I-45, there will be opportunities for expanded greenways and additional park space along the trail. The importance of expanding green spaces in Houston is explored in depth in *Beyond the Bayous (2017)*. Connecting to parks and community centers helps residents gain access to park program that their neighborhood park might not offer such as a swimming pool or soccer field.

The project also provides ¼ mile access to approximately 5 places of community worship, and multiple local restaurants, grocery stores and banks. White Oak Music Hall is also adjacent to the Little White Oak Bayou Greenway.

Planning Factors - Planning Coordination (Max 10 Points)

1. Is the proposed project recommended in a regional/sub regional/or locally adopted plan including regional thoroughfare plans? Or Has the sponsor conducted interagency coordination with other local or state agency affected by the proposed project?

Beyond the Bayous, Near Northside and Acres Home Open Space and Connectivity studies, Houston Bike Plan

The Little White Oak Bayou Regional Connector Greenway was identified in the *Beyond the Bayous* study conducted by the Houston Parks Board with a generous grant from Houston Endowment. It is part of the *Beyond the Bayous Regional Connector Network of Greenways* that is being submitted by the Houston Parks Board for the H-GAC 2045 Regional Transportation Plan. It was also identified in the *Near Northside Open Space and Connectivity Study* and the *Acres Home Open Space and Connectivity Study* carried out by the Houston Parks Board. The Little White Oak Bayou Greenway is also part of the *Mayor's Complete Communities Near Northside and Acres Home Action Plans* and the *Houston Bike Plan*.

The Houston Parks Board has been involved in the development of the NHHIP through the Coalition to Make I-45 Better. The Little White Oak Bayou Greenway has been presented to TxDOT as one solution to help mitigate the negative impacts of the highway expansion. The project has also been discussed with the Harris County Flood Control District.

Planning Factors - Emissions Reductions (Kgs/Day) (Max 10 Points)

1. Please provide the air quality improvements (estimated NOX kgs/day) the proposed facility provides.
2. Please provide the air quality improvements (estimated VOCs kgs/day) the proposed facility provides.

Template

Planning Factors - Environmental Justice (Max 10 Points)

1. Is the proposed project located in or is adjoining an environmental justice sensitive area (census block groups) identified by HGAC?

Maps: environmental justice sensitive areas

The project is located in a number of environmental justice (EJ) sensitive areas as described in the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) "Environmental Justice" report and Executive Order 12898. All census block groups along the proposed route are minority communities. Many census block groups within this area have "secondary" indicators of disadvantage. These include the following factors: high concentrations of senior population, limited English proficiencies or "LEP" population, zero car households, female headed households, and limited educational attainment or "LEA" population. There are also a number of census blocks with disabled populations along the Port Regional Connector Greenway. The map provided shows areas of particularly high concentrations of environmental justice populations by census block group.

The project intends to serve these communities by increasing their access to education, jobs, recreation and transit. It addresses the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) fundamental principles on environmental justice by encouraging healthy environments and increasing access to social and economic resources from minority and low-income neighborhoods.

- a. If Yes, Will the project incorporate measures that reduce, minimize or avoid adverse effects environmental justice sensitive areas (census block groups) identified by HGAC?

Narrative

Locating active transportation projects in environmental justice areas benefits these populations. Instead of providing potential barriers for pedestrians and bicyclists like most traditional roadway projects, they provide additional support and connectivity to resources. The greenways will be ADA-compliant and aide pedestrians seeking an alternative to personal vehicular use. H-GAC's Environmental Justice Report (2017) stated "only 5% of the regional network of pedestrian-bicyclist infrastructure are within EJ (Environmental Justice) zones described as having "high disadvantage." The Little White Oak Bayou Regional Connector Greenway helps Houston better balance the distribution of pedestrian infrastructure. This enables equitable access to recreation, education and jobs to historically underserved communities.

The project also mitigates impacts caused by past infrastructure projects and the historic lack of investment in pedestrian infrastructure in low-income and minority areas. It overcomes many barriers that have isolated these neighborhoods such as major roads, bayous and railroads by making safe connections across them.

References:

Draft Environmental Impact Statement North Houston Highway Improvement Project, Houston District. April 2017. By Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). http://ih45northandmore.com/draft_eis.aspx

Environmental Justice. 2017. By Houston-Galveston Area Council. <http://www.h-gac.com/taq/title-vi/documents/Environmental-justice-HGAC-2017.pdf>

Houston Bike Plan, 2017. City of Houston Planning & Development Department, Department of Public Works & Engineering and Houston Parks and Recreation Department. <http://houstonbikeplan.org/documents/>

Acres Home Complete Communities Action Plan, 2018. City of Houston https://www.houstontx.gov/completenesscommunities/docs_pdfs/AH/acres-home-cc-action-plan.pdf

Near Northside Complete Communities Action Plan, 2018. City of Houston https://www.houstontx.gov/completenesscommunities/docs_pdfs/NN/near-northside-cc-action-plan.pdf

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Acres Home Open Space and Connectivity Study, 2018. Houston Parks Board <https://houstonparksboard.box.com/s/5s3zy7cni9t9robbluw42cp2k5ir13od>

Little White Oak Bayou Connectivity Study, May 2017. By Riverview Foundation and Houston Parks Board.