

## 2018 TIP Call for Projects

### Houston Parks and Recreation Department / Houston Parks Board

#### West Side / Westpark Regional Connector 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?

##### *Narrative*

The major barriers in the communities surrounding West Side / Westpark Regional Connector Segment include two major highway intersections. The first is the I-69 and I-610 interchange. These roadways make it difficult for pedestrians to navigate between the neighborhoods of Gulfton, Bellaire and Uptown. To the west, I-69 crosses over the Westpark Tollway near the Hillcroft Park and Ride. Here, pedestrians must navigate the expansive underpass on narrow sidewalks which run along a depressed roadway. Today, the METRO easement along Westpark Tollway acts as an informal footpath for nearby residents in Gulfton to access the Hillcroft Park and Ride. However, pedestrians must climb guardrails, walk through brush and cross unmarked intersections to use the right-of-way. This perceived lack of safety and accessibility is a secondary barrier for community members, particularly residents with disabilities or travelers with small children. The proposed network provides a shared-use greenway along this corridor that improves these highway interchanges, while leaving ample space for future METRO use. It also provides pedestrian improvements at the eight intersections along the route providing safer connections across the tollway.

Another barrier between the City of Bellaire and West University Place is the CenterPoint corridor that runs from Richmond Avenue to Brays Bayou together with the adjacent railroad. The powerlines and railroad restrict pedestrian access between local neighborhood networks to the east and west. Three roadways intersect with the powerline corridor: Bissonnet Street, Bellaire Boulevard, and Beechnut Street. These roadways offer limited sidewalk access between neighborhoods. The proposal uses the established agreement with CenterPoint Energy to add a public shared-use trail along this corridor. It includes providing pedestrian improvements at the roadway intersections. To the north, it connects to the Uptown TIRZ project that creates trails on the CenterPoint easement from Memorial Park south to Richmond Avenue. It addresses the existing barrier by turning it into a community asset and important corridor in Houston's active transportation network.

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

##### *Narrative*

The *Houston Bike Plan* (2017) identified the use of the CenterPoint corridor from Memorial Park to Brays Bayou as a future project and “Key Connection” in Houston’s bikeway network. This off-street greenway provides a safe route for cyclists of all levels of experience to reach recreation opportunities in Memorial Park and along the existing Brays Bayou Greenway. The *Houston Bike Plan* also identified the Metro right-of-way along Westpark Tollway as a future project and “Key Connection” in the bikeway system. These segments are portions of the longer regional, off-street greenway corridors proposed in The *Houston Bike Plan* as well as the Houston Parks Board’s long-term proposal for the Beyond the Bayous Regional Connector Network of Greenways.

In addition to realizing portions of the regional off-street network, the plan also links with *Houston Bike Plan*’s future dedicated on-street bikeways at Westward Street and Newcastle Street in Gulfton. The connection to the future bikeway on Westward Street would facilitate access to Houston’s Southwest Multi-Service Center via another future bikeway on High Star Drive.

#### **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?

*Narrative, MAP*

The commercial corridors along Bellaire Boulevard in Bellaire, Sage Road in Uptown and Richmond Avenue near Upper Kirby are reached within ¼ mile of the proposed Greenway. These corridors are serviced by METRO bus lines that connect residents to employment along the route. The greenway also connects to the existing Hillcroft Park and Ride and the future Bellaire Uptown TC. These transit hubs facilitate access to job centers around the city of Houston via express and local bus service.

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

*Narrative, MAP*

One school is reached within ¼ mile walk from the proposed greenway segment. The route connects to Amigos Por Vida or Friends for Life Charter School on El Camino Del Rey Street in Gulfton via the Westpark Metro right-of-way. There area multiple schools within ½ mile of the greenway.

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

*Narrative, MAP*

Twelve Oaks Hospital located at 4200 Twelve Oaks Pl. off Richmond Avenue, and Memorial Hermann Orthopedic and Spine are within ¼ mile walking distance from the proposed shared-use greenway trail. The greenway provides pedestrian access to these hospitals from the densely populated Gulfton neighborhood which does not have a hospital within the

neighborhood's boundaries. It also provides access within 1 mile of other local pharmacies and clinics.

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

*Narrative, MAP: transit*

The project connects to the existing Hillcroft Park and Ride and the future Bellaire Uptown Transit Center, both at the north end of Gulfton. Along the proposed route, pedestrians have opportunities to reach transit stops located within a ¼ mile walking distance along the larger commercial corridors that intersect with the CenterPoint and Westpark rights-of-way. These routes include the Kuykendahl-Greenway Plaza-Uptown Park and Ride route, 33 Post Oak route, and the Bellaire Quickline. At these intersections wayfinding and pedestrian infrastructure is provided to aide pedestrian access to nearby bus stops.

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

*Narrative Other categories for community destinations with ¼ mile walk are parks, community centers, churches, grocery stores, banks, and restaurant / retail areas.*

The greenway system is a linear extension to Houston's parks and open space network. Reaching larger destination parks via the greenway system is an important component to increasing equitable recreation opportunities across the region. The project directly connects the Brays Bayou greenway, with its 30 miles of parks, trails, and amenities including the Texas Medical Center, Texas Southern University and the University of Houston. It also connects to Memorial Park via the Uptown Management District partner trail. Direct local park connections include the Danny Jackson Family Bark Park, Mulberry Park, and Lafayette Park. Evelyn's Park is within ¼ mile walking distance from the CenterPoint Energy greenway segment. The West University Place Recreation center is also adjacent to the proposed trail.

The project also connects within ¼ mile to the Walmart Supercenter off South Rice Avenue. The trail connects to other local groceries along the route, approximately 4 places of community worship as well as banks and restaurants near the Walmart and on Bellaire Boulevard.

### **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?

The West Side / Westpark 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 for the H-GAC 2045 Regional Transportation Plan. It was also identified in the *Gulfton Open Space and Connectivity Study*, and the *Mayor's Complete Communities Gulfton Action Plan*.

The Houston Parks Board is currently building a trail in a different segment of the same CenterPoint corridor identified for this project from Sims Bayou Greenway to Airport Boulevard. This project will be carried out under the same agreement with CenterPoint, and a letter of support from CenterPoint is provided. The project has also been discussed with METRO and Harris County Toll Road Authority.

#### **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. The majority of these EJ communities are located in census block groups within the Gulfton neighborhood.\* 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. Census block groups with concentrations of these "secondary" factors of disadvantage in addition to minority and low-income populations within ¼ mile of the greenway include Census Tract 421201 Census Blocks 2 and 3, Census Tract 421102 Census Blocks 1 and 3 and Census Tract 432701 Census Block 1. 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 making more equitable access to education, jobs, recreation and transit. In particular, the greenway connects these communities to the closest transit center (Hillcroft) and provides greenway connections to adjacent communities with additional employment opportunities such as Uptown and Bellaire. 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 in minority and low-income neighborhoods.

\* Areas Outside the City of Houston were not considered in the EJ analysis.

- 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 West Side / Westpark 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. Increasing the off-street pedestrian routes available and bolstering pedestrian protection at key intersections will help reduce the safety concerns in these EJ communities.

#### References:

*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/>

*Gulfton Complete Community Action Plan*, 2018. The City of Houston. <http://www.houstontx.gov/completemunities/gulfton/>

*Gulfton Open Space and Connectivity Plan*, 2018. Houston Parks Board. <https://houstonparksboard.box.com/s/hwoeowzgt4h9lurkvxjzyg8afw178nj9>

*Beyond the Bayous*, 2017. Houston Parks Board. <https://houstonparksboard.box.com/s/2pbf5fxnpro5uivlabxdzn6044ekrx0d>