



C.H.O.I.C.E.S. for TRANSPORTATION

Connecting Houstonians On Issues Concerning
Effective Solutions for Transportation

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Transportation is about choices. Houstonians should be able to choose between driving on uncongested highways and traveling on efficient mass transit, including buses, commuter rail, and light rail. Those who wake up in Spring Branch or Clear Lake should have the option of reaching Downtown Houston, the Medical Center, Greenway Plaza, or the Galleria with or without their cars. The challenge is enabling people to travel into and out of the city efficiently; and, once there, enabling them to move easily among employment, retail, and entertainment centers.

Houston is at the center of our region's unprecedented growth, leading the area into a new era of opportunity and prosperity. However, more jobs, an expanding population, and increased activity at the Port of Houston contribute to traffic congestion that saps our economic strength while threatening our ability to grow further. According to the Texas Transportation Institute, congestion cost our region nearly \$2.5 billion in 2007. Six of the top ten most congested roadway corridors in the state are here in Houston. In order for Houston and the region to continue to grow, we must develop and implement a strategic plan for regional mobility to reduce congestion.

Houston must lead a regionally coordinated transportation system that meets the needs of its diverse commuters, business constituents and neighborhood residents. As mayor, I will lead this effort. My plan will: (I) **improve regional coordination**; (II) **create real transportation options for Houstonians**; and, (III) lay the groundwork to **build more livable communities**.

I. IMPROVE REGIONAL COORDINATION - Houston's mayor is uniquely suited to take a leading role in developing and realizing the vision for transportation that our region needs. Regional coordination is the cornerstone of my approach to improving mobility. We must work with our partners in the Houston-Galveston area to develop a transportation plan that shares resources where possible and works for the region as a whole.

- **City Department of Mobility** - We need to bring together parts of the city's existing transportation effort to better coordinate mobility programs without increasing costs. The new City Department of Mobility will combine parts of existing city departments, such as the Public Works and Planning. This department will be led by a Director of Mobility who will work with existing institutions, including the Houston-Galveston Area Council, METRO, Harris County, TXDOT, and others. The Director of Mobility will report directly to the

mayor and sit on the Regional Transportation Policy Council and will serve as our city's primary regional mobility advocate working with our state and congressional legislative delegations to secure state and federal funding for the region's transportation initiatives.

- **Increase Accountability and Public Communication** – We must increase the accountability of government through an ongoing strategic plan to guide our actions and measure outcomes. We must measure success in transportation improvement not just in dollars spent, but in time saved and carbon emissions decreased. Publicly tracking and reporting our success will demonstrate value to taxpayers and commuters; and improving public communication about ongoing and upcoming projects will help commuters steer towards the routes or modes that work best for them. Both can be accomplished through a new “Mobile Houston” website that will incorporate real-time traffic information, currently available from Transtar, with more detailed construction updates.
- **Expand the Use of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)** – Coordinated traffic lights have increased mobility downtown and on Westheimer. This saves Houstonians time and money. Similar coordination can be accomplished at every level, from local neighborhoods to the entire region. We will target opportunities to coordinate signals throughout the city. We will also work with the surrounding communities and our Transtar partners to make sure that our regional ITS matches or surpasses any in the nation. The use of new technology and shared data to improve emergency vehicle notification, collision avoidance, and traffic prediction and management will facilitate free flow and best use of real-time information about our transportation system.

II. CREATE REAL TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS FOR ALL HOUSTONIANS – Cars, buses, and trains all play important roles in transporting people and goods around our city. We have the opportunity to create a transportation system that makes a morning commute as straightforward as a Saturday morning trip to the grocery store. To do this, we must improve the quality and accessibility of our public transit system, and enable it to interface more smoothly with our roads and highways. We must target areas of congestion with innovative solutions that combine reduced demand with increased capacity, while simultaneously protecting neighborhood quality in developed areas. We must recognize that retooling our region's freight rail system is critical to our economy, both for moving goods to and from port facilities in our region and for the potential to remove obstacles to free movement of surface-street traffic.

- **Target Key Congestion Points for Neighborhood-Sensitive Capacity Expansion** – Bottlenecks are trouble spots for Houstonians because they often occur in developed areas. To solve this, we need state, county, and local governments to work with neighborhood groups for solutions to ease congestion while minimizing impact on adjacent residential and commercial

areas. A specific area we need to invest in is the 290 corridor, one of the fastest-growing areas in the region. We must work with our congressional delegation, TXDOT and Harris County to widen 290, as well as consider a high-capacity transit corridor.

- **Reduce Demand During Peak Commute Hours Through Increased Access to HOV Lanes and Park-and-Rides** – High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes have been successful in enabling people to efficiently travel to Houston’s major employment centers. We must expand park-and-ride service to more Houstonians. HOV lanes should provide access all the way to park-and-ride centers in Kingwood and Clear Lake; and we must increase access to HOV lanes outside Loop 610. Our transit service to park-and-ride lots must also accommodate those who want to take routes other than the suburb-to-central-business-district course. Houstonians should be able to use the park-and-ride service to travel from one side of the city to another.
- **Rethink Our Bus System** – We must take a serious look at our bus system and consider new ways to deliver a world-class bus system for Houston without significantly increasing cost. To do this, we must think outside of the box. The bus system must be flexible and serve the full range of consumers, from transit-dependent citizens to tourists. We should consider the following: (i) bus or trolley service within and among major retail centers, such as downtown and the Galleria; (ii) expanded express service along major corridors, perhaps using existing HOV lanes during enhanced hours; (iii) reorganized local service, including increased coordination between bus and rail systems; (iv) increased technology in bus tracking and communication; (v) improved bus shelters; and, (vi) reducing bus fares to increase ridership. We will also look at a pilot program to eliminate bus fares at certain times.
- **Build Light and Commuter Rail** – We must complete the new light rail lines as quickly as possible with the least amount of disruption to adjacent businesses and neighborhoods. We will require METRO to assist local businesses and neighborhoods in dealing with the disruption. We must also begin discussing the next phase of METRO Solutions. We must move forward with our partners in the region to build commuter rail. The Houston-Galveston Area Council has proposed a 5-corridor commuter rail system that we must move on as quickly as possible, while ensuring the region as a whole shares the cost of commuter rail.
- **Improving Freight Rail, Expanding Economic Opportunity** – We need to alleviate the gridlock in our freight rail system. By coordinating rail improvements with port facilities we can reduce truck traffic by shifting more container traffic directly to rail at the dock. We also need to work with the Freight Rail District to relocate rail corridors, relocate rail yards, and eliminate at-grade crossings that pose a safety risk in our neighborhoods. Other transportation modes are directly affected by freight rail planning (e.g., when

light rail has to cross a freight rail line). However, a coordinated comprehensive transportation plan will address and solve this potential issue.

III. BUILD MORE LIVABLE COMMUNITIES - The city needs an integrated plan that takes into account not only transportation modes, but neighborhood quality and the environment as well - the basic foundation for a livable community policy. In March, the White House announced a program to integrate federal transportation and housing/urban development programs into a livable communities program. Energy and environmental issues may be included in that program also. We need a similar effort here at the city level.

- **Expand Flexible Work Hours Program** - We must reduce road congestion during peak travel times to afford people an easier commute between home and work. Houston's Flexworks pilot program has significantly reduced congestion. I will work in partnership with the Houston-Galveston Area Council, METRO, and the Greater Houston business community to encourage increased utilization and expansion of these programs.
- **Enable and Encourage Bicycling** - To encourage cycling as a method of transportation, the city must facilitate better coordination and connection of bike routes with other transportation modes. We must also offer incentives for the private sector to provide the facilities necessary to make bicycle commuting more feasible. Through incentives, developers could be encouraged to accommodate cyclists by providing showers and/or bicycle storage facilities at places of employment and other key destinations.
- **Promote Transit-Oriented Development** - Some people talk about transit-oriented development, I believe there is a great opportunity for us to encourage transit development oriented to its *users*. As the city changes we must ensure that transit-oriented development respects the historic character of many of our neighborhoods. Part of making our transportation system work for everyone is ensuring that people can conveniently use a combination of public roads, buses, and trains as needed, to get to where they live, work, eat, and shop. For commuters in the outlying reaches of our sprawling city, this may mean offering incentives for mixed-use developments around park-and-ride lots, as opportunities arise. For those living along the proposed light rail lines, it could mean active economic development to establish train stops as centers of residential and commercial convenience. As more passengers incorporate easy access to transit as part of their transportation decisions, we will increase transit ridership and reduce highway and road congestion. This will improve both the environment and economy, while letting Houstonians spend more time with their families and less time on the road.