Why you should care when the TPC sends the RTP to the FTA

The Transportation Policy Council, a governing board of the Houston-Galveston Area Council made up of elected officials from around the region, expects to vote to approve the draft 2035 Regional Transportation Plan on August 24th, when it will be sent to the Federal Transportation Administration.

Traffic, asthma, water quality, the fate of the endangered Atwater Prairie Chicken, housing options and affordability, unemployment, Houston’s contribution to global warming, your stress level, taxes, transportation options and affordability, green space, farmlands, hurricane evacuation and potential damage, the forests of Montgomery County, access to jobs and schools, traffic deaths, and the size of the transportation infrastructure construction industry all will be affected by the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which is currently available in draft form for public comment.

The draft RTP is a long-range plan anchored on the values of the citizens of the Houston region, which emerged from the envision+Houston Region process. The plan addresses the environmental – and especially land use – impacts of transportation infrastructure. It encourages the development of walkable, human-scale Livable Centers, and envisions a rapid transit system that will be both efficient and comprehensive.

Unfortunately, the project list included with the plan departs in serious ways from the values and policies contained in the text of the plan. Projects are predominately focused on building roads throughout the region to allow for suburban development in a way that no other region in America is doing. You can have a significant impact on the future of the Houston region by learning more about the RTP and making your voice heard.

The above maps show current and projected population for the Houston region. The one on the left shows the 2005 census data and the one on the right is the 2035 forecasts, holding current trends and policies constant over the next 30 years. This future scenario could be drastically different depending on how we as a region decide to invest in our transportation infrastructure.

What is the TIP?
The 2008-11 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the vehicle through which all regionally significant transportation projects are coordinated and approved by the TPC. The TIP must meet various state and federal guidelines as well as fit within the long-term goals and visions of the adopted RTP.

Who is on the TPC?
The Transportation Policy Council is made up mostly of area elected officials who represent the many local governments that are members of H-GAC. The City of Houston is represented by Council Members Pam Holm and Sue Lovell as well as Mike Marcotte, Director of Public Works and Engineering. Other non-elected members of the TPC are people such as Gary Trietsch, the Texas Department of Transportation’s District Engineer for Houston District.

While the TPC can direct regional transportation planning by choosing to include projects in the TIP and the RTP, the TPC does not actually have the power to build transportation infrastructure. Various agencies, such as METRO, Harris County Toll Road Authority, the cities, and others actually fund and build the projects in the TIP and RTP.

The public comment period has been extended and runs from June 1 - July 16, 2007. H-GAC has an online comment form available on their website. You can also talk to your representatives on the TPC individually about issues affecting your area. Their contact information can be found on the “How to Comment on the 2035 RTP” document on our 2035 RTP website.

H-GAC’s 2035 RTP website: 2035plan.org
Our 2035 RTP website: gulfcoastinstitute.org/2035rtp