Houston Transportation

Bulletin 11

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Gulf Coast Institute
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The 2025 Regional Transportation Plan created by the Houston-Galveston Area Council is the largest, long-term transportation plan for the Houston area. To help increase understanding of the plan the Gulf Coast Institute will publish a series of educational bulletins.

Is the Regional Transportation Plan a done deal?

No, the new, $77 billion draft 2025 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) will not be voted on until Friday, April 23rd at the earliest, and possibly not until late May. A group of 25 transportation and elected officials called the Transportation Policy Council will vote on the plan. The Council is chaired by Harris County Judge Robert Eckels and includes many city council members from cities around the region as well as several other public officials. The Houston-Galveston Area Council, the regional agency that administers the plan, is holding public meetings and taking public comment on the RTP until May 4th. The plan is updated every three years.

RTP Highlights

The plan includes a 60 % increase in roadways, or 12,900 additional lane miles. This equals adding 128 Katy Freeway Expansions into the region, or one long bridge from San Francisco to South Africa.

Houston Trip Length Facts

Houstonians already drive more vehicle miles per capita per day (about 39 miles per day) than any other urban area in the nation. However, decreasing VMT is not a goal in the RTP. In fact, the RTP forecasts that Houstonians' will drive 75 percent more vehicle miles per day by 2025.

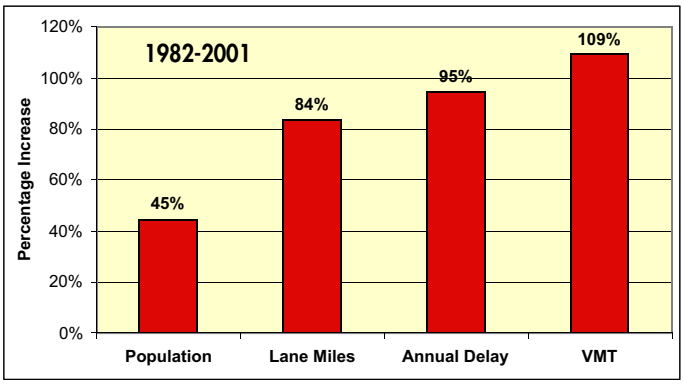
Does the RTP address health concerns?

In spite of the ambitious expansion of the roadway system and the well known health consequences of proximity to high-capacity roadways, the word "health" only appears three times in the RTP. None analyze health consequences of expanding roadways by 60 percent (two statements suggest that non-motorized options would help health and the third related to pedestrian and bike crashes.)

Cleaner Vehicles/Trip Length Facts

Today's vehicles are 80 to 99 percent cleaner per mile than vehicles produced in the late 1960s. However, since 1970, the number of vehicle-miles traveled (VMT) nationwide has increased by 159 percent, from 1.1 trillion in 1970 to 2.87 trillion in 2002, wiping out many of the healthy air advantages gained by cleaner vehicles.[1] Houston's freeway and principal arterial VMT has increased 109 percent since 1982.[2]

Does adding lane-miles reduce congestion?



Research shows that in the long term, adding lane miles even at a rate much higher than population growth does not reduce congestion or driving distance. Here, one sees that Houston's freeway and principal arterial lane miles grew at roughly twice the rate of its population over the past two decades. However, Annual Delay per person and Vehicle Miles Traveled on freeways and principal arterials still grew at higher rates. Source: Texas Transportation Institute, Urban Mobility Study 2003.

Highway/Air Pollution Facts

Per capita, cities with more major highway capacity have higher levels of air pollution from vehicles. The correlation holds for small (under 250,000 population), medium (250,000 to one million), and large (one million and up) metropolitan areas. In all cases, the relationship between highway capacity and air pollution from vehicles is highly significant. The probability that these two factors are directly correlated is greater than 99.9 percent.[1]

When and where are the RTP's public meetings?

There are four remaining public meetings: April 8th in Conroe, April 13th in Houston, April 14th in Sugar Land, and April 20th in Lake Jackson. In addition, the Transportation Policy Council (TPC) invites the public to make comments at its meetings. The next TPC meeting is at 9:30 am April 23rd in H-GAC's offices on 3555 Timmons Lane, 2nd floor. To find locations and more information about the public meetings, visit http://2025plan.org/info/public_meetings.htm

Except where noted, information comes from the 2025 Regional Transportation Plan (http://www.2025plan.org) Other sources:

1. US PIRG, "More Highways, More Pollution," March 2004.
2 . Texas Transportation Institute, Urban Mobility Study, 2003.