A disconnect between taxpayers and tax spenders

Last year, a poll of Harris County residents found that almost twice as many people (46 percent) prefer more public transit as the best long-term solution to traffic over more roads and highways (27 percent). However, projects proposed by local governments and H-GAC fall out quite differently than the public suggests. Roads make up 73 percent of total projects while transit makes up 27 percent of total projects over the next two decades. Harris County residents make up roughly three-quarters of all the people living and working in the region covered by the RTP.

Houston's transportation choice problem

A national transportation study cited in the RTP found that Houstonians have fewer options than citizens in other metro areas of similar size. Transportation choice was measured using the supply of public transportation available compared to the supply of roadways available. The study found that Houston's supply of roadways dwarfed its supply of transit. Houston's transportation choice ratio (.96) ranked significantly lower than that in Dallas (1.21), Atlanta (1.35), Los Angeles (1.22), Philadelphia (1.94), and Washington DC (2.69), among others (higher numbers mean more choice). Despite this and the public's apparent desire for more choice as noted in the RTP's public involvement section and in other public surveys, giving residents more choice is not a major goal of the RTP.

More transportation choice equals less waiting

"In places with more transit service, a smaller portion of the population drives to work each day, lowering overall exposure to congested conditions," concluded a report by a national transportation research nonprofit. They found that the lower an area's transportation choice, the more the area's residents have to fight congestion. "In places with more choices, more people can choose whether to fight through congestion in their cars or avoid it by using less stressful ways to get to work," the report said.

Public process calls for "alternatives"

In summarizing the public participation process, the 2025 RTP draft says "Many of the public comments received were focused on the need to provide more travel choices. The public also indicated a desire to promote transportation alternatives that have more positive environmental (air and water) impacts than those associated with major roadway/freeway expansion." The RTP, as seen in the lower graph (right, above) proposes that 73 percent of projects be for roadways.