



Public comments - NHHIP MOU Working Group Meeting 9/3/20
By Harrison Humphreys, AAH Transportation Policy Advocate

Good afternoon working group members, staff. My name is Harrison Humphreys and I am with Air Alliance Houston. Thank you for the opportunity to comment today.

I'd like to preface my comments by explaining that they're coming from a place of frustration. Frustration with the MOU drafting process up to this point, frustration with the arguments continuing to be used to justify an ill-conceived project, and frustration on behalf of the entire city who will suffer the consequences of this project for decades to come.

I think a lot of my current frustration can be explained by a moment in last week's meeting, in which Ms. Eliza Paul explained that the original purpose of I-45 was to move goods to California. Harkening back to the original purpose of the interstate highway system as a reason or validation for the planned project design is very indicative of the issues many stakeholders have with the H-GAC's and TxDOT's modus operandi today. TxDOT seems deadset on relying on outdated and outmoded schools of thought to try to address very contemporary issues. And please don't take this as me putting the weight of blame on Ms. Paul and TxDOT, though; this attitude seems pervasive among many in this working group and the TPC at large.

Following this discussion on the potential MOU the past few weeks has been disheartening. What should be a forward-thinking discussion about ways to work within existing frameworks to implement innovative redesigns that not only meet the needs of the growing region but also address the life-altering concerns of the communities most affected by this project, has instead been drug down into a frustrating fight by a few interests who refuse to acknowledge there are alternatives to continuing to try and fail at building roads faster than our population grows. At this point of the project, it's frankly embarrassing that the policymakers dictating the future viability of transportation in this region refuse to recognize transportation planning realities long ago accepted and incorporated by more innovative regions. A preponderance of academic and even anecdotal evidence shows that expanding mainlane capacity will not solve the congestion issues. As Dr. Lewis stated during the last MOU meeting, we have seen time and time again we simply will never outbuild our congestion. It is well past time that we recognize this fact and begin seriously exploring other alternatives.

Outside of the evidentiary arguments, though, the purpose of this MOU process is to address the concerns of the vast number of Houstonians who made their voices heard and gave their input on this project. The past year's community engagement process yielded an overwhelming outpouring of opposition to plans that would rely on destroying communities to pursue ineffective freeway expansions. They instead asked for a cooperative design that incorporates multimodal infrastructure that is more equitable, more environmentally sustainable, and will ultimately go farther in addressing the issues that TxDOT is seeking to fix. This MOU and its language should reflect those asks. If this working group walks away with an MOU framework that doesn't adequately outline a forward-thinking vision of this project, that ignores the pleas of communities and the Mayor's invitation to cooperate, I firmly believe all parties involved will come to regret it. I know the people who will lose their homes and businesses will.

Finally, I think it would give some observers of this process some clarification if Eliza Paul could more clearly explain her comments towards the end of last week's meeting, in which you made the claim that capacity expansion was necessary for whatever mode might eventually take up the corridor space. Could you clarify:

- Are you committing TxDOT to exploring converting these lanes to mass transit in the future?
- Are you relying on specific studies that have been conducted that show the extra capacity is needed for multimodal improvements?
- You said that that capacity could be used for other things long-term, but that it was needed short-term for congestion; I think clarifying long vs short term would give many some peace of mind.

Thank you for your time and allowing me the opportunity to provide comments.