



June 26, 2020

Dear Transportation Policy Council members,

My name is Bakeyah Nelson. I am the Executive Director of Air Alliance Houston - a local nonprofit working to reduce the public health impacts of air pollution and advance environmental justice in the Houston Region. Air Alliance Houston believes that everyone has a right to breathe clean air and where you live, work, learn, and play should not determine your health.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns about the vote that will likely take place today. First, I would like to recognize the efforts by the City of Houston and Harris County to more closely examine the issues that have been raised about this project and taking steps toward mitigating some of those issues.

While we at Air Alliance Houston acknowledge that improvements to I-45 are needed, we strongly believe and ask you today to keep NHHIP in the broader Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) but remove it from the TIP funding window (2021-2024) until a fair and equitable path forward can be defined in partnership with residents and delineated in writing. To be clear, the vote to support funding for Segment 3 at this juncture will cement systemic racism into transportation planning for another generation. Furthermore, without written commitments to address the adverse and disparate impacts that are well documented in the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) draft environmental impact statement and community impact report, TxDOT is making known its discriminatory intent.

For some of you this request may seem extreme however, TxDOT has given us no reason to believe or trust that it will act on the express desires of residents or the City of Houston more broadly. For example, after a number of meetings with TxDOT where staff have made verbal commitments, Air Alliance Houston has yet to receive any document, in writing, outlining TxDOT's plans to mitigate the increased exposure to air pollution for children who attend schools within 500 feet of the highway.

The same is true for the City of Houston. TxDOT has offered nothing in writing to assure anyone on this committee that it will comply with the desires of local elected officials and the communities they are supposed to represent. It is my understanding that the Transportation Policy Council has the legal authority to make a motion to remove or defer the vote for funding

the NHHIP at this time. With your vote, you can let your constituents know that TxDOT's "shoot now, ask questions later" approach to transportation planning is unacceptable.

This is a historic moment in time, a time when many across the country and throughout the world have shown leadership by taking immediate actions that demonstrate they can no longer be silent on racial injustice. It speaks volumes that the metropolitan planning organization serving one of the most diverse region's in the country has remained silent about the current state of reckoning with systemic racism. Even more troubling is that the representatives on this committee are choosing not to pause and reflect on this massive project that will perpetuate the disregard of communities of color for decades to come.

In the absence of taking a stand for communities by making a motion to remove NHHIP from the TIP 2021-2024 window, it is critical the TPC move forward to establish a MOU that includes an explicit mechanism that prevents future funding from TxDOT unless TxDOT complies with the terms outlined in the MOU. Moreover, the MOU should include a requirement that TxDOT conduct a social impact assessment to determine how the project will disrupt social cohesion and to identify steps that can be taken to minimize the impact to residents.

I implore each of you to vote with courage and conscience rather than tradition. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Bakeyah Nelson
Executive Director