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March 30, 2020

Mayor Sylvester Turner
City of Houston
P.O. Box 1562
Houston, TX 77251

Eliza Paul, P.E.
TxDOT Houston District Office
7600 Washington Avenue
Houston, TX 77007

Delivered via email: mayor@houstontx.gov; eliza.paul@txdot.gov; HOU-piowebmail@txdot.gov

Dear Mayor Turner and Eliza Paul, P.E., Texas Department of Transportation Houston District:

We write to request that the City of Houston and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) issue a joint statement delaying the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP) due to the restrictions placed on the public during this pandemic caused by the coronavirus COVID-19.

The FEIS is an important document impacting thousands of people who live and work in areas along the project corridor. There is deep public interest in understanding the FEIS and a corresponding desire to participate in the public meeting process that is required by law. Under the current circumstances, it is impossible for many people to hear or participate in this legally required public process. Moreover, when the FEIS is issued, important timelines begin regarding the community's ability to seek amendments or changes to the document. At this time, Houston and Harris County elected leaders have issued a shelter in place declaration until at least April 3, with most area schools shut down until at least April 13, making it extremely difficult for the general public—particularly those living in the areas most affected by the NHHIP—to prioritize comments, engaging with, and understanding this \$7 billion project.

Furthermore, many elderly and low income individuals rely on public places such as libraries to access information that will be released in this report. They will be unable to do so if this report is released on schedule because all of those community spaces have been closed during this public health crisis. Finally, elected officials have asked employers and employees to work from home if possible, making it extremely



difficult for the non-profit entities below to continue engaging with community members and each other to ensure a robust and transparent process around this project.

As we have routinely stated, public feedback on this monumental project is vital to ensure the process and the outcomes from this infrastructure investment are equitable. No public meetings or civic and community gatherings will be able to be held to discuss the contents of the report for the foreseeable future. Moreover, even before the report is issued, the ability of community members to meet and discuss this project during super neighborhood meetings, or other types of meetings has been disrupted and in many cases, completely stopped. As all of you know, community meetings have been essential to facilitating discussion on this project and will be all the more important with the impending Record of Decision.

In order to ensure that the public feedback process is equitable and accessible, TxDOT should take into account the gravity of the current public health crisis by accommodating community members that will be most affected by delaying the release of the FEIS until the crisis subsides. Similarly, TxDOT should take into consideration the considerable burden on Mayor Turner and his staff during this time and delay the release of the FEIS to allow for adequate time to finish the city's design assessment and public outreach process.

Specifically, we ask that a statement that delays the release of the FEIS until the later of the two – either the 3rd or 4th quarter of 2020 or until the pandemic's impact on the region has been diminished to the point of allowing public feedback consistent with what would have been expected prior to the pandemic, be issued prior to the April 30th public meeting of the Texas Department of Transportation Commissioners' meeting. Mayor Turner, we also you articulate the same by requesting this or expressing these same concerns.

Sincerely,

Air Alliance Houston

Eastwood Civic Association

Montie Beach Civic Club

Avenue CDC

LINK Houston

Super Neighborhood Alliance

Preservation Houston

Friends of Woodland Park, Inc.

Bayou Preservation Association, Inc.

Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy

Preservation Houston

Galveston Bay Foundation



The Rev. Carissa Baldwin-McGinnis, Vicar
Northside Episcopal Church

Tom Bacon
Civicap

Heritage Society

White Oak Bayou Association

BikeHouston

Lower Brazos Riverwatch

Stop TxDOT I-45

Buffalo Bayou Partnership

Greater Fifth Ward Super Neighborhood #55

Citizens Transportation Coalition

Texas Housers

Bayou City Waterkeeper

Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience

HOME Coalition

Public Citizen

State Representative Christina Morales
District 148

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