



Chair Canales and Members of the House Committee on Transportation,

I am writing today to inform the committee of our organization's, Air Alliance Houston, support of two bills under consideration today, HB 2219 and HB 2223. We support these bills because they present an opportunity to shift our statewide transportation planning practices to a more sustainable, equitable paradigm.

Texas faces a number of challenges regarding transportation and land use and their effects on public health and environmental sustainability; these issues will likely worsen if appropriate actions are not taken. According to a report released earlier this year by your own colleague, Rep. Gina Hinojosa, the transportation sector accounts for the largest share of CO2 emissions in Texas at 34%. Transportation systems are vital components of communities and cities that allow the movement of people and goods in an efficient manner. However, transportation policies that have prioritized the building of roads and highway infrastructure, coupled with poor land use planning, have contributed to many health and environmental inequities in Texas. These policy decisions have fragmented many communities of color, undermined funding for alternative modes of transportation, facilitated a sprawling landscape, increasing the distance between homes and jobs, and advanced residential segregation.

As Texas' population booms, with its increasing combination of urban, suburban, and rural communities, it is imperative that we look at the long-term health impacts of our policy and infrastructure decisions. Research suggests that cities with a higher degree of sprawl also have a higher number of ozone exceedances than more compact metropolitan areas. For example, The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) estimates that because of population growth, there will be 61% more vehicles on the road by 2045. Last year, the Houston region experienced thirty-three high ozone days and, according to the 2019 American Lung Association State of the Air Report, was ranked 9th for most ozone-polluted cities. Ground-level ozone can trigger asthma attacks, inflame and damage airways, and cause chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Moreover, air toxics from mobile sources, such as benzene and formaldehyde, can cause damage to the immune system, reproductive and neurological disorders, and respiratory problems.

Building sustainable, accessible multimodal infrastructure, such as mass transit, is essential to mitigating transportation related air pollutants and GHGs. However, almost all of Texas' state transportation funding is constitutionally dedicated to on-system freeway projects; very little of it can be used for multimodal projects. Compounding this issue, TxDOT mixes most of the discretionary federal funding it receives with the state money, rendering it unusable for multimodal projects. We support HB 2219 because it offers an immediate, although not comprehensive, opportunity to provide essential funding to multimodal transportation infrastructure.

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While we generally support conducting an inventory of our state transportation system like the one proposed in HB 2223, we would ask Chair Canales to consider adding language to the bill that would direct the researching organizations to also report on the direct and indirect impacts of transportation on Texans' health. Additionally, as this bill is an attempt to understand the various costs associated with transportation and its wear on our infrastructure, we ask that the study consider the costs of transportation emissions and the long-term costs of failing to mitigate climate change. Finally, many parts of Texas are in noncompliance with federal air quality laws, and the state spends considerable time and funds compensating for these violations. Any study of our transportation network should take this into consideration.

Respectfully,

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