

BLUEPRINT HOUSTON FORUM  
THE 2025 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

\*\*\*\*\*

April 27, 2004  
3555 Timmons Lane  
2nd Floor, Conference Room A

\*\*\*\*\*

Reported By: Lea Abbott, C.S.R.

Last May a thousand delegates attended the Blueprint Houston Citizens Congress, and they voted on ten top priorities for the citizens' future -- for the city's future. And I wanted to read you these priorities in the order that they were approved. The first one was public transportation. The second one was air quality. The third was government and leadership. The fourth was infrastructure provision and maintenance. The fifth was economic development. Sixth was roads and congestion. Seventh was healthcare. Eighth was flood management. Nine was steward of water resources, and ten was a clean city.

If you look carefully at these goals, three of them clearly relate to transportation needs in our community, no surprise. Also in the top ten, the remaining ones, especially three of them, are related to the quality of life and also to transportation needs. And those are air quality, No. 2; economic development, No. 5; and 7, healthcare; and 8, flood management. So, you can see all of these top ten priorities definitely are related to transportation, planning, and to the quality of life in our community.

I would like to thank all of you again for being here and to thank our panelists for being here and to also thank H-GAC for working with us to hold this meeting. This is a fabulous facility, and we're grateful for being here, and we hope that this is the beginning of a continuous

PROCEEDINGS 7:08 p.m.

MS. SWEETNAM: Hello, everyone. My name is Heidi Sweetnam. I'm the executive director of Blueprint Houston. And I'm going to yell, I think.

I'm very pleased to see all of you here tonight. Blueprint Houston is a nonprofit organization that's nonpartisan, and it's dedicated to building community support for a planning process that makes improvement to Houston's quality of life.

The purpose of this meeting is twofold. One is to have a panel discussion where we'll talk about regional planning issues and the goals that were adopted at the Blueprint Houston Citizens Congress last May.

The second part of the meeting is to have a public comment period. Blueprint Houston believes it is very important for the community to have an opportunity to speak on this important plan, and H-GAC has cooperated in helping us have this meeting, and an official court reporter is here to make sure your comments are forwarded.

Blueprint Houston -- tonight we're here because Blueprint Houston believes that informed citizen participation results in better plans. We think plans should be based on the citizens' vision, values, and goals, and that's why over the last year we have worked with the community to develop a vision for Houston's future.

and long-running relationship. We would like the community to be informed and, therefore, more effective in the transportation planning process.

There is concern in the community that the 2025 Regional Transportation Plan does not adequately address our transportation needs and that it does not address the implications of the plan for the other related goals that I just described. Mobility is a complex issue. We need to solve our transportation issues, obviously, so that we can grow and prosper. But we also need quality of life in order to attract the business that keeps us healthy and prosperous. So, it's for this reason that we've organized this forum to provide a framework for understanding regional transportation issues and how they relate to our Blueprint Houston goals.

I'm very pleased you are all here. I think your presence sends a very strong signal to our council members and to H-GAC and to the Transportation Policy Council that votes on this plan. Blueprint Houston often says the community wants to be involved in planning. Your presence here definitely sends that signal, and I applaud you.

(Applause.)

MS. SWEETNAM: This evening's program is divided into two parts, as I said, a panel discussion, and a public comment period. In the public comment period, we're very pleased to have the League of Women Voters here. They

have been a loyal ally of ours throughout our existence, and they are going to be the timekeeper today, and Lula Blake is kindly going to keep track of your time. We have a very -- a lot to accomplish tonight. We want to get through this forum. The people have very important things to say, but we also want to give the public time to comment. Please sign up on the sign-in -- the speaker sign-in sheet. Is it outside still? And after we turn it over to the public comment period, we'll bring this sign-in sheet and we'll place it on this table over here -- right, Alan? -- and people can sign up if you change your mind and are interested.

So, now I would like to begin the forum. We are very pleased to have as our first speaker Alan Clark. He is the Metropolitan Planning Organization director of H-GAC. He's been here for 12 years, and he knows a tremendous amount about the plan. I've asked him to give us a brief overview of the plan and to talk to us about where the plan is in the whole complete planning process. Blueprint Houston believes that plans are not the ultimate goal of the -- of the plan. It's a planning process, and it's an ongoing process, and we need to be aware of that. And so, I hope you will welcome Alan Clark.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you very much, Heidi. It is my pleasure to welcome you here tonight, and I, too, look

forward to a long-term relationship with Blueprint Houston and other groups that allow us to fully explore the dynamics of -- of our growing region.

Get these lights changed. All right. Are we connected? Why don't you just hit the buttons for me?

And I know I'm right in your viewing angle from this podium; I apologize for that. This very first, very complicated slide is one of the handouts that you should have somewhere in your seating area or on the tables as you were walking in. What we wanted to begin is to explain the role of the Regional Transportation Plan.

First of all, it is the beginning point for many transportation ideas, many transportation improvements in our region. Some of those projects and ideas will take ten to 20 years before they may actually be implemented as a specific new service or transportation improvement to our area. Some of the projects in the plan are ready for funding within the next three-year funding cycle, what we call the Transportation Improvement Program. Until a project enters that very last stage, it is really moving from concept through a process intended to define the purpose, need, and scope of the project. It may involve many, many opportunities for public review and comment, not only beginning with the Regional Transportation Plan but as it moves through the levels of feasibility study, through

preliminary engineering, through design and possibly various levels of environmental analysis.

As a project is ready for a funding decision, if -- especially if the project's being considered for Federal or state transportation funding assistance, H-GAC requires that the project sponsors not only show work to satisfy us that they fully understand the scope, the cost, and the impact of their project but to show us evidence of public participation in the project and local government support. The plans and ideas in the Regional Transportation Plan require the agreement of many parties before they become projects or new services. Not only must they be in our Transportation Plan if they are federally or state funded but they must be part of the plans of local governments and local transportation agencies who are the implementing organizations for these potential ideas and projects.

As a consequence, they will probably be shown, if it's a highway program, thoroughfare plans. Thoroughfare -- much of what we are implementing in the Regional Transportation Plan began on thoroughfare plans 20, 30, even 50 years ago for our region.

Okay. If I can have the next slide, please.

The Regional Transportation Plan also has a number of stated goals, and I believe these goals greatly complement the goals I saw in the Blueprint Houston forum.

However, they are much more specifically focused on the transportation needs of our region. In addition to -- to reducing congestion, we are concerned about economic growth, environmental quality, improving the safety of our transportation system and its security, and trying to make sure that important goals for our communities are met.

The purpose of the Metropolitan Planning Organization, when it was created in the 1970's, was to ensure that the expenditure of Federal funds was consistent with the goals and plans of local governments. That's why we're here. We work for you. We work for local governments. And it's our job to make sure that we translate our transportation needs into programs and projects that are consistent with the plans of our -- our communities.

Next slide.

The biggest challenge we face is the sheer magnitude of growth in this region. I don't know of another area other than a few southern cities, like the Dallas-Fort Worth area, perhaps the Atlanta area, facing the magnitude of growth that this region faces. In the decade of 1990's, we added a million people to this region. We're predicting that we will add close to 3 more million people by the year 2025 as compared to the 2000 census. That has many, many impacts, not the least of which is transportation.

The -- many of the concerns I've heard about

the Regional Transportation Plan, I think, in part, are reflections of the concern of how our region is going to -- going to engage in this potential growth and economic development, what it will mean for the parts of our region we want to preserve and protect, and how transportation can be effectively provided so that this growth won't result in higher levels of congestion and loss of mobility.

Next slide, please.

These slides are going to be very hard to see.

I can -- we've got on the story board tonight a number of elements of the regional transportation, just in picture form, that addresses, of course, the needs for our road system. It does not recommend, as compared to our last Regional Transportation Plan, a significant -- I mean, a -- a very large or proportionate increase in transportation investments in new freeway investments and tollways facilities. It is about a 20 to 25 percent increase in lane mileage, most of it in the tollways and HOT lanes that we're proposing. The greatest amount of investment, we see from our modeling, needs to be in thoroughfares. I believe we overuse our freeway system. It's about 10 percent of the region's lane miles. It carries 45 percent of all the travel, and as a consequence, is highly congested.

I believe that many people would prefer to be able to travel on their local thoroughfares. And

Next slide, please.

It looks beyond that program. We've tested high-capacity transit in corridors that would -- that would really cover the major population centers of our eight-county region. Metro Solutions fully utilizes the resources of the Metropolitan Transit Authority. We do not have counterpart organizations to Metro with the kind of local financial resources that allow us to immediately program for implementation some of the major travel corridors that you see on this map. However, we are recommending that we should undertake feasibility study and develop, where local governments concur in the potential contribution of these facilities, financial plans that will allow us to begin to move these projects forward.

Yes, we can use highway funds for transit activities, and we do that today. However, in the transit arena, almost 50 percent of the cost of transit services is borne by local governments. Therefore, we have to work very carefully with our local governments to develop the financing mechanisms that will allow major investments like many of the corridor studies shown here.

The good news is, is that if we provide reasonable transit services that have conductivity and allow people to travel to a wide choice of destinations, we can greatly improve the transit ridership in our region.

improvements, I think, to those could not only relieve some of the congestion on our freeway system but reduce the intrusion of traffic into neighborhoods.

Give me the next slide, please.

What this slide illustrates is that a lot of the investment in this plan is the implementation of thoroughfare plans, as I said, that in some cases have been -- been in place for a couple of decades.

Next slide. Okay. Can you get one more, please? Yeah, give me one more.

We've proposed a concept of upgrades to our thoroughfare system that we're calling Express or Smart Streets. This is using traffic management and access management tools to try to get the most out of the system that we have. I believe that because of the underuse of these techniques, we can improve mobility on our major thoroughfares in a way that not only adds to their capacity but provides for more effective transit service and improves the environment for pedestrians and cycles. We need to look for win-win-win solutions when we implement this Regional Transportation Plan if we're going to achieve the goals of adding mobility and improving quality of life.

Next slide, please.

Our plan does embrace the voter-approved Metro Solutions Program.

Next slide, please.

This map was a depiction of the bicycle portion of our Regional Transportation Plan. We have, again, maps on the wall that illustrate this. And, really, it's in two -- two pieces. One, we do have a map showing bicycle facilities that we would like to see implemented. But we've also recommended that we focus on activity on high-population employment activity areas that would be very suitable for a range of bicycle treatments. Most bicycle trips are very short. We need to look within a district or a neighborhood or a community for opportunities to implement bicycle improvements that can truly provide an option for those wanting to travel who might otherwise go by car.

We -- we are just engaged in the first of these district studies, and I hope that that recommendation will lead us to a new way of considering how to improve both bicycle and pedestrian activities. And those are critical to transit use, because every transit rider is at some point a pedestrian.

Next slide, please.

We also recognize, though, that we cannot build all the facilities that will accommodate the full travel of our region. Our region is going to be growing by something in the range of 60 to 70 percent. We cannot expand the system in a conventional way. I think it's about 75

percent, actually, in terms of population growth. Therefore, we need to reduce the demand for travel by increasing -- at least the demand for vehicle travel, by increasing other options, not only transit, teleworking, van pooling, car pooling, and a whole range of other options. We've recommended dedicating resources to do that in this Transportation Plan.

Next slide.

And then the issue of transportation safety.

Some of you may have heard some recent press accounts of some of the work we're doing here at the council to analyze the safety issues in our -- on our region's highways. We lead the state in almost every category of serious and severe crashes. We have targeted over 300 locations that account for 25 to 30 percent of the serious and severe crashes in our region and are recommending that in this plan we dedicate resources to looking at those particular issues, in addition to the resources that we may be providing to improve those segments of our road system. We think that we could have a very fast payback in terms of the cost that reducing even 20 percent of the crashes at these high-crash locations would afford.

And then the cost of our plan. This has also been an area of great concern, as it should be. It comes with a big price tag, \$77 billion. 12-1/2 billion of that is

represented by ports and airports in our region. That funding is not controlled by our Transportation Policy Council. However, we thought that it was very important that you see the biggest possible picture of our transportation needs. To do that, you need to understand what's happening with our ports and airports, because they have a major impact on our transportation system. We've included that for your information and tried to take into account what those activities may mean in terms of additional truck and vehicle travel.

The other remaining 65 billion is divided between highway and transit uses. As I said, we've fully captured the Metro Solutions Program. We would like to see even more transit investment in our region. We believe that there's travel demand that would support that, and we look forward to working with you and our local governments to further investigate the options and possibilities of doing that.

With that, that's sort of my quick whirlwind view of the Regional Transportation Plan. Thank you, Heidi. (Applause.)

MS. SWEETNAM: Thank you very much. We're going to move along here quickly, but I would like to acknowledge that there are -- an important council member has just arrived, Council Member Khan. We thank you very much

for coming.

(Applause.)

MS. SWEETNAM: And we have representatives here tonight from Council Member Ron Green's office, Adrian Garcia's office, Ada Edwards's office, and Michael Berry's office. So, we're very pleased to have them.

(Applause.)

Okay. Now I'd like to introduce our second panel speaker, Dr. Tim Lomax. He has had 20 years of experience in transportation planning. He is with the Transportation Institute -- Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A & M, and I've asked him to talk about regional transportation plans and the mix of solutions.

DR. LOMAX: Thank you very much, Heidi. Even though I am a university professor, there won't be a test on this later on. So, you can kind of dispel some of that problem.

I think, as Alan said and as Heidi has said, the way to look at this is this is a tool and a process. This is not an end -- I would hope that it's not an end. I don't think Alan, the staff at H-GAC, or the Policy Council views this as an end. It is certainly a good place to get your input, to get some opinions, but if y'all don't continue to participate, all this becomes is kind of a gripe session, and that really isn't as helpful as participating in the

process, making your wishes known, thinking about the challenges before you. Three million new people. I think that's what this plan is trying to get its hands around. So, from my perspective, looking at any regional plan, looking at the demands, how are those going to be solved?

Well, there's a whole bunch of different solutions. But again, looking at this as a process, you got to understand -- or you got to think about where the demands are, how the population and employment is going to be distributed, what the vision, what the goals are for the community. Again, where y'all can help is in helping define or refine or make clear what your goals are for your neighborhood, your community, Houston region as a whole -- recognizing that a lot of the issues that get -- get play or get the input are things related to air quality, the environment, the sort of new capacity numbers that Alan talked about.

There's a whole range of other concerns. Certainly, safety is a -- is a big component of any plan that addresses a major urban area. But maintenance and operations, very important to keep the roads, the transit system, maintained and operating well. The freight network, the freight movement is so key to the port and the railroads. The commerce in the area has to be addressed. There -- and let's not overlook the policies and programs that go along

with any of these projects.

If you just build a road or build a transit system, there's a whole range of other policies and projects that have to be incorporated, and from what I've seen in the plan right now, there is some of that. I think the -- the interest in extending that or finding out where the opportunities are is at least part of why Heidi and the Blueprint Houston group are here.

So, from my perspective, the solutions sort of come down to big groups of things like adding capacity, whether that's road or transit, bicycle lanes. That sort of capacity, that sort of additional system you need, you're not going to handle 3 million new people with no roads and no new transit. So, there's got to be a component of new capacity.

But I think it's important to get as much out of the system as you can. So, managing the system as efficiently as possible, getting the crashes, the vehicle breakdowns out of the way, making the signal systems work as efficiently as possible, so that you, in essence, get as much productivity out of the limited -- the system that's out there, so that you can handle some of this growth on the existing system. Making sure that when people use the system, they know what their options are, they -- they have a chance to think about things like telecommuting, ride sharing, what time of day are they travelling, can they make

from the professional perspective. I think that's something that we see in a lot of different areas around the country.

So, finally, I'd like to suggest that you think about how important transportation is a concern. You've got a whole range of things that folks are concerned about: cost of living, quality of life, environment, schools, healthcare, shopping opportunities. There's a whole range of different things. How important is transportation, and then how do you want that system, how do you want the transportation element of your vision or your goals to be installed or implemented? How important is sitting in your car waiting for the stop-and-go traffic to get away versus how important is it for you to spend a dollar or two more in gas tax every week to add some more roads or add some more transit or add some more bike lanes or manage the demand or to provide people incentives to car pool, things like that.

On some level, you can sort of think of this as a -- we're going to pay for mobility. It's just how we're going to pay for it. Are we going to pay for it by sitting in cars, sitting on buses, sitting in trains, paying a little bit more in gas tax, paying a little bit more in property tax? There's some combination of that that is really a part of this community discussion. I heartily endorse the -- the fact that we're having this forum or having this discussion. Again, I would urge you to continue to participate in this

some phone calls or do some business over the -- over the Internet or by computer between 7:30 and 9:30 in the morning and then get out on the roadway system after that or get onto the transit system after that, to try to level out some of the demand.

Again, we're not going to build capacity of any sort to handle the -- the peak hour demand. But if we can kind of spread that demand out, I think we got a better chance of working on it -- (beeping) Is that my time? You know, I usually get 55 minutes.

So, adding capacity, getting the system to operate as good as we can, managing the demand, the human aspect of the use, and then working on the development patterns. I think there's an awful lot of discussion now about how the city gets developed. I think that's all really important. Recognizing that the city is going to develop in different ways and all these solutions are going to get incorporated in different ways depending on where you are. So, the set of solutions that work for this area inside the Loop may not work for Champions or -- or the Near East Side, and they may not work for Sharpstown, but they may work for Alief.

That sort of regional variation in the solution set, if you will, is an important component. It should be something that you at least think about, certainly

process. Don't let this be the last meeting you come to.

Thank you very much. Heidi.

(Applause.)

MS. SWEETNAM: Well, we plan to stick around.

The next three speakers are going to address some of the goals that were adopted at the Blueprint Houston Citizens Congress last May. Flood management was one of those goals, and we're very pleased that Mr. Burton Johnson can be here from the Harris County Flood Control District. He has worked there since 1991, I believe, and is an engineer. And I've asked him to talk to us about the relationship between roads and flooding.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Heidi.

Let me figure out this microphone here. Can y'all hear me fine? Good.

You know, here in the top ten list, there -- it kind of occurred to me, listening, that there are really ten different things. I think flood management was eighth. Over time, I think most of those issues will stay fairly static. The one issue I really think that has the potential to move up and down is flood management. And we see these lists of sorts come out from time to time, and it's always kind of a function of the weather. You know, we had Allison in 1991 -- or 2001, and we moved way up on that list with flood management. If you took that same top ten poll in,

say, May of 2001, I don't even know if it would appear on it. And so, you know, really, in terms of our planning, in terms of getting interest and engaging with the community, we strike while the iron is hot.

There has been quite a bit of activity on our part since Allison. I think y'all are starting to see some of those things today, with the TSARP project. There's floodplain maps and things like that. And that's really where I want to start and kind of move from there, but what the TSARP project does -- and I'm assuming that most people here are familiar with it. In short, it's a study to recalculate all the various floodplains in Harris County.

But for us, it does other things. It helps us understand, really, our flooding problem at a higher level. To solve a problem, you certainly need to understand it the best you can. And also, it helps us develop and own great tools to help us address flooding and do flood planning and flood management, which are on the list. So, we're real excited about that, and I think you will see the returns on that over the years -- that are projects.

I feel like my microphone is coming in and out. Is it doing that? Okay. Good. I'm kind of a little paranoid with these things.

But -- and that's really where we're headed. Now, in talking specifically about roads and how it affects

Now, it doesn't mean that development does not present serious challenges to those of us in the flood management business, because it does. I will talk quickly about how we deal with those. First off, I manage the planning department. We're talking about a Transportation Plan. I'm a flood control planner. And so, there's a lot of similarities here. And hearing Alan's discussion, I hear a lot of the same buzz words we use all the time. But you got to have a good plan, and that's what we're working on.

That's why I started off mentioning the TSARP project. That's given us immense tools. We've already started using those tools to develop a plan for every one of our 22 watersheds in Harris County. Those plans will do a lot of things. No. 1, they will attempt to address the existing flood problems we have. We're somewhat implementing projects as we speak. We will expand that into a greater plan.

But also, we're going to look past the existing problems and kind of take some of the types of projections you've seen back here. The 2025 projection showed an immense amount of growth, 3 million people. Well, that's going to have consequences for us. I assure you that. So, we need to have a plan in place to help so that if that growth occurs, it grows in a way so that we don't have adverse effects of flooding downstream and at the same time

flooding, let's tie it all together. Let's just talk about development. That's kind of the big word, the big D word, I guess. New development. Whether you're talking about roads, whether you're talking about subdivisions or anything else, it all kind of is development. And I think some of the concerns about plans, it gets people excited. They see all this new development and have various reactions, good or bad, to them. And the big question comes: Well, how is that going to affect flooding?

One thing to keep in mind, flooding in Houston, on the Gulf Coast of Texas, is our natural disaster. It's not earthquakes. It's usually not tornadoes; from time to time we will have one. But it really is flooding. So, to the folks in San Francisco, what an earthquake is, to us it's a flood. And that's something for us to keep in mind. It flooded here long before any of us were here. It flooded well before there was any development. There is kind of an urban myth out there that there was never any flooding until we started paving things.

The reason that -- the biggest relationship between development and flooding really is somewhere in our infinite wisdom, our forefathers, as developed here, saw a bunch of floodplain land and said, "That would make a good subdivision. That would make a great city." And thus, that's where we are today.

we don't have adverse effects to our natural and social environment. The very same things that were on those bullet points show up on our bullet points all the time.

So, that's what we do. We'll be engaged in our own planning process over the next year, and we will complete our plans sometime at the end of this calendar year. The magical thing about these plans is we're not going to put them in a hardback book. They're going to live in some type of digital environment so we can kind of update them as things change and evolve over time, which is an important consideration, I think.

But really getting back to the basic question, which I have kind of dodged to this point, how does roadways affect flooding? Well, you build a road. And we all know it involves more pavement, and I think that's something that's generally misunderstood in this area. We have clay soils. Our soils don't absorb a whole lot of water anyway. So, yeah, when you put pavement down, it does increase the volume of runoff and there can be an impact. And there is one, but it's not nearly to the significant magnitude everybody thinks it is.

What is of a significant impact is the construction of drainage infrastructure. Any time you take a pasture or a meadow or woods and go grade the land and build roads and build inlets and ditches and channels and rush all

that water out as fast as you can, we certainly have an impact. We've seen that that is much more of an impact-causing event than just putting the pavement down. And so, those are the things we will address.

As the roads are built, they are the secondary drainage system. I'm sure you have heard that before. You know, there's a big, heavy rain, and you're trying to go home from work, and you can't really drive through the road right there, and somebody on TV says, "Well, it's supposed to do that." And it is.

Now, it's not supposed to do it every single time it rains. But when we have those really bad rains, the worst ones, we would much rather see that water ponding in the street than rushing down to Braes Bayou or Buffalo Bayou and flooding homes. And that's what we're trying to do with roadway construction in town.

And by the way, as an aside, the city's program, the storm water management program, the storm drainage plan they have, will not eliminate that. It will -- it will decrease it. It will bring some of these old systems up to current standards that were built below standard. But I guarantee you, if there's 6 or 7 inches of rain, we do want to see some ponding in those streets. And that's really what happened in the roadway system.

Now, lastly, what happens -- now, how does it

Environmental Health Section of Baylor College of Medicine's Chronic Disease Prevention and Control Research Center. And I've asked her to talk about the relationship between transportation and health.

MS. JENSEN: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to speak and think this is a great step for bringing the medical community into the planning process and giving us a chance to help ensure that the health of area residents is adequately considered.

I'm now going to make three major points. First, I'll discuss how air quality impacts of the proposed projects are addressed in the plan. I will then describe how the air quality impacts could affect the health of area residents, particularly those working, living, or going to school along the major corridors. And finally, I'll argue that more work should be done to ensure that public health needs are adequately addressed.

So, regarding air quality impacts, discussion of air quality is essentially limited to three pages of the appendix. Appendix Q notes that the plan cannot be approved unless it shows that it won't make the area's ozone problem worse. An analysis done last year showed that plans would indeed meet this requirement, although new analysis will be done once the state's new ozone plan is approved.

But what doesn't the plan say about air

affect flooding? I told you it could impact flooding. Today those building roads, whether it be TX DOT, whether it be the various counties, cities, Metro, all of them are putting in mitigation to offset those impacts, just like developments do. You build a road; you build infrastructure. Instead of passing all that water down to the bayou, we ask, and they -- and they do construct detention ponds on down. We've found that that typically costs -- well, they have told us, actually. It adds about 25 percent to their construction cost. And many years ago when we started that dialogue, there was a lot of resistance to doing that. They have been doing it for some time. I fully expect it to happen into the future. And that's really at the very basis how we try to offset the impacts.

Hopefully, as our plans get done, they can all be kind of tied together so these potential impacts can be addressed in a more holistic way as part of the larger system, and that's really where the planning and dialogue between our group and folks like the H-GAC and other transportation groups will continue.

So, I look forward to any questions later on.  
(Applause.)

MS. SWEETNAM: Thank you.

And now we're going to hear from Rebecca Jensen. She is the environmental -- a project manager in the

quality? First, the plan mentions regional air quality, which averages pollution over space and time, but does not mention pollution peaks on or near highways where there are many homes and schools. The plan doesn't consider pollutants beyond those impacting the ozone problem. Therefore, it doesn't address a number of pollutants known to be associated with serious adverse health impacts. And these include air toxics, such as benzene, 1,3-butadiene, formaldehyde, acetaldehyde and other criteria pollutants, like carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide.

The plan also doesn't consider emissions from construction equipment -- and of particular concern here are the diesel emissions -- nor does it consider emissions from road dust, chemicals evaporating from the road surface, and particles from the breakdown of brake linings and tires.

The plan also offers few details about the assumptions going into the air quality model. For example, other cities have found that highway expansion helps fuel an increase in driving, triggering changes in driver behavior and land use that spurs additional vehicle travel. They call those induced traffic. It is unclear whether this increase in driving is adequately considered.

So, now I'll move on to health. The word "health" appears only a few times in the plan, and none of the references relate explicitly to the impact of air

pollution on public health. The plan does not account for the differential impact of the pollution that will be imposed on the populations adjacent to the expanded roadways, particularly homes, schools, and day care centers. And the studies published in a wide range of scientific journals document the health effects for people living at various distances from roads with as few as 20,000 vehicles per day. And this is about the amount of traffic you might see on Kirby or a tenth of the amount of traffic on a typical Houston freeway.

And multiple studies have addressed this, and a few examples I'll give here. First, compared with children exposed to background levels of air pollution, children living near major roads had higher rates of hospital admissions for asthma, respiratory symptoms, reduced lung function, and respiratory infections.

Secondly, infants exposed to high levels of traffic exhaust had an increased risk of developing asthma during childhood.

Third, mothers who lived close to heavy traffic during pregnancy were 10 to 20 percent more likely to have a preterm birth or a low term -- low birth weight baby.

Fourth, men and women living within 200 meters of major roads were shown to be at increased risk of dying from stroke as compared to people living a thousand meters

Kleinberg, Professor of Sociology at Rice University. He has been there for many years and is responsible for a very well-known public opinion survey of Houstonians. And I've asked him to come and talk to us about how the general public is responding to the economic, demographic, and environmental challenges of our time.

MR. KLEINBERG: Two minutes?

MS. SWEETNAM: Five.

MR. KLEINBERG: Okay. I'm delighted to be here. I want to go as quick as I can, because we're here because of you and your participation and questions are the most important for this meeting.

We've been doing a survey, as Heidi mentions now, for 23 years, taking a representative random sample of Harris County residents, something called the Houston Area survey, a regional random sample, and asking people with identical questions over the years: "How do you see the world? What is happening in your life?"

And then we have sat back and watched the world change. We did the first survey in March of 1982. Two months later, the oil boom collapsed. Houston went into a major recession and recovered in the late Eighties into a restructured economy and a demographic revolution. So, we've been watching those changes.

The new economy is one in which the source of

from major roads. So, most of these health effects appear strongest within about a hundred meters of -- or about one football field. But studies show effects up to 300 meters from major roads. So, I have a list of references I'm happy to give anyone who is interested.

I also wanted to mention that health is also a concern for people driving on the roadways and I don't just mean vehicle crashes. Levels of air pollution inside a cabin of the car are often about 2 to 4 times greater than the levels outside a car, especially when traffic is moving slowly.

So, in conclusion, I think more work should be done to ensure that the public's health needs are adequately addressed. And of particular concern is the impact of vehicle-related pollution on people who are living, working, driving, or going to school along these expanded roadways. And I think we must begin to consider the health of area residents a top priority in the transportation planning that's now provided.

So, if you're interested in getting more information, please take a look at our Web site, [www.envirohealthhouston.org](http://www.envirohealthhouston.org), or talk to me after the meeting.

Thank you for the opportunity.

(Applause.)

MS. SWEETNAM: Our last speaker is Stephen

wealth has less and less to do now with natural resources and more and more to do with human resources. The source of wealth in the 21st century is knowledge rather than natural resources, the resources housed between the ears of the best and the brightest people in America, who can live anywhere.

And so suddenly and increasingly in Houston, we recognize that quality of life issues, far from being sort of unnecessary and sort of frivolous social spending and "nice things if you can afford it," are essential to economic prosperity for Houston in the 21st century.

I want to share with you the findings from our latest survey just completed in early March of this year, not yet released to the CHRONICLE, so, you're getting a little firsthand picture of this.

The first question we ask when we reach a random adult in a random household is: "Thank you very much for helping us out. What would you say is the biggest problem facing people in the Houston area today? What comes to mind as the biggest problem in Houston?"

At the beginning, back in 1982, traffic mobility was a high -- that was a time of the great boom when 1 million people had moved into Houston, Texas, in the previous 12 years, when people were coming at the rate of 1,380 a week, we were adding 230 cars and trucks every day to the streets and freeways of Harris County, in a city with no

planning, no concern about what we were -- about how we were going. And the result was enormous traffic.

Then, of course, came the recession and the economy was a big preoccupation. In the 1990's, crime was the great fear. Concern about crime has gone down; concern about the economy has gone down. We have a population no longer preoccupied either with economic insecurity or personal safety -- more prepared perhaps than any time in the last 22 years to freely ask what we need to do to address the issues that Houston needs to face if it's going to be as successful in the 21st century as it was in the 20th.

And in the last couple of years, mobility has once again become the biggest problem, mentioned by 34 percent, 33 percent, 33 percent, in 2003. In the latest survey completed three weeks ago, 48 percent of all Houstonians said mobility, traffic, congestion, road repair is the biggest problem facing people in Houston -- a major kind of reemergence, as high a level of concern today as at any time in the 23 years of the surveys, and an important remainder of why we're here and why this matters not only for the people who are living here now but for the opportunities for economic prosperity of Houston in the 21st century.

I want to touch on two other quick things that we found. We've asked people over the years, "How important do you think it is for Houston's success to make major

So, one of the things it reminds us of is the great challenge in this city where we are so used to using our car for everything and always -- but the best predictor, by the way, in answer to that question, was whether you were born and grew up in Houston. People who have come here from other cities were much more likely to say, "If the transportation system improves, I will not drive my car." Those -- those that have grown up in this city, we're still committed to it.

So, it is a powerful reminder of as we build a viable system of the next 15 to 20 years, to address the quality of life issues that are so central to economic prosperity for Houston in the 21st century. We're going to -- we're going to be challenged to change our own ways of thinking about mobility, about how to get around, and to recognize as the mass transit systems improve and as access to different mobility needs begin to be met, to get more and more of us to be willing to, at least on occasion, no longer drive our cars and to move into these other systems.

It is interesting, also -- we ask people, "How long does it take you to get to work?" Longer than ever before in our surveys. The number of hours -- number of minutes to drive to work. And we ask people, "How do you get to work?" 87 percent, more than ever before in our survey, said, "I drive alone to work" -- a reminder once again, a part of the challenge before us. Thank you very much.

improvements in the public transportation systems? Very important, somewhat important, or not very important?" 57 percent, up from 52 percent last year, said it was very improvement to make major improvements in -- in public transportation.

And then we asked, "How important is it for that transit system to have a rail component? Would you say very important, somewhat important, not very important?" 48 percent said "very important," higher than at any time in all the previous surveys -- clear increasing commitment to improving public transportation, clear increasing commitment to rail as an important component of that transit system.

And then we asked a question that we last asked back in 1985. Every year we sort of look back over the surveys and say, "Are there any questions we ought to ask again?" And here was one we thought, "This one, we ought to ask." It was a question that said, "Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Even if public transportation were much more efficient than it is today, I would still drive my car to work." And we wanted -- expected to see some change from 1985. In 1985, 60 percent said, "Yes, I agree. I would still drive my car to work." 37 percent said, "No, I wouldn't."

Today, 58 percent said, "Yes, I would still drive my car to work." 38 percent said, "No, I wouldn't."

(Applause.)

MS. SWEETNAM: Okay. Well, that is the conclusion of a wonderful panel discussion, and we appreciate each and every one of you for being here tonight.

Now we'd like to move into the public comment period. And I'm going to turn the microphone over to Alan Clark. H-GAC has very kindly provided us with a court reporter and who is going to make sure that all of your comments are recorded and submitted. I don't know if I said earlier, but Blueprint Houston definitely plans to take these comments, because they're mostly from people in the City of Houston, to our council members that serve on the Transportation Policy Council. So, I thank you very, very much for being here. I look forward to your comments.

MR. CLARK: I'm going to ask you to come up. And I'll give about three names -- because we're only going to have time for about 2 minutes per speaker. I apologize for that. If you are unable to give us your comments in the two-minute time slot that we've allowed here, please go to our Web site at [www.h-gac.com](http://www.h-gac.com), and on the Transportation page, where you will see the regional plan, you can send us more comment by e-mail. We will also be happy to receive it by -- by good old mail, by fax, any way you want to give it to us. Call us on the phone. We will make sure we get your comments recorded. The transcripts of tonight's meeting will

be available on our Web site as well, and they will be important information for our Transportation Policy Council.

I want to also thank all the panelists we had here this evening. They very, I think, accurately described the range of concerns that -- that are addressed by the Transportation Plan and facing our region as we look for continued growth.

And now I'm going to call forward the first three speakers in the order that they've signed up. And if you, when you arrive, if you would pronounce your name and if you're representing a group, in case I mispronounce it, for our transcriptionist.

Robin Holzer, Tom McKittrick, and Robert Mohammad. If you-all would come on up, and we'll start with Robin.

MS. HOLZER: Good evening, my name is Robin Holzer. I'm one of the cofounders of 59 Gridlock. And I want to start by clearing up why many of us are here tonight. Why have so many people come out to share their concerns with the Houston-Galveston Area Council? One reason is that H-GAC is home to the Transportation Policy Council. Recently I've heard a few members of the Transportation Policy Council say that they don't really decide which transportation projects get done, that they defer to the local transportation agencies. I've heard them say that they look to local

Finally, to all of you present, now is the time to provide concrete suggestions for how the Draft RTP can be improved. The formal public comment period ends May 4th. You can phone or e-mail H-GAC. And if you'd like to contact members of the Transportation Policy Council, they are listed on the H-GAC Web site, and there's also a handout on the table over on the side over there with their names and contact information. Thanks.

(Applause.)

MR. MCKITTRICK: My name is Tom McKittrick. I'm an architect and a retired professor of architecture from Texas A&M. I'm also a native Houstonian. I want to ask four important questions about the RTP and then tell you four reasons why I think it's flawed.

No. 1, should representatives of the counties around Houston be able to approve projects that have serious negative impacts on Houstonians?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No.

MR. MCKITTRICK: 2, should any project in the RTP be approved without evaluation of more environmentally responsible alternatives?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Absolutely not.

MR. MCKITTRICK: No. 3, shouldn't H-GAC include a new policy in this requiring a meaningful public participation process in each affected corridor or

elected officials to know what's best for each area.

However, the Transportation Policy Council is empowered by the Federal government to oversee and coordinate transportation planning activities across our eight-county Houston region. The 25 members of the TPC represent cities, counties, TX DOT, and Metro. Together, they're responsible for approving transportation projects and prioritizing which projects in the region will receive state and Federal funds.

While the Transportation Policy Council did not create the projects in the draft plan that we're here to talk about tonight, the elected officials on the TPC are in charge of deciding whether the projects in the draft plan will meet our needs without ugly side-effects like worsening flooding or air quality. If not, it's time to come up with new projects.

So, let me conclude with two requests. First, to those of you who sit on the TPC, please listen carefully tonight to the concerns of the folks who will come after me. The many experts and concerned citizens present have good ideas for how to simultaneously improve mobility and the quality of life in our region.

Second, we can delay the vote on the RTP and give ourselves time to evaluate the Draft RTP critically. There are many problems with this plan, and we all need time to fix them.

neighborhood?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

MR. MCKITTRICK: No. 4, shouldn't the RTP be based on a comprehensive vision for the region and for the City of Houston, developed through a process similar to Envision Utah? And some of you know about that.

This RTP -- here are the flaws. This RTP will add to Houston's already serious air pollution problem. Those new residents will own over 2.8 million additional cars and trucks. The RTP will extract a heavy price from Houston's homeowners and businesses; it will take countless homes and businesses in Houston for road right-of-way. It will cause 60 to 100 square miles of new parking lots and garages. It will require 30 square miles of paving for new roads. It will require over 12 square miles of land for retention ponds.

This RTP will not solve the problem of automobile congestion. New roads will induce more driving, as numbers of cars grow to over 6 million in the eight-county region. New toll roads will inject cars inside Loop 610, creating massive congestion.

This RTP fails to address future RTP transportation scenarios. No. 1, the location and impact of the NAFTA highway, I-69, is not addressed.

Time? Thank you again for your attention.

(Applause.)

MR. MOHAMMAD: Good evening -- good evening. I'm Robert Mohammad, minister of Mosque 45, Nation of Islam. I'm an urban planning student at the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs and all-around nice guy.

I want to -- first of all, let me thank those in this Houston-Galveston Area Council for your hard work and sacrifice in putting together this plan. I don't think, though, that we share the same values; but that does not mean the plan is flawed. If the goals and objectives that you set out are the goals and objectives that you want to achieve, it's a good plan.

But we don't have the same values. And I'd like to bring to your attention that increasing capacity in roads is not the way to go. And just adopting the Metro Solution plan, instead of being an advocate for its improvement and betterment, is really the way to go.

And then I'm concerned about your population analysis. I only got two minutes; it's hard for a preacher. Now one minute. It's real hard. But your population analysis -- really, it is insufficient in so much as we keep talking about 3 million people, 3 million people. But you're not telling us what type of people. I suggest that you get Dr. Kleinberg's Houston area survey and that you find out that these are going to be young, Hispanic, immigrant,

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you. Next we'll hear from Olive Hughes, Terry Thomas, and Ed Brown. If you will please start to come forward. And we'll start with Olive.

MS. HUGHES: Good evening. My name is Olive Hughes. I'm a life-long Houstonian. I've just finished reading a biography of Robert Moses, who for 40 years dominated transportation in New York City. It is a cautionary tale for Houston. Moses built freeways and bridges, to the exclusion of surface rail, subways, and walkways. He gave no thought to the infrastructure required to absorb the cars he brought to the city; no thought to the cross-streets, through-streets, parking, and pedestrians; no thought to air and noise pollution. And as quickly as he built, they filled. Congestion persisted. New York's problems will become Houston's problems.

Read the Houston-Galveston Area Council's proposed Regional Transportation Plan: it's incomprehensible. If the council cannot present its plan in accessible facts and figures, the plan is bad and it should not be hastily adopted. The proposed plan includes little rail except for Metro's late limited plan. The proposed plan is a concrete mask of our true transportation problems, not a (inaudible) integrated comprehensive solution. Its answer to surface congestion is to convert thoroughfares to freeway

undereducated, and poor.

So, now we've got this reliance on roads, but these are roads to nowhere, for master-planned communities, to a noncomprehensive plan, deed-restricted, developer-friendly, urban core with no affordable housing policy. And if you're going to --

(Applause.)

MR. MOHAMMAD: Wait. You're messing up my time. Hold up.

And if we're going to concentrate bicycle paths and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods around our employment centers -- I saw a reliance in this plan on employment centers -- then you must understand the concept of neighborhoods says that there is a quarter of a mile walking distance radius. Now, where in the Medical Center are you going to find affordable housing in a quarter of a mile of that?

And it's not really the employment centers we should be looking at. We should also be looking at the small to medium-size businesses that are related to or dependent on these major employment centers, because they and their employees are really the ones that are going to cause a lot of the congestion. So, please, no more roads to nowhere. Let's have a comprehensive plan that takes everything into account.

with concrete.

We need a plan, a plan with rail, a plan supporting through-streets, buses, walkways, parking, and bike paths -- a plan for all people. If everyone drives, nobody moves. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. THOMAS: Good evening. My name is Terry Thomas. I'm a lifetime regional citizen, so -- but I am also a member of the Spring Branch Memorial Chapter of Mothers for Clean Air and the new chairman of the Katy Corridor Coalition.

I'd like to talk to you about air quality. Air quality is what got me involved in this issue. Air quality is a major issue in Houston. And while the projects listed in the Regional Transportation Plan will be evaluated for their compliance with the Federal ozone standard, the draft fails to analyze or even discuss the health effects associated with more serious air pollution, such as the fine particulate pollution from vehicles. The draft plan fails to ensure that people on and near highways and major roadways, where many of us live in homes, businesses, schools, will be breathing clean air.

This RTP is a draft for the next 20 years. It's a plan of the future. So, my question is: Why does it not look into the future with the latest science available

today on how particulate pollution will affect our health? Houston needs a balanced plan with alternatives to highways which offer citizens more transportation -- transportation choices while protecting our environment and quality of health.

The RTP is missing critical analysis that is necessary before the public or elected officials can reasonably assess it. The TPC should defer the May 28th vote at least until June 25th, to allow them time to come up with a more balanced plan. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. BROWN: This is not a written preparation. This is off-the-cuff. So, I'm your first speaker that's not going to read something, I guess. But I've been in and around the Albany Street for the last 25 years, and we're talking about a plan that's supposed to look into the future 25 years. In 1956 M. King Hubert predicted that America would reach a peak in oil production in 1970. He was laughed at. We reached a peak in oil production in 1970. Today Kenneth Deffeyes has said that we will reach a peak in oil production worldwide within the next five years. I don't know if you're laughing at him or not, but it seems to me that a 25-year plan needs to address this to some extent.

The Offshore Technology Conference in this year is in Houston. And on Thursday, May 6, they are going

This is a great plan, what these people worked on. You know, if you tell anybody that "Okay, we're going to have so many people, 3 million more people in the next 20 years, and we need so much water and we need so many hospitals and we need so many" -- they will plan for that.

But roads, in my opinion, is not exactly that. You have to know -- you cannot just say, "Okay, we're going to build roads to accommodate so many more people" and let them just come and drive on them. I think better planning has to be that you plan as to where those people are going to live, where they are going to work, where they are going to play, and then design a transportation system which accommodate the needs of those people.

I think that if we want to be the best city in the world in the 21st century, and we have the potential to be, I think that we have to come up with a plan which address not only additional 3 million people but maybe a lot more than that. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

DR. STROBL: Hi. My name is Roland Strobl. I am an urban planner. I have a Ph.D. from Southern California in Urban Planning, and I find it -- I'm actually a new transplant to Houston, moved here in January, and I'm actually finding it a great place. It's amazingly interesting from an urban planning standpoint. And to that,

to spend a half a day talking about this. Is this a real situation or not? My suggestion would be that we build mass transit, then see what else we need to build. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you. Our next three speakers will be Councilman M. J. Khan, Roland Strobl, and David Crosley. Councilman -- and one of our newest TPC members.

COUNCILMAN KHAN: Thank you. I want to make one address. My name is M. J. Khan, and I hope and plan to be a life-long Houstonian.

As an observation, Dr. Kleinberg, I'm a big fan of you. Next time when you do a survey, ask the people that "if you're given a choice of driving two hours in Houston congested traffic to go to work, or take a mass transit which will take you to work in 15 minutes, what will you choose?" I bet you will not find 58 percent driving their cars to work.

The other suggestion I have is that I think that panels like this, you should also consider inviting urban planners. We heard about a statistic that population in Houston going to double by 2025, 3 million more people. Just imagine if you don't have any city and you're planning on building a city for 3 million people, what would you do? I think that urban planner must be part of this process.

I guess I'd like to make a few comments.

First of all, a couple of -- two lessons from L.A. First of all, you cannot build your way out of congestion. It is impossible.

(Applause.)

DR. STROBL: And just moving along, secondly, rail can work. They built the first blue line in L.A. It didn't -- it took off, but it didn't do as well as they thought. Then they built a subway, then they built a line out to Pasadena -- not to be confused with our Pasadena here. But now the system is working, and lots of people are using it. It's the same kind of thing here. Once we get commuter rail and other types of rail, not just light rail, working, it's a system that works because it goes to places where people go. Simple -- simple thing.

Second point I'd like to make is a point on long-range planning. You make some goals, and you make some objectives that try to fulfill those goals, periodically review them. The key point in that is that you have to stick to that. The plan that we have in front of us makes some -- has some really great goals in it. But when you look at Appendix N that has all the list of projects, 60 percent of \$30 billion is spent on added capacity for new roads. The majority of that is the Grand Parkway. A couple of other points -- but I'll move along.

Thirdly, the H-GAC is a great organization because it is situated in a way that no other place is here in the Houston area. It's a super- -- a superregional agency. You have not only the ability but also the duty, I would say, to educate not only the public but all decision makers that you're dealing with as well. And in order to educate them, you have to let them know what is -- what the people are saying from all the surveys, what your own results are showing, but why some of the ideas -- or why most of the ideas in the plan are not necessarily the ones that the people are -- are looking for. It should be used more as a bully pulpit. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. CROSLY: Hi. My name is David Crosley. I'm president of the Gulf Coast Institute, where we do research on urban issues. First, I want to commend the staff at H-GAC -- and I think everybody needs to understand that H-GAC is an intensely political organization and that elected officials drive all the assumptions that the staff then has to bring forward into a plan.

Having said that, there's a lot to question in this plan, and there's -- and I have already written 36 pages of single-spaced comments. So, this is going to be hard -- and I'm nowhere near finished, and I wonder if we could extend the public comment period another year.

we're seeing on how the projects themselves get ranked is that there's a new system that's saying that if there's transit in your area, you get extra points for that transit. If there's environmental justice issues, like where -- a lot of people in households with no cars, then you get extra points for that.

Well, finally, to just say that those are being used to produce road-widening projects that will make life worse for the people or make transit not work in those areas.

And finally, just to say those maps are also on-line at [www.livablehouston.com](http://www.livablehouston.com), where there are bulletins about all of this stuff as well. Thanks.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you. Our next three speakers, Wesley Kruger, David Marrack, and Linda George Smith. If you all would come up, please.

MR. KRUGER: In the interest of time, people have said it better than I could ever say it. So, I'm going to sit down.

(Applause.)

DR. MARRACK: I'm Dr. Marrack, a practicing physician. This plan is predicated on three things. One, there will be 1.5 million jobs. Dr. Kleinberg has told you: The jobs are going to be service jobs. They can go anywhere.

But there's three brief things I'd like to mention. One is that I don't think this vision in any way relates to the vision that you hear from the public participation in this process or in Blueprint Houston or anything else we're hearing, and I think that's a -- and I don't mean that sentence, it's the "vision." I mean the vision. We're talking about spending 83 percent of the \$29 billion of added capacity money on roads. And the people have called for more balanced, something different, not 5 to 1 against transit.

So, this vision is going to produce a much more fragmented and sprawling region than we have now, and we need to really think about that. The forecasts on which all of this stuff is based, I think we're seeing a skew or a bias toward suburban expansion, something we just wanted to --

(Applause.)

MR. CROSLY: And I say that because I look at these charts and graphs, and I see a teeny little sector in the middle of the Loop that's compared to some place that's 20 times as large out in Montgomery County, and it says there's 10,000 people there and there's nobody inside the Loop living. So, sectors having -- this is -- there's technical issues here about how the forecasts are done that really need to be addressed.

But finally, I think the biggest issue that

They're going to be in India and China and you know where. Not in Houston. Don't believe that figure of 1.5 million. They ain't going to be here. There aren't any resources.

The next thing is the population growth is predicted to be 3-1/2, 4 million. What are they going to do if there are no jobs? Obviously, they're not coming. Who will come here when you can go other places?

The last thing is it's predicated on almost totally automobile transport. Are you really going to do Dr. Kleinberg's story of all people going by -- 60 percent or something, by alone in a car when your gas costs you 4 to \$5 a gallon? It's going to do that within five to ten years. When China demands its quota of the world's oil and India, too, and they're expanding rapidly, much faster than we are -- you've got a problem. You won't be going by auto.

And so, the problem here is, with this plan, there are no alternatives. And there are alternatives if a proper were presented. It's your taxes that are going to be spent. Are there not some better things that those taxes could be applied to, antenatal care for our ladies, immunization of children? There are some real things that we need in this city. It surely ain't more cars.

Lastly, Metro is required to have a referendum. We're going to have to spend this kind of money, we need a referendum.

(Applause.)

DR. MARRACK: And we want some proper alternatives, with their full impacts. This doesn't -- the costs presented here do not include the flooding costs. They don't include the huge health costs if you live within 300 meters of a road. We need to change the plan. Throw this out and get a plan that represents the kind of growth we're going to see in the next 20 years. And it isn't the one that's projected.

(Applause.)

MS. SMITH: Good evening. My name is Linda George Smith, and I've lived in Houston in the West University area, in or around, for 52 years. I've been a teacher since 1971, and I am the mother of a stepdaughter and granddaughter. I care deeply about Houston's children. I care about the air quality. I care about the water quality and all the health issues. I also care about preserving our beautiful city, the beautiful bayous, the waterways and so forth, for recreation for the future.

And the reason I bring those things up is because this plan emphasizes roads and not mass transit. It takes so much area away from our green space and so forth and so on, plus it pollutes terribly.

I also -- my last incarnation was as a cofounder of the Anti Toll Road Coalition of the West

are something that I think every city shouldn't want. Please make Houston the "wants," not the "don't wants." Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. LEDVINA: Hi. My name is Polly Ledvina. I'm Kirby Ledvina's mom. Kirby will be 21 in 2025.

Our region is already severely out of bounds with respect to transportation alternatives. And for all the reasons you heard already, Harris County residents have made it clear in polls that they want more balance in their transportation strategies and they want more transportation choices. If balance and choice are our goals, this means putting more of our resources and creativity towards improving conditions for transit, cycling, and walking, as opposed to new roads.

The RTP does not do this. Instead, it takes us in exactly the wrong direction by calling for -- and I thought the number was 73 percent -- of total projects to be roads and about 27 to be transit. Worse than that, it threatens to back us into a need for future highway projects we know we don't want. For example, with all of the new and widened roads in the plan for West Houston, we are about to be backed into the need, as Linda just said, to either double-deck the West Loop or create a bypass through Memorial Park and West University. This would come against the will of the many residents who have already made it clear to

University area, because Harris County decided to study putting a toll road under -- under Memorial Park, down Community Drive, behind our houses in West University. Now, Steve Raddick has promised that we will not have that toll road. But if we don't revise the plan and put a lot more mass transit into the plan, reduce the roads, we're going to see a lot more toll roads threatening our communities.

So, for all the reasons, we're asking H-GAC to postpone the vote, to revise the plan, and put a lot more mass transit into the plan. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you. The next three speakers, Kirby Ledvina, Polly Ledvina, and Chris Williamson. If you-all would come forward, please.

MISS LEDVINA: Hi. I'm Kirby Ledvina, and I want a good city to live in. I want a city where there is plenty of trees and grass, where it's safe to ride your bike without having to worry so much about cars, where we have bigger sidewalks. I think Houston should have more villages like Rice Village, where you feel safe and there are small shops and bikers and big sidewalks. I also think that Houston should have more public parks. I don't want a city where the skies are gray with pollution. I don't want a city that is covered with freeways and cars. Those "don't wants"

officials that they do not want either a double-decked loop or a bypass through park and neighborhoods.

We need to see transit alternatives in the plan which will help us escape fates we have said we don't want and help us bring into -- bring us into a future we have said we do want. I've given the West Loop as one example where transit alternatives could make a difference. I think H-GAC should use its modeling and outside consultants to identify others. The MPO owes the public an analysis and presentation of transit alternatives that will prevent the need to construct and widen more highways and tollways through our parks and neighborhoods. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. WILLIAMSON: My name is Chris Williamson. I was born in Houston, grew up in Galveston, live in Galveston now, have lived in Houston. So, I guess I'm bi-city, if you can -- can I say that in public?

Just to boil it down, this -- this floored me when I looked at it this way. And I wish I had some mesmerizing graphics to go up on the wall of my own, but this is what my printer could do. So, some of you up front can see this, and you'll get the point.

If you look at the 2025 plan, it's got a section on goals. And I mean, I commend you guys for putting together what you have put together. It's a very

professional document. And they have goals in the 2025 plan. And I'm paraphrasing here for time, but at the top of the list is reducing congestion and helping the economy. The second goal is maintenance of the system. Third is safety. Fourth is the environment.

Well, here is the list of goals that Blueprint Houston's Citizens Congress adopted last year in the Citizens Agenda for Houston's Future. No. 1 is public transit. Second is good air. Third is better government. Fourth is maintenance. Fifth is economy. And sixth is congestion. You could almost flip the planner's list over and it would be the Citizens Agenda list.

Now, the good news is that we're on the same page. But what I would like to see three years from now, I would love to be able to get up here and say, "We're also in the same column. We've put the same things as our priorities." Because if you look at the 2025 plan, it's very clear that its first goal at the top of the list is reducing congestion, whereas the Citizens Agenda, its first goal is public transit. And I think everybody in this room knows that the 2025 plan would look very different than it does today if the goals were in this order. You didn't have the benefit of this when you started planning the 2025 plan. And I just would like to say that I consider this meeting perhaps the first public meeting for the 2028 plan. And if we look

(Applause.)

DR. HELLERSTEIN: And part of the problems that we've been -- faced in getting economic assistance from the government.

I finally am extremely frustrated about the money that we've had to give back because we have lost our ozone level that we were supposed to meet, as well as the lawsuit against Houston which took several million dollars of funds, which were totally unnecessary. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. KINNEY: My name is Tarin Kinney, and I'm a graduate of the Rice School of Architecture, and I'm currently working on a grant sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance. I'm going to talk a little bit more specifically, but maybe what I'm going to propose could take us towards some of the goals that everybody else has talked about tonight.

One thing I'm wondering is if the H-GAC has done this or if anybody else thinks it might be worthwhile to consider development of the space under freeways. There's a lot of this space in Houston, and some ways that we may be able to develop this space is in an effort to mitigate negative effects of freeways on adjacent neighborhoods. We could do this by developing recreational space, more green space, new path systems. Another thing we could do is

at it that way, we've got three years to put together a kind of plan that gets us in the same column. So --

MS. BLAKE: Time.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you. Next will be Lew Hellerstein, Tarin Kinney, and Frank Blake. If you-all will come forward, please.

DR. HELLERSTEIN: Thank you. I'm Lew Hellerstein. I've practiced cancer medicine in Houston for the last 31 years.

Unfortunately, many of the people before me have taken the things I was going to talk about, health, and did a magnificent job of presenting them to you. So, I will not duplicate that information.

These problems -- well, so, what I will do is express some of my frustrations, one of which is after many years ago voting for rapid transit or transit system, I find out that a large percentage of it has been donated to filling potholes in some of our suburban locations. That just blew my mind.

Second of all, I'd like to ask someone who knows, at a meeting Culberson said and assured us that the highway would go from Mexico through Houston, up north. Does anyone have any data on that? 69? Because that would strike me just as a disaster.

process pollutants in these spaces. We could also use this to encourage the secondary wastewater management. Basically, the idea is to have a processing system overlapped over our freeway system so that it is actually taking care of some of these negative effects that the freeways are bringing to our city. So, just an idea to get out there.

There will be a civic forum at the Museum of Fine Arts sometime in the next six months. It's not -- the date isn't announced yet, but if you can look at the Rice Design Alliance Web site, that will be coming up.

(Applause.)

MR. BLAKE: My name is Frank Blake, and I'm the conservation chair for the Houston Sierra Club. First off, we would like to endorse the comments of all those who have spoken to express the concern that this plan focuses far too much on additional roads, road development, and not enough on real transit.

We feel that this plan sort of pays lip service to transit development, but it -- it's really all about building more roads. We really feel that it doesn't -- it pays lip service to dealing with the concerns of air quality, flooding, health concerns, et cetera, but it's -- it's pretty apparent that what's actually proposed on the plan does not really -- it is not really an outgrowth, trying to seriously deal with those issues.

And an issue that we're particularly concerned with is the lack of concern for preserving future green space. Houston historically -- we've had long-range road development plans that map out highways decades into the future, but we don't make a comparable effort with preserving green space and establishing parks for our community, and the parks that we do have are compromised by a lot of these road projects. Historically, we've compromised Memorial Park; 610 was split through that. Hermann Park has been compromised. There are presently plans to run a road through Herman Brown Park on the Northeast side of Houston. There are even new plans, such as the mentioned tollway through Memorial Park, and there have been other roadways planned to go through Hermann Park. This is an ongoing problem. So, all the clout in this community has been with the road-building constituency and not with the general public in terms of protecting our parks and green space, and this has got to change.

One of the highway projects in this plan is the proposed Grand Parkway. That's going to compromise some of the best state parks in the region. It goes right north of Brazos Bend State Park, and it's going to lead to secondary development, which is going to influence the observatory there and the surroundings of that park.

Anyway, we really have to get our priorities

straight and -- and plan for better comprehensive planning that protects our green space in the future so we have some place to get to. Thanks.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you. Next I'd like to invite Councilman Ron Green to address you. Councilman Green.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN GREEN: Good evening. It is great to see a room filled with people who are concerned about their neighborhoods. I won't rehash what's been said here. I was recently appointed as the Houston-Galveston Area Council Transportation Committee liaison from the City, by Mayor White. So, I attended my first meeting last week. So, I am getting up to speed on the RTP plan.

There are some things in it that I know are concerns for people in the -- the city. I am a major alternative mode of transportation plan advocate; i.e., the rail and different things like that. And I would like to see less concrete in there.

So, the H-GAC is doing a great job of updating me on the plan. And as I get the information, I want to relay it on to you. I know I've already gotten some e-mails from many of the citizens, from Blueprint and outside of Blueprint, that are -- that's pouring out some of the issues

you have with the plan. Please continue to do that for me because we are compiling a list of your concerns as well. And when I meet with H-GAC, I want to be able to address those plans on a more specific basis.

So, certainly I am working feverishly. I've been on the committee all of about ten days, but I am trying to get up to speed, also with Council Member Khan and Pam Holm, who is our other representative on the committee as well. So, we are going to do our best to make sure that the information gets in the hands of the citizens and that we have input. Once again, if you need me, my phone number is (713) 247-2012. Thank you very much.

MR. CLARK: Thank you very much, Councilman. Our next three speakers are John Wilson, John Martinez, and Joe Maruska. If you will come up. John.

MR. WILSON: Thanks, Alan. My name is John Wilson, and I serve as a member of the Technical Advisory Committee to the Transportation Policy Council. And normally I would refrain from commenting in a public meeting because I have the opportunity to have extended dialogue with H-GAC during those Technical Advisory Committee meetings.

However, I wanted to speak tonight because I feel like that dialogue has become rather fruitless. The transportation planning process that produced this document is very, very flawed. The plan was produced largely -- I

don't want to use the word "secret," but I can't think of another word. It's really right.

There were major aspects of it that a lot of us wanted to participate in and speak with the staff about and help with. I'll give a very small example of that. If you look buried in one of the appendixes, the H-GAC for the first time actually looked at alternative land use scenarios. And a lot of us really worked hard, asking them to do that, and they promised to do it, and then told us there were technical problems. And we sort of thought it had completely gone away. And then, lo and behold, they were done. We didn't have any chance to have input on the details of those.

One of them is the radical notion of 10,000 more people working downtown. Now, I've done transportation studies on downtown, and nobody can tell you within 10,000 people how many people work downtown. So, the idea that 10,000 more people is a radical, pushing the edge of the envelope idea, is just wrong. And that's an example of one of many little details in this plan that make it so incredibly flawed.

Another issue is that, finally, this plan is about a budget and how we allocate it and how we set priorities. Now, how many people in this room have a family budget or at least something that resembles one? An awful

lot of you. How many of you -- think very carefully about what's the No. 1 item on that list and how important it is to you. You got it in your head? Now, the No. 1 item on H-GAC's budget and its priority list is rebuilding Main Street between 59 and Holcomb. That's the one that scores the highest in the whole plan, according to a spreadsheet that I got from the staff. That road was just rebuilt, except for one segment, and that part is going to be rebuilt in a few months or years. It's already been done once. And yet, they want to come back and tear it up and put in what's called an Express Street, with grade separation, perhaps, or at least separation from all the other streets, with turn lanes and all kinds of things, tearing out all the trees.

MS. BLAKE: Time.

MR. WILSON: It's incomprehensible. This plan is so flawed that I don't ask for more time for public comment. Let's bring this to a vote and vote it down, and let's start all over again. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. MARTINEZ: I'm John Martinez. I'm the Democratic candidate for Congress, District 7, running against Republican John Culberson.

(Applause.)

MR. MARTINEZ: The Greater Houston Partnership in our business community really do want a high quality of

And thirdly, our new Metro CEO is coming from Los Angeles area, has that experience. And he is making the comments that we need to start now with transportation planning and transportation through transit, high-speed transit, so we don't become a new Los Angeles. We do not want to become Los Angeles.

So, what I ask of you likewise is to join me in a vision for Houston that includes transportation, flood control to go right along with it, because we can do both at the same time and result in cleaner air. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. MARUSKA: Hello. My name is Joe Maruska. I've been in Houston since 1965. I'm a practicing engineer. And some of the things that sort of concern me about this is I get the gut feeling that this proposal is a lot like the TX DOT major investment projects, that the answer is determined before the public gets a chance to give input. And in that case --

(Applause.)

MR. MARUSKA: -- the answer was more concrete over neighborhoods. And that's the way it sort of worked out. And I'm wondering if the proposed solution may not be worse than the disease, that it might not kill the patient. Can you envision Metro drowning in cars like it's drowning in water, and what would we do? Well, we would get rid of the

life here in Houston, as evidenced by all the advertising during the recent Super Bowl, and we're going to get it because we have excellent transportation options.

Well, we don't have that right now. I'm an oil and gas consultant that goes around the world doing oil and gas projects. And our competition in the oil industry have new cities coming up around the world and the old cities, and they have excellent transportation. Folks, we need to start doing that.

Secondly, clean air. Well, today's issue of USA TODAY has lots of cities, as they always do, and Houston is the only one on here that has an air quality index of "unhealthy" today.

Likewise, what we need, like Memorial area has, we need lots of trees and very few roads. That enhances the quality of life and makes it more desirable, but raises the price tag.

How are we going to get there? Well, we need to plan for mass transit. What I'd ask you to do would be to ask the Transportation Policy Council and H-GAC to push and put the weight on mass transit and transportation options, not roads.

No. 2, I ask you to change Congress. Let's get some people in here that reflect our desires, not opposing them.

cars.

And I want to address maintenance. Are we destroying more Houston roads while we're building roads outside of the City of Houston? There's a flier that somebody's passing around here that -- if you didn't get one, raise your hand, let him know. It discusses this subject.

Noise. Bellaire has solved this problem.

We shouldn't have to address or even think about it. Go by and look at their solution.

Air quality, how can you talk about air quality when there's not enough air quality monitoring stations? There's none 24-7 in any of these areas. And we're supposed to be reducing vehicle miles? They are exponentially going up. We need to encourage reduction and not force increases.

And finally, flooding. I live in the Memorial area near Memorial City, and we're getting new water from unknown places. We think it's I-10. And that -- it hasn't been expanded yet. There is no retention to date been built except that I-10-Beltway, and that's where all the TV stations always run every time there's a little rain, to see how much water's on its flood gauge. And that's an example of how well TX DOT pumps water. And that's what they're proposing to do now. They're going to pave over the railroad -- poor us -- detention -- retention that we've got

now that's been saving us since 1965, at least, and then they're going to pump that water uphill to somewhere in the vicinity of I-10-Beltway.

And I guess what I'm going to say is this -- is let's let the voters also vote on every toll road. You see, that's how they cram things down. We're getting things crammed down. A toll road could be crammed down your throats, and they have been, and some of them didn't even make money. Okay. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you. Our next three speakers, and I hope I pronounce these names halfway correctly, Paul Spanhach or "-hake," Suzie Rowley, and Bob Randall. I hope I halfway got those right. Please introduce yourself before you speak.

MR. SPANHACH: I would like to yield the balance of my time to the next speaker.

(Applause.)

MS. ROWLEY: Hi. My name is Suzie Rowley, and I'm an attorney for Harris County.

My name is Suzie Rowley, and I'm an attorney for Harris County. And I recently learned that this RTP plans for Westview to be a runout -- off street for I-10 and the West Belt. I live on the Westview, and Westview is a residential area, while just one street over is Long Point,

It needs to be thought about because if the price of gasoline in real dollars is going up a whole lot, then a lot of this road travel becomes a very different deal than it is now. People are thinking, "Well, we just pave some more roads and people will drive cars," but not if the price is going up a lot. And that price is going up a lot. The question is really: How much? Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you. Our next three speakers, Catherine Bargefeld, Lois Stromberg, Olivia Randall. If you would please join me.

MS. BARGEFELD: Hi. My name is Catherine Bargefeld. I'm president of Spring Branch Central Super Neighborhood. I've got one comment about where they gathered the information for this report, especially for our area. We for the past five years have been very active with the City of Houston regarding our streets, our larger streets they want to put in, and our city streets.

I know that three years ago when Spring Valley decided that TX DOT could not widen that street to four lanes, it was not done. It's a completed road. So, your information is incorrect. That road is done; it will not be done again. And if you think you're going to convince Spring Valley to widen it to four lanes, you're nuts, because they will fight you all the way,

which is a commercial district. Why would anyone plan a major thoroughfare through a residential area when one street over is a commercial district that can route the same traffic to the same destination?

Also, a major project was just finished two years ago that added sidewalks and drainage to the same 3.5-mile stretch of Westview. I want to ask: Was that two-year project just a waste of taxpayer time, money, and expense? Thank you.

(Applause.)

DR. RANDALL: Hi. I'm Bob Randall. I have a doctorate in ecological anthropology from Cal Berkeley and have been working on community gardens for a long time. What I want to do is just say something about sustainability. I don't know whether that should fit into this, but I'm particularly concerned about what is going to happen to oil in the years ahead in terms of its prices. Another gentleman mentioned that. And I don't think there's anybody around that knows anything about this subject that doesn't think that the price of oil isn't going to go up a fair amount, maybe a whole lot. And it needs to be factored into any kind of plans for transportation that far ahead.

Basically, what we need to do is to figure out what it will cost an individual, say, to travel a hundred miles in the year 2025 by car, by rapid transit.

Also, I saw Hollister on there. We went in front of City Council two years ago, made it very clear Hollister would not be four lanes and would not be cut straight through our community. We have the chance to have a huge housing development to improve our area. We are trying to revitalize Spring Branch. Let us do it, and help us. Don't work against us. You need to come out to our communities. You have to sit down and talk to us and say, "What is going to be best for you?" To take away our green space? We have very little green space, and all y'all want to do is get that traffic to go north and south and east and west. Last Sunday there were five accidents on Hammerly at Peppermill. No one stops at the Peppermill light because the lights are synchronized to go from Bingle to Gessner without stopping. That's 4-1/2 miles. This is ridiculous.

You need to work with the communities. You need to work with the people out here. Let us help tell you what roads we want. If somebody wants to live in Katy, sit on the damn freeway for two and a half hours to get downtown to work, let them do it. That's the price that you want to work downtown, you want to live in a house, and you want to live in Katy.

(Applause.)

MS. STROMBERG: Hi. My name is Lois Stromberg. I'm not going to fuss at you. I'm just going to

help you straighten out a little something out here. It's just a little thing. I am -- well, I'm president of the Spring Branch Civic Association, which is right around Campbell Road, which is what I'm going to talk about, and I am an executive vice president of Spring Branch Central Super Neighborhood, and I'm liaison for Representative Dwayne BOHACK of District 138, who that's in his district, also. Anyway, you know, grandmother, granddoggy, all that kind of thing.

But Campbell Road, let me just show you. They have written down to go from -- do a four-lane from Longpoint to Clay. Okay. Now, Campbell Road comes through, as Catherine just said, through Spring Valley from I-10. Okay. We're not going to bother that. Then it -- watch my fingers. Then it makes a one-block jog and starts again and goes two blocks through the -- and that's where it would start, right there at Long Point. Okay. Widening it. And it goes through the 17 and 1800 block, and then it goes like this (indicating). I mean, you know, like this (indicating). I know because 180 feet of it is this (indicating), and that's where I live, and it goes through -- it starts from 1800 block, jumps to 9200 block, see, because it goes like this (indicating).

And then it goes through the 9400 block. So, that's another two long blocks. Then it does this

(indicating) again and goes a few little blocks to Clay. Okay. These are residential. Further up there, that little part going up to Clay, some of that is yucky commercial, okay? But anyway, it has to pass Blalock and run like real close, a block apart, a short block apart, and just go right down to Clay.

Now, I realize that you said two things. You are trying to get traffic out of neighborhoods, you know, residential neighborhoods, and also you're watching for a lot of accidents. I want you to know -- I'm not fussing at you. I just want to tell you something that's been cleared up. On this (indicating), where I live, we used to have so many -- so many accidents. That has been cleared up. City Councilmen, listen to me. You can talk to Gary Shots, okay? I hung in there. My name was "Tenacity," I guess, for a long time. And we got bollards around there, we got glow-in-the-dark stuff. But we have -- our traffic -- I mean, our accidents has dropped to zero. I promise you, zero. So, you need to look at that, not what happened in the past as far as accidents, but look at what's going to happen in the future. We don't need (indicating) this, this, this, this, this.

Okay. One thing I want to say, though, before I sit down, the little lady who said that she feels like that you should use Long Point, you know, instead of the Westview,

I've got good news for you. John Culberson is working very hard to get us some funds for widening Long Point.

(Applause.)

MS. RANDALL: I'm Olivia Randall, and I represent the Sunnyside South Park Super Neighborhood. And I have two -- two environmental problems. The railroad tracks there on Griggs and Mykawa Road, we are the capital of the railroad tracks. I think that's an environmental problem. And I don't -- I didn't hear anything discussed tonight about the railroads.

Also, we are the capital -- Sunnyside area is the capital of the ditches in Houston, and I think that's a strong environmental problem. You know, we would have more road spaces if we had the ditches covered up. So, that is a major -- those are some major issues there.

And for -- I agree with Minister Robert Mohammad about the mass trail and the -- I mean, the mass transportation. And also, the inner city areas. We really need some attention there. You know, it's just like you have some money. Do you want to do the inside of your house or the outside? So, you have to see what you need to do the most.

So, I think we need to use some of this money and some common sense on the inner city people who -- who's really carrying a big load, and we don't get anything for our

tax dollars.

And speaking of population, you always speak about the growth, the growth. Are anybody going to die? Have anybody figured out the death projection? Are anybody dying? That's what I want to know. So -- and if you look in the HOUSTON CHRONICLE, you can see so many deaths. So, how are you-all basing it on? That's what I want to know.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Our next speakers will be Richard Farias, Loren Gearhart, and Peter Brown.

MR. FARIAS: Good evening. I'm Richard Farias. I'm with the Tejano Center for Community Concerns, president and CEO. And I'm also with Blueprint Houston.

I would like to kind of slow things down for a moment, realizing the limitations of time. But I think we're forgetting a lot of people, a lot of people that don't have cars, that have not joined the rat race, that are still walking to work and walk to school every day. And I am concerned about the inner city lack of sidewalks. Children and families are having to walk streets because there are no sidewalks to get to school. Those that have cars are having to use their cars to get their children to school because there are no sidewalks. So, I don't know if -- why there's not enough sidewalks and why that's not part of a plan. And I haven't heard anything that it is. So, I'm concerned about

that. And I think it definitely needs to be a part of the plan. Walking is still a mode of transportation, and I hate to think that all of us are just going to be hitting the highways and the roads. I think it's real important that we continue to remember that there are many thousands of children and families that are having to walk streets because of lack of sidewalks. And if we could go ahead and build those sidewalks, you could actually have less vehicles on the roads at the same time because not as many people would have to take their kids to school. That's all I really wanted to say tonight. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. GEARHART: Hello. My name is Loren Gearhart. For the past six years, I've been one of these people without a car. I've been leading a very productive life. I wouldn't say I'm out of the rat race, though.

And so, of the many challenges I've faced, the two that have been the hardest to deal with, not having a car, have not been the heat, the traffic, or the potholes. The two most challenging problems are the air, because breathing exhaust stinks. And the refrain that I hear from every voice, including my fellow cyclists, too often, that I'm crazy not to own a car, that I'm crazy -- and it's crazy to walk or bike in Houston. It's not. It actually can be done, and it needs to be done.

Okay. I think -- I think that's a message that needs to be carried back to Houston-Galveston Area Council, that we have serious concerns about the validity of this plan.

I'll make just another comment. The great architect Mies van der Rohe once said, "God is in the details." And I think with this plan, the devil is in the details. And let me give you two examples of the devil in the details. John Wilson mentioned South Main from Holcomb to 59. This is the historic part of Main Street -- and now I'm speaking on behalf of the Main Street Coalition. We do not want Main Street to become an Express Street.

And I was absolutely flabbergasted when I saw that in this plan, spending \$2.6 million per mile to reconstruct Main Street. We don't want it. The Main Street Coalition has never been consulted on this. We have a Main Street master plan that has been totally ignored by this plan. I think that's -- that's a sign that the devil is in the details.

The other one I would mention is the extension of San Jacinto through -- across I-10 through the Hardy Yards to Fulton Street. This is a very important inner-city construction project for which the construction drawings are already in progress. The construction drawings are already in progress, and there's funding committed. That segment is

In looking at this plan, I have two comments, one general, one specific. The specific one is my understanding -- I haven't looked at it in detail -- is most of the bicycle accommodations in this plan are all offroad. They are largely bayou trails, which are great if you're going out on the weekend, but they're not going to solve transportation problems without connecting these facilities to -- to the rest of the city. And that's not acceptable.

The second comment, the general comment, is that looking at this long-range plan, I find that despite awesome ambition and a huge price tag, it is essentially a "business as usual" plan that assumes that we can solve our problems by building more roads and providing lip service to so-called alternative modes of transportation. Well, "business as usual" is not going to produce a city that I'm willing to live in. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. BROWN: Thank you. My name is Peter Brown. I'm an architect and urban planner and currently an adjunct professor of urban planning at Texas Southern University. I've been sitting back in the back of the room, and I think I'm hearing a message here -- and this is democracy in action. So, I would like to have a show of hands: How many of us in this room think this plan needs to go back to the drawing board? Let's have a show of hands.

not even in the plan. It's not even there.

So, you look at this and you begin to wonder, not only is the plan flawed conceptually, it's flawed in the details. And I'd say that's -- that is really scary. That is really scary. This would not happen in any other American city, and it should not happen in Houston, Texas. We need a vision for our future, and I think the people of Houston need to demand that we have that vision come true. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: Thank you. We have one final person who's signed up to speak tonight, Christine Sagstetter. Christine.

MS. SAGSTETTER: Good evening. My name is Christine Sagstetter, and I work for Sierra Club, the Southern Plains office -- or Southern Plains Region. We have an office here in Houston.

Because my focus has been working with communities in the path of the Grand Parkway, also called State Highway 99, I attended every H-GAC 2025 Regional Transportation Plan meeting held in April, except Fort Bend County. I did get to the Conroe meeting late, and they were gone. With an hour's time that was posted publicly, in my opinion, they should have stayed.

Anyway, I was struck by the repeated

questions: "What will H-GAC do with our input? How will our comments make any difference? Will our input result in any changes to the plan? What is the process to get projects into the plan? And what exactly is H-GAC's role? Who do we need to talk to if it's not H-GAC?"

The public needs H-GAC to do a presentation that will explain the transportation process, and this should be done annually. The public needs to know that projects are selected, supported, and brought to H-GAC by local governments and can be removed by those governments. If the public supports or opposes a project, they should be speaking to their own elected representatives.

The 2025 plan and projects in it do not adequately address impacts on communities and the environment. There is a public participation process. It invites the public to participate in meetings. When the public sees no result from their input, the process seems to be in place merely to meet a legal requirement to hold a meeting; it seems hollow.

We would like to see how H-GAC responds to and implements recommendations from the public. As more citizens and communities are impacted by these transportation projects, this presents an opportunity for an improved partnership with the public and the transportation agencies which were created to serve them.

We do appreciate H-GAC and its staff and their hard work. We do ask that an honest and legitimate public review period be followed, that public comment period be extended 45 days from the date the Project Viewer is working properly so the public can locate the projects in their communities and then evaluate its impacts and make comments, and that the vote on the 2025 plan should be rescheduled to July or August, at the very least, instead of May 28, to provide adequate review and comment period.

And on a final note, I would like to say I've gone through the 223 pages in the appendix project listing and there is about 2 billion dollars' worth of Grand Parkway projects, and there are communities all around the path of the Grand Parkway that are fighting to keep this from taking their homes, their land, their farmsteads, their property, and historic places and open spaces. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. SWEETNAM: That was the last speaker that we have tonight. And I thank you all for your comments.

I want to just point out two things: One, I don't know if you saw this, but this is a public participation survey. And if you'd fill it out, we would be interested in how you heard about this meeting.

Also, I'd like to acknowledge Polly Ledvina, who prepared these maps that are on the wall. We felt very

strongly that the one important way to understand this very large plan is to look at these projects by your neighborhood and by the area in which you work. So, we feel very privileged that we have these up, and they are -- they're on the www.livablehouston.org Web site that is sponsored by the Gulf Coast Institute. So, I thank you all --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: One more speaker, please? Is that possible?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Open mike for a few moments? (Comments.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Point of information. Is the vote going to be delayed? Is the vote going to be stopped? Can we find out how that process will take place, what's decided or not decided, and when it will be decided?

MS. SWEETNAM: Okay. Let's have -- are there two people, two final speakers? Michael and -- is there one person back here who would like to speak?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Right here.

MS. SWEETNAM: Oh, right here? I have three? Three final speakers here. Please come forward, and we'll close the final comment period at that time. I'm sorry you didn't sign up.

(Comments.)

MR. ZEGAROV: I'm Michael Zegarov. I'm from Houston. I was born in Riverside area and grew up mostly in

Braes Heights and have lived in Houston all my life, 41 years. Just a couple of things.

Gosh, when I was growing up, you could go and ride a horse at Hermann Park. If you couldn't get to Hermann Park, if you could get to the corner of Kirby and Main, you could rent a horse there, and you could ride a horse. I've traveled to 61 countries, and if you talk about Houston, people say, "Space Center," "oil," and "cowboys."

I tell them, "The only time you'd see cowboys is during the rodeo."

What happened to horses in Houston? I wish there were more places to ride horses.

Also, when I was a little boy, when I was really little, before we had Astroworld, we had Playland Park down on South Main. And do y'all remember when they put the monorail in? Does anyone else remember the monorail? They built a monorail, and they said, "Why don't we think about putting a monorail in Houston? It's working in Seattle." It's working in Vancouver now. And if we had put a monorail in, nobody would be making a left turn in front of it. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. KLEIN: How do you do? I'm Barry Klein. I'm the president of the Houston Property Rights Association, but I am speaking simply for myself today. I do want to

point out that I'm a life-long human, as many of you are.

The last time that H-GAC had an official presentation to the public to comment on the plan, I made some extensive comments about the lack of a cost/benefit plan. There's no way to know if there's societal benefit from this without a cost/benefit plan that also would include external costs and opportunity costs to be included.

When Houston-Galveston Area Council -- I'm sorry. When the Flood Control District does a project, it works with the Corps of Engineers, it has a cost/benefit plan. When it works with FEMA, it has a cost/benefit plan. Those are big-dollar projects.

This road program is even bigger, and yet, there's no cost/benefit plan. So, I think that's something that should be pointed out. In any future rewrite of this plan, there should be a cost/benefit analysis done.

But today I want to point out another aspect of this kind of question that we should be dealing with, which is the equity issue. I think most of you got my flier. If you didn't get one, please talk to me afterwards. And it brings up this issue that oftentimes money is collected from one part of our region and spent in another. And it is easy to see that in the case of Harris County, which spends a small portion of its road dollars inside the city, even though the bulk of its property tax revenue was collected

cultural change in the city, where we need to come out of the isolation of our cars.

And most importantly, we need to stop this cycle that has been brought to your attention through this article that has been circulating, this cycle of cross-subsidy that has been driving further suburbanization further out from the city center.

We need to bring in real estate developers to encourage them to build truly integrated urban development that brings commercial and residential functions within the same city, so we can have walkable spaces, bicycle spaces, and that we are not always slaves to our cars. That's all that I think an alternative vision could have.

(Applause.)

MR. PAGE: I'm Bob Page. I'm a very, very interested participant in the Blueprint Houston process. Half of the process for me is -- certainly the planning is part of it. But one of -- and an equally important part is citizen participation. And clearly, you people are doing this here.

But we have a problem. It was interesting the number of hands that went up who were in agreement with all the other speakers. Everybody here is. We're preaching to the choir.

We have -- we have a problem; and that is,

from Houstonians. But that approach can be refined, and it should be done. And it does involve some very careful thinking about what is moral and what is equitable when you collect money from one part of a region and plan to spend it in another, with some significant changes in land use and in the value of the needs of the people who live in those respective parts of the Houston region. I thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. ANGELINI: Hi, everyone. I think I'm battling cleanup today. Thanks for sticking around.

MR. CLARK: What's your name?

MR. ANGELINI: My name is Alessandro Angelini. I'll be entering the doctoral program at City University of New York near fall, in urban anthropology. And Professor Kleinberg's findings, the survey results that hinted, I thought, at a social impasse, I think can be surmounted by a responsible RTP, in that when he basically found that we all want less cars on the road but we don't want it to be ours; we don't want "my car" to be off the road.

So, how do we get around that? It seems to be a contradiction that can only be solved by building more roads for more cars. But I think the RTP needs to show -- needs to reflect some of the creative solutions, like mass transit and pedestrian areas, that we've been bringing forth to them, and that this plan needs to actually bring about a

that 58 percent of the people who drive their own cars want to drive their own cars. Somehow we've got to influence them and help get people to help our good political leaders to do things in a more intelligent fashion. I would urge you all to contact Heidi. We're always interested in establishing citizen committees. If you're interested in this, let's get together and try to figure out how we can condense those 58 percent of the people to maybe take public transportation, maybe take the bus. It's just a challenge.

(Applause.)

MS. SWEETNAM: With that, we say thank you and good night.

(Conclusion of proceedings.)

REPORTER'S CERTIFICATION  
BLUEPRINT HOUSTON FORUM  
THE 2025 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN  
APRIL 27, 2004

I, Lea Abbott, Certified Court Reporter for the State of Texas, do hereby certify that the facts stated by me herein are true; that I did, in shorthand, report said proceedings, and that the above and foregoing typewritten pages contain a full, true and correct computer-aided transcription of my shorthand notes taken on said occasion.

I further certify that I am not in any capacity a regular employee of the party in whose behalf this proceedings is taken, nor in the regular employ of any parties of record; and I certify that I am not interested in the proceedings, nor a kin or counsel to the parties.

WITNESS MY HAND this the 4th day of May, 2004.

Lea Dorothy Abbott  
Texas CSR No. 6611  
Expiration Date 12/31/04  
3000 Wesleyan, Suite 325  
Houston, Texas 77027  
(713) 572-2000