



## I-45 North Houston Highway Improvement Project

# MINIMIZING COMMUNITY IMPACT



A project as complex as the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP) will impact more than just roadways while re-routing I-45. Some business owners, organization leaders, and community residents will need to make important decisions that will impact their lives. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is committed to assisting all of them in making these relocation decisions.

The NHHIP is the largest transportation project in our city's recent history, and many of the concerns expressed by neighborhood residents are more closely related to neighborhood characteristics and livability than they are to traffic and engineering. This is one reason why TxDOT studies and publishes all potential community impacts to both the natural and social environment during the environmental review process.

Transportation is an essential part of daily life that connects people to nearly every activity of their lives. This requires an understanding of the relationship between different factors affecting people within their communities. This is why the input this project has received during more than 300 community meetings including five rounds of environmental study meetings, since the plan's earliest ideas in 2011 is so valuable. Attendance at these meetings has been strong. TxDOT has learned a great deal about what is important to you as stakeholders and users of this transportation system, and how we can make the NHHIP more effective while ensuring that those affected are assisted through every step of the process.

Numerous changes have been made to the NHHIP based on public input. For a detailed review of the changes that have been made, please see NHHIP publication *Changed for the Better*.

Many aspects of the NHHIP and some of the changes implemented will enhance the communities affected by the project. TxDOT is committed to Environmental Justice which the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines as the "fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work."

Besides the overall need for transportation network improvements and the benefits that NHHIP will provide, there are a number of impacts that are likely to affect communities. In order to make sure that these impacts do not build upon one another, TxDOT is addressing these issues directly through mitigation. Mitigation is provided in order to avoid or lessen specific impacts both during construction and once the project is complete.



Professionals will work with each resident on a case-by-case basis to find affordable replacement housing as close as possible to the home a resident is leaving.

## Affordable Housing

Houston's growth has created a shortage in affordable housing. This growth can also have unintended consequences such as gentrification which can change both the appearance and social fabric of neighborhoods.

Investments from redevelopment can involuntarily displace long term residents of a particular community when they can no longer afford the associated increases in rent or property taxes. Gentrification pressures, floodplain buyout programs, and previous transportation construction projects are examples of how these impacts can all contribute to increasing affordability gaps in Houston. In fact, some areas have experienced dramatic increases in housing values which could make it more challenging for displaced residents to relocate within their neighborhoods. Demand for affordable housing near Downtown is high already. The NHHIP both increases demand while removing affordable housing supply.

To mitigate these housing market impacts, TxDOT will provide supplemental financial assistance to qualifying owners. This supplement can be applied to the incidental costs of the purchase of a new residence such as loan-related fees. Also, enhanced individualized advisory services will be provided to ease the transition and relocation process. Professionals will work with each resident on a case-by-case basis to find affordable replacement housing as close as possible to the home a resident is leaving. This support will be available until the resident is settled in their new home.

TxDOT will also offer direct financial assistance to affordable housing providers to support specific affordable housing initiatives. The eligible initiatives include construction of affordable single-family or multi-family housing, and support of programs that provide assistance and outreach related to affordable housing. This program is budgeted for more than \$25 million and will be coordinated with local partners to administer these funds effectively. Assistance will be directed towards those neighborhoods most impacted by the NHHIP.

## Kelly Village and Clayton Homes

For similar reasons, efforts will be made to ease the burden of relocating residents living in properties owned by the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) that will be directly impacted by this project. At Clayton Homes, 100% of the units will be relocated including 112 units that have been uninhabitable since Hurricane Harvey flooded them. TxDOT and HHA have entered into an agreement where HHA, funded by TxDOT, will construct replacement housing for displaced residents. Kelly Village residents will also have similar options.

This agreement with the HHA prioritizes efforts that minimize disruptions to residents during the transition. Having begun this transition process as early as possible will allow time for new affordable housing construction and reduce the need for residents to move more than once, avoid interruption of current employment, and maintain children within the same schools and school districts.

TxDOT's goal is to help households and individuals maintain their current social support networks. Disruptions associated with moving can affect a resident's access to a strong social structure built over time. This can include community activities (church and school) and other regular routines such as grocery shopping, childcare, and medical services. Individual circumstances will vary, but minority, low-income and limited English proficiency populations may be especially vulnerable to such impacts. TxDOT will work diligently to try to avoid such effects from occurring.



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New pedestrian enhancements at all crossings and connections to current pedestrian elements.

## Right to Choose

Current residents have the right to choose where they will live. Housing Choice Vouchers (formerly known as Section 8) will be offered to all current residents who are eligible. Current residents will also have the first right to reside in the new, modernized replacement units. Because 112 previously uninhabitable units will be replaced and some residents may not choose to relocate to the new replacement units and will opt instead for a Housing Choice Voucher, the result could be a net increase in the affordable housing supply in the NHHIP area.

Through an agreement with TxDOT, current residents will not be required to relocate until the land currently occupied by Clayton Homes is needed for construction of the NHHIP. TxDOT's goal is to notify all of those to be displaced at least 180 days before they need to move. Each displaced person will be given sufficient time to plan for an orderly, timely and efficient move, and have professional assistance in reviewing their choices.

TxDOT will use the same priorities to guide the purchase of at least 50 housing units, and all or a portion of the community park at Kelly Village. These displaced residents will undergo a similar process, and will also be offered a Housing Choice Voucher and be given priority to reside in other HHA properties.

Relocation specialists will be individually assigned to assess the unique needs of each household. Language accommodations will be made to help overcome any potential linguistic or cultural barriers to understanding and participating in this process.

None of those receiving relocation assistance will be put on a waitlist or have their current benefits altered as a result of this relocation plan.

## Weatherization Opportunities

When studying the socioeconomics of the NHHIP project area, many household incomes were reported to be at or below federal poverty levels. Additional burdens to these communities can pose a greater hardship than those with the ability to move, or those that have more resources to adapt to changes or impacts.

People living near the project that leave their doors and windows open because they lack air conditioning, may be exposed to increased levels of dust and noise during the active construction phase of the project. For these reasons, TxDOT is providing weatherization and energy efficiency services beginning in 2021 for qualifying minority and/or low-income, single-family residences. The program will include services such as:

- Energy assessments and upgrades such as increased insulation
- Window air conditioning units
- Weather-stripping
- Storm windows and door installation

The program will prioritize accessibility by bringing these services directly to affected residents. In addition to installation, the program will provide supplies and practical education on conserving resources and controlling utility costs. As with all mitigation efforts, outreach will be done to make sure that the public is aware of exactly what is being offered and how to apply or otherwise access these services.

Whether these households are renters or homeowners on fixed incomes, providing these essential home improvements is part of TxDOT's effort to keep residents in their homes so they can continue to contribute to their community's social fabric.



New pedestrian and bicyclist facilities can build neighborhood connections.

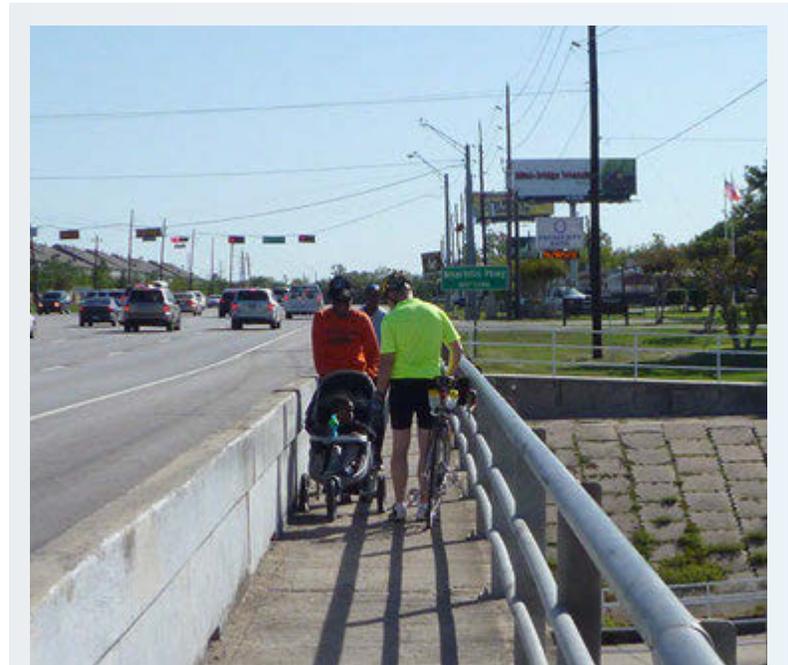
## Bike and Pedestrian Areas

New pedestrian and bicyclist facilities can build neighborhood connections and provide an increased sense of safety within the community. Although pedestrian and bicycle access may be temporarily impacted during construction, the numerous improvements being made will allow greater access once completed. Transit service may also be temporarily disrupted, but TxDOT is working with METRO to keep these at a minimum and incorporate transit improvements in the NHHIP.

TxDOT is proposing bicycle and pedestrian enhancements at all crossings and connections to current pedestrian elements. This includes the addition of bicycle lanes and sidewalks along the 44 Downtown streets that cross the freeways, including a 15–17-foot pedestrian realm that includes separate and adjacent sidewalks and bike paths. This increased width will create a buffer between the bicycle and pedestrian travelers and vehicle traffic, which is an important safety design feature. Accessible sidewalks will also be constructed and connected along frontage roads.

TxDOT will coordinate with schools in the project area regarding safe routes for school children traveling on foot, including the potential for additional pedestrian enhancements.

These enhancements to connectivity in the project plans are consistent with many local government and neighborhood plans that are increasingly emphasizing walkability as a part of overall neighborhood livability. The NHHIP will incorporate the City of Houston Bike Plan on city streets within the project area.



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*To learn more about NHHIP, scan or click the QR code and watch the Change for the Better video.*



For more information about the project please visit: [www.ih45northandmore.com](http://www.ih45northandmore.com)  
Also, find out more about TxDOT at [www.txdot.gov](http://www.txdot.gov), or contact us by email at: [HOU-PIOWebmail@txdot.gov](mailto:HOU-PIOWebmail@txdot.gov)  
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