

MAYOR TURNER'S STATE OF MOBILITY ADDRESS

Mayor Turner delivered his State of Mobility Address during the Transportation Advocacy Group Event Thursday June 8, 2017

Thank you Transportation Advocacy Group Executive Director Andrea French, and Chairman Jack Drake for inviting me. Certainly want to start out by thanking Council Member Amanda Edwards for a very gracious introduction. Executive Director Andrea French has just done a phenomenal job with this organization. Andrea's just wonderful.

I appreciate the great work being done by TAG and by all of you, as partners, to make sure that Houston's transportation network supports our continued success as a city and a region.

I really want to acknowledge TAG and the advisory board. And everyone affiliated with all the partners, certainly want to acknowledge all the elected officials that are here this morning, on the state level, the county level, all the mayors that are in the room, all the mayor that are here, let me just see, can I get a show of hands of all the other mayors that are here? In fact, why don't y'all all just stand, all the mayors stand up. I certainly appreciate y'all being here.

All the city council members that are here this morning I certainly want to thank them for being present, I appreciate that. I appreciate all the things Council Member Edwards had to say. But I think all of us who are public servants that are in business recognize that there is no one single effort, it's a collective effort. Without all of the personalities working together it's hard to get anything done and accomplished. So, I want to thank my partners at City Hall as well as other elected officials in our area. I'm going to be talking about TxDOT several times, so I certainly want to acknowledge TxDOT and the work they do.

Our growth is well-documented, and although we may have seen a little slowdown, Houston and our metropolitan region will remain a magnet for people who recognize us as a welcoming city that works for all.

By 2040, Houston Galveston Area Council (HGAC) forecasts that the Houston Metropolitan Area will have more than 10 million residents – that's about 4 million more than we have today, for a growth rate of about 66 percent over the next two decades.

While growth of the region is essential, how we grow is just as important – our growth must be sustainable and forward-looking. It must address a comprehensive menu of transportation needs, and must do so by coordinating approaches and partner agencies across counties and cities.

The decisions that we make as public agencies, developers, engineers and contractors will shape these growth patterns for the future. If we do our jobs well, we will create a region that attracts and accommodates healthy growth by supporting a strong economy and quality neighborhoods.

I am very impressed that TAG, although founded by industry, has diversified so greatly and now represents a broad base of stakeholders when it comes to multimodal mobility.

What impressed me the most about the MotionMap is that TAG convened various agencies and built consensus. This is what we have been lacking when it comes to advocating for more resources. I spent 25 years in the Legislature, I can tell you, in the past Houston has suffered from a lack of consensus and our region's failure to speak as one voice. TAG's leadership on this front is incredibly valuable to this region and this city.

You may remember that last year, I called for a paradigm shift in our approach to addressing mobility challenges in our region.

I've laid out key strategies including:

- Encourage well-connected urban centers/Transit-Oriented Development;
- Utilize a multi-modal approach to transportation and mobility;
- Develop and maintain efficient systems for moving freight by water, road and rail;
- Identify sources of strategic funding, and be good stewards of those resources; and
- Foster strong inter-agency coordination and partnerships.

I'm proud that we're already making progress on these, not just as a city but as a region. As we move forward, let's remember why these strategies are so critical to our success:

There's a reason they call the central city the "urban core." It's at the heart of our region's success. Focusing our roadway investments at the periphery of our region and concentrating on single-occupant vehicles is not the best policy at this time. That approach encourages sprawl. And sprawl creates congestion, exacerbates flooding, hurts air quality, encourages climate change, and destroys natural habitats. It makes us less healthy, and probably less happy too – there's not too much to be cheerful about on that list I just read.

While we dream big, we must recognize that our resources are limited. We need to be smarter as a region by aligning plans and approaches so that we use available funding as strategically as possible. That will be our ticket toward a transportation network and a metropolitan region that is healthier and more sustainable, and that provides better access to quality of life and economic opportunity for all.

I am proud of the progress we have already made toward improving Houston's mobility options and transportation network. We are working to improve our streets through [ReBuild Houston](#). But we've done much more than that.

For starters, City Council in March adopted the new Houston Bike Plan, an ambitious but realistic vision for making Houston a safe and convenient place to get around on your bicycle. The plan sets goals of more than tripling Houston's miles of high-comfort bike facilities like trails in 10 years, and achieving gold-level bike friendly recognition from the American League of Cyclists (we would be the only Texas city besides Austin to earn this status).

We continue to work toward fulfilling the [Bayou Greenways 2020](#) goal of a 150-mile interconnected system of parks and trails along our major bayous.

Bayou Greenways is the core of the [Houston Bike Plan](#), which is designed to help people in neighborhoods across the city gain easier access to the bayou trails and green space.

Another big change we've made is new leadership and a reorganization in our Public Works and Engineering Department. Karun Sreerama is doing a great job as director, with improved public engagement one of the highlights. We are now truly listening to communities – to people -- as we develop street improvements and other infrastructure upgrades across our city.

So, we *are* making great progress on a variety of fronts, but we cannot do it alone. Mobility is not a Houston issue, it's a regional problem. And one can only think of making any headway toward long-lasting and comprehensive solutions by collaborating with our regional partners.

Across the world, there are significant innovations in means and methods of mobility solutions. We have a serious and urgent need, as a region, to adapt these innovative solutions to serve our needs and priorities. I believe we must find innovative approaches; traditional solutions like building wider and newer roads have failed us. And we are backing ourselves into a corner if we just keep trying the same old ways of solving ever-changing challenges.

Underlying the problem is the mind-set of people. People across the world are changing their ideas on where they live, work, and play. Houstonians are part of this movement, especially many of the newer arrivals in our city. Our urban core is offering more and better options in all these aspects. And Houstonians seem to be changing their mindset. Living in the suburbs and working downtown used to be the norm. However, more and more people, especially millennials, choose to live in the central city and enjoy the many amenities it provides, from parks and trails to accessible public transit to theaters, museums, arts districts and other quality-of-life opportunities. Where areas like the Washington corridor, Midtown, EaDo, Heights, and Uptown used to be dead in the evenings and weekends, they are now buzzing with life and commerce.

It is important for people to have several options going from point A to point B. Everyone should be able to live anywhere in the region. We should be able to work anywhere in the region. And we should be able to travel anywhere in the region easily. The progress of our region should not be impeded by mobility. In fact, mobility across our region should be our competitive advantage.

In that spirit, let me highlight some initiatives being undertaken by the City and our partner agencies that have great potential for our community and the greater Houston region.

Our [“Walkable Places Project”](#) recognizes the importance of coordinating transportation and land use. Dense, walkable activity centers – places people like to go to shop, eat, recreate and just hang out – are vital to economic development with low impact on mobility. But our development regulations favor a “suburban” style of development, with rigid parking and landscaping requirements and buildings set back from the street. We need regulations that are sensitive to local context and enhance walkability in high density, mixed use areas where people can live, work and play in the same vicinity. That’s why I asked Planning Commission Chair Marty Stein to assemble stakeholders to review our regulations and ensure they are encouraging walkable places.

I already noted the Houston Bike Plan, and we’re doing some very good work to make bicycles more accessible to people. Our [BCycle](#) program is growing rapidly – we recorded more than 48,000 trips on BCycles through late April of this year, and that’s up 32 percent over the same period in 2016. Thanks in part to 3-point-5 million in federal funding, we’re more than tripling our system from 33 to 104 stations. You’ll soon be seeing BCycle stations in neighborhoods farther from downtown as we work to establish a real network of pickup and return stations. I also want to recognize Houston Bike Share for their work in maintaining our system.

We’re also combining our commitments to public engagement and multi-modal transportation with the [Lower Westheimer Enhanced Pre-Engineering Study](#). In a heavily traveled, congested and very space-limited stretch of Westheimer, we’re developing a creative corridor concept that enhances this eclectic area’s vibrant, walkable character. And we’re preserving vehicular mobility with increased capacity at signalized intersections, creating dedicated through-lanes and turn lanes that don’t exist today. As the Houston Chronicle recently suggested in a complimentary article, we need more creative thinking like this across our city.

TxDOT’s North Houston Highway Improvement project - At 24 miles in length and estimated to cost \$7 billion, this is one of our region’s most significant infrastructure projects of its time. The project will improve access into downtown Houston and through the heart of our city and will change the face of our urban core by re-routing I-45 to the east side of downtown and putting much of the freeway below ground level. This can also be an economic development project if designed well, and we may look to “cap” some areas, creating opportunities for parks and placemaking. Too often, freeway projects divide neighborhoods – this one can help connect them, and it’s a great opportunity for TxDOT, the City, METRO and community stakeholders to create a transformative outcome for Houston. We appreciate TxDOT’s partnership and commend the state for helping set a national example of how to improve local and regional mobility in a manner that is sensitive to the concerns of people and neighborhoods.

METRO is working to update its regional transit plan, which hasn’t seen a wholesale revision since 2003. METRO is initiating its first rounds of public outreach this summer with meetings throughout the service area, working to gather input that will build on successes from the prior METRO Solutions plan. Those successes included 15 miles of light rail, eight new park-and-rides, seven new or expanded transit centers, and a total redesign of the local bus network. That redesign was so well-received that last year METRO was one of just four transit systems in the nation that gained ridership on its local bus network. As our inner core grows denser with population, transit must be a larger part of our mobility mix. Many

of our local streets aren't suitable for expansion or widening, and so we must get more capacity out of what we have available – METRO is an essential partner in that effort. Thanks to Carrin Patman and the METRO board and staff for their leadership.

While we're on the topic of futuristic thinking, the Texas Central Partners' high-speed bullet train rail project remains an opportunity for improving transportation options to Dallas, and it looks like this concept – entirely privately funded, mind you – has survived the legislative session. That's good for Texas and good for Houston; we are already looking at the potential for redevelopment and convenient, efficient transit connections at the line's expected terminus in the 290/610 area – we want to provide easy access for those catching a train, and for those arriving in Houston, we must make sure that the end of the line isn't the end of the line.... We should be thinking Downtown, Airports, etc. (Plenty of work for contractors, architects, engineers and planners)

METRO's Uptown Bus Rapid Transit on Post Oak is a vital connection from the region into one of Houston's largest, busiest activity centers – dense areas like uptown area a great example of the truth that we cannot build our way out of congestion with everyone in their own car. More effective, efficient transit options like the BRT are the kind of thing that dense cities do around the world. We cannot keep relitigating this concept, and we would be better served to embrace the future than to cling desperately to a past that is slipping through our fingers. Once the BRT is in place, we need to identify ways to better connect Uptown and Downtown with strong transit connections.

I'd also like to commend the Houston-Galveston Area Council, which of course is a leading force for transportation planning and improvement across our region. H-GAC's High Capacity Transit Task Force, part of the Transportation Policy Council, includes Metro Chair Carrin Patman and Council Member Amanda Edwards as vice chairs. This important task force is looking at the region's long-term transit needs, and how we can attain a greater share of funding in the region for transit projects that will improve efficiency and mobility.

When we talk mobility, we often think first of ourselves as commuters. But mobility isn't just about moving people; it's also about moving the things we need for daily life. Freight movement is important to the future of our region for a variety of reasons. First, we have to eat. Much of our food arrives in Houston by truck. Trucks also bring us the gasoline that fuels our cars.

At present, about 49 percent of our freight travels by truck, 39 percent by marine vessel and 12 percent by rail. Our marine capabilities are well-known – the Port of Houston is first among U.S. ports in foreign waterborne tonnage, U.S. import tonnage, and U.S. export tonnage, and we've ranked second in the nation for total tonnage for more than two decades. The Port of Houston and other smaller ports in our region are vital to our economic health. As a region, we must focus on identifying appropriate freight corridors that will facilitate truck traffic to and from the ports.

Beyond trucks, a final key to our freight system is the railroad. There are currently more than 700 at-grade rail crossings in Houston alone, and countless more across our region. As important as the freight rail system is, these crossings can block vehicular traffic, sometimes for hours. We need to identify critical points and pursue funding for grade separations to improve safety and enhance mobility for

trains and cars. But this cannot be just a public-sector investment – we need the railroads and industry to be partners in these endeavors if we are to succeed. We recently received \$46 in federal grant for grade separation project. We are currently proposing a joint funding agreement on the match requirement between TXDOT, COH and Harris County.

In the end, then, we are back to partnerships. As we just showed by achieving pension reform that had been viewed as impossible by many, there's no limit to what we can achieve if we dream big and work together. Examples aren't hard to find:

Just look at Denver, where they're using public-private partnerships to build new light rail faster and cheaper. They're the first to use a P3 to build commuter rail, and they did it on a project that cut transit time from downtown to the airport in half when the line started running last year. The P3 approach is estimated to have saved 300 million dollars for the regional transit agency while moving construction forward more quickly than a traditional public-sector construction procurement.

Or take a look at Los Angeles, long considered the capital of California car culture. That City's new Mobility 2035 Plan, approved by City Council in August, proposes a new network of bike lanes, bus-only lanes, and similar improvements for many L.A. streets. They've already established a new autonomous vehicle policy, the [first in a major U.S. city](#), and the Mayor's Sustainable City Plan seeks to reduce vehicle-miles-traveled while increasing the use of shared mobility systems. And they're backing their vision with an estimated 121 billion dollars for transit investment through a half-cent sales tax increase.

And here's the key: Improvements cost money. Nothing good comes for free, and we are fooling ourselves if we think we can continue to enjoy a healthy, successful city if we won't invest in fundamentals like mobility and transportation.

From the Medical Center, Museum District, to Herman Park – We need an efficient people moving system. We need to carry more people quicker on existing infrastructure, while working to create more innovative, complimentary options.

Our focus should include options, not just to get us from Houston to Dallas; but also from Houston to Austin; and Houston to San Antonio.

Houston has two international airports, but we need more options to get people to and from there and on to their next destination. 90 A Commuter Rail - Consider a possible freight rail line from the Port through Dallas to Chicago. If we can envision it, we can achieve it. There is nothing that is out of our reach if we work and plan collaboratively.

Last, what I will say too --We hosted the Super Bowl this year-- It was not just the City of Houston Super Bowl; it was the Super Bowl for our *region*. And we worked in collaboration; so many different partners came together, and we invested in the Super Bowl. Bob, it did not come cheap. A lot of people put their money on the table. Course, the committee raised a lot of money, and all of us worked together to make it happen. Because we worked in collaboration, it was the most watched, and I believe the most

successful Super Bowl in this country's history, but we did it together. We did it together, and we did not try to do it on the cheap.

When it came to the pensions, seventeen years of problem in the making, but we came together. We partnered *together*, we collaborated *together*, employees and business, city council members, the business community, the legislature... all working together to make it happen. It did not happen on its own, and it did not happen with one or two personalities. But we worked together to make it happen, and we did.

Transportation is no different. It cannot be territorial. It's not about what one person does, about what one group does. It's about what we can do together.

I am a native Houstonian, proud of this city, and we've come a long, long way over the last 25 years. But other regions are not standing still either. Denver people are proud of them, and they want to move. People there in L.A., they're proud of L.A., and they want to move. There are people, they are not waiting on the City of Houston. They are not staying because you all are not prepared to spend. They want to be competitive, and they recognize that they're not competing just against Houston. They are competing with cities all over the globe.

This is our moment. This is our season, and we need a transportation mobility system that will work for the businesses that are looking at a world energy city, with the largest medical center. They are looking at this region, but they do not want to come to a city or a region where they are stuck in traffic and will get caught up trying to pave the way forward by dealing with yesterday's means.

We must be competitive. We must do it now. We must do it together, or we're going to be stuck behind Denver and L.A. And as long as I am Mayor, it's time for us to move, be creative, let's put our money where our mouths are and let's get ourselves out of this traffic.

