

Talking Points for Mayor Sylvester Turner
Texas Transportation Commission, Austin
January 28, 2016

Possible narrative (includes 3 key points from above):

- Distinguished members of the Commission, good morning. I want to thank all of you for the invitation that Commissioner Bugg extended to me to speak with you today. We had a great initial discussion earlier this week in Houston on some of TxDOT's upcoming priorities and I'm glad we can now continue the dialogue.
- Before I begin, I want to take a moment to simply express my appreciation to TxDOT, who is a vital partner to achieving the City of Houston's mobility goals. If I may, I'd like in particular to commend TxDOT's local staff in Houston, including folks like the Houston District Engineer, Quincy Allen. I'm pleased to report that our staffs work very well together in a true spirit of collaboration, and we look forward to continued partnership between our agencies.
- I'd like to offer some thoughts on how Houston is looking at our mobility challenges, and invite you to participate with the great cities of our state, like Houston, in a broader discussion on these issues. If there's one message that I'd like to convey, it's that we're seeing clear evidence that the transportation strategies that the Houston region has looked to in the past are increasingly inadequate to sustain regional growth. Our agencies must look beyond these strategies if we are to successfully accommodate the growth that Texas' major urban areas are anticipating.
- The greater Houston region is projected to grow by more than 3 million people over the next 20 years. This is greater than the population of the entire city of Chicago. The population in the greater Houston region is approximately 6.5 million. With the population of the Houston region projected to grow by nearly 50% in the next 20 years, congestion in the region will likely increase.
- The region's primary transportation strategy in the past has been to add roadway capacity. While the region has increasingly offered greater options for multiple occupant vehicles and other transportation modes, much of the added capacity has been for single occupant vehicles as well.
- It's easy to understand why. TxDOT has noted that 97% of the Texans currently drive a single occupancy vehicle for their daily trips. One could conclude that our agencies should therefore focus their resources to support these kinds of trips.
- However, this approach is actually exacerbating our congestion problems. We need a paradigm shift in order to achieve the kind of mobility outcomes we desire.
- Let me give you an example. The Katy Freeway, or Interstate 10 west of Houston, is the widest freeway in the world, with up to 26 lanes including frontage road lanes. The 2008

widening had a significant impact on the adjacent businesses and communities. Yet, despite all these lanes, in 2015 the section of this freeway near Beltway 8 was identified as the 8th most congested roadway in the state. This was only 7 years after being reconstructed!

- This example, and many others in Houston and around the state, have clearly demonstrated that the traditional strategy of adding capacity, especially single occupant vehicle capacity on the periphery of our urban areas, exacerbates urban congestion problems. These types of projects are not creating the kind of vibrant, economically strong cities that we all desire.
- There's a better way. Here are three suggestions that I'd like TxDOT to consider as we continue to pursue a vibrant, well-connected State:
 - First, we need a paradigm shift in how we prioritize mobility projects. Instead of enhancing service to the 97% of trips that are made by single occupant vehicles, TxDOT should prioritize projects that reduce that percentage below 97%. TxDOT should support urban areas by prioritizing projects that increase today's 3% of non-SOV trips to 5%, 10%, 15% of trips and beyond. Experience shows that focusing on serving the 97% will exacerbate and prolong the congestion problems that urban areas experience. We need greater focus on intercity rail, regional rail, High Occupancy Vehicle facilities, Park and Rides, Transit Centers, and robust local transit. As we grow and density, these modes are the future foundation of a successful urban mobility system. It's all about providing transportation choices.
 - Second, I believe we need to focus the highway resources for our urban regions in the urban core, where congestion is most severe. Urban cores are the crossroads where freeways, railways, and ports such as the Port of Houston come together, and where the region's mobility systems often bear the greatest stress. Spending limited resources on the region's periphery, rather than the core, exacerbates the City's already severe urban congestion and dilutes TxDOT's ability to address the most vital challenges to economic development and mobility in the urban core.
 - Third, our agencies should continue to collaborate to find comprehensive solutions for the traveling public. TxDOT and local partners like the City of Houston should work together to ensure TxDOT's projects are coordinated with enhancements to the local street system – the "last mile". Highway improvements impact our local thoroughfares, and that last mile must have adequate capacity to receive increased volumes resulting from highway improvements. Cities need to be at the table throughout project development to ensure highway improvements do not create new congestion problems along local thoroughfares with inadequate capacity. TxDOT's North Houston Highway Improvement Project, on I-45 from north Houston through downtown, has been a great example of meaningful collaboration. We commend District Engineer Quincy Allen and his staff, including Pat Henry, for their partnership for this project. We ask that these kinds of collaboration continue.

- Mobility is very important to Houston's success, and it's important to me. That's why I've asked both the directors of both the Public Works and Engineering and Planning and Development Departments as well as the City's top traffic engineer to join me here today. These departments provide City leadership on improving mobility in our city and they are available to you and your staff to continue to further this dialogue.
- Thank you very much for your time, and I'd be pleased to answer any questions you have now or in the future.