



NORTH HOUSTON HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Final EIS Now Available

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Photo courtesy of Brett Coomer/Houston Chronicle

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Since the release of the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 2017, TxDOT has continued public engagement through holding community meetings and by posting updated technical reports for public comments. Feedback received over the course of that public engagement period resulted in project design changes as well as new information on the project’s environmental concerns, impacts, and mitigation. This input resulted in changes to the EIS.

The website IH45NorthandMore.com contains the complete document:

- Volume I contains the body of the Final EIS and includes an Executive Summary, which can be downloaded separately. The summary provides a snapshot of the project background and its need and purpose; summaries of alternatives considered and anticipated environmental impacts; and the preferred alternative to improve mobility and safety throughout the NHHIP corridor, from Downtown Houston to Beltway 8 North.
- Volume II includes Final EIS exhibits; schematics and typical sections for the preferred alternative; final technical reports; and documentation of agency coordination and public involvement.
- Volume III contains responses to comments on the Draft EIS and responses to comments on the draft technical reports for the Final EIS.

The environmental process described in the document is not just a scientific compilation of impacts, it also speaks to social and human aspects similar to the Advance Acquisition of Right-of-Way (ROW) article in this newsletter.

Where to Review the Final EIS

In addition to availability online at IH45NorthandMore.com, you may make an appointment to review the document at the TxDOT Houston District Office: 7600 Washington Avenue, Houston, Texas 77007 by calling (713) 802-5207. Details about weekday appointment times and required safety measures are included in the Final EIS notice published in local papers, included in mailings, and posted on the project website.

When local officials reopen public facilities such as libraries and community centers, document distribution locations will be posted on the project website.

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Project Facts & Highlights

TxDOT recently prepared a series of white papers titled “NHHIP Project Facts & Highlights” to help convey concise and key information regarding matters of high priority to the public. Documents on the topics listed to the right are posted on the website.

These materials highlight aspects of the project that would have positive impacts, such as highway reconfiguration that eliminates the need for through-traffic to weave in and out of lanes to get where they need to go; flood prevention to keep highways passable during major flood events like Hurricane Harvey; and design options for safe, accessible, and high-comfort bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.



Next Steps

Achieving environmental clearance — the Record of Decision (ROD) — is a necessary step for the project to begin detailed project design and utility work. Although the ROD is the final step in the EIS process and will result in a selected alternative, future changes and refinements to the project can still occur. After the ROD, project development would continue, including final design, right-of-way (ROW) acquisition (advance acquisition of some parcels has already begun, as discussed below), utility relocation, mitigation activities related to environmental impacts, and construction of the project. TxDOT also anticipates continued refinements and improvements to the project as the project design continues to develop and additional input is received from the public and other stakeholders.

Estimated Potential Construction Start Dates:

Segment 1 — no sooner than 2026

Segment 2 — no sooner than 2024

Segment 3 — late 2021

Advance Acquisition of Right-of-Way

Although right-of-way (ROW) acquisition typically occurs after a proposed project’s environmental decision has been made, like a ROD, TxDOT began partnering with some property owners years prior to the environmental decision to work closely with persons and organizations that would have complex relocation requirements should the preferred alternative be selected and the project advance to construction. Advance acquisition was accomplished by TxDOT at risk, meaning that if the property were ultimately not needed for the project, TxDOT would bear the risk of having unnecessarily acquired it. Advance acquisition has no bearing or influence on determining a preferred or selected alternative. Clayton Homes and the Mexican Consulate are two recent successful partnerships.

Clayton Homes

Clayton Homes, an affordable housing complex built in Downtown Houston in 1952, is adjacent to a portion of existing US 59/I-69 subject to potential reconstruction. TxDOT began acquisition talks with the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) in 2017 to help them remove the 112 units left uninhabitable by Hurricane Harvey and to provide housing options to relocate 672 residents in the remaining 184 units. TxDOT and HHA structured a two-phased \$90 million package that gives the HHA up-front funds to construct new housing. The agreement specifies that 80% of new units be constructed within two miles of Clayton Homes, to maintain the community fabric, and that displaced residents have right of first refusal on new construction.

“...it is likely the impact upon the Houston Housing Authority, Clayton Homes, Kelly Village, and, most importantly, the residents of both communities will be positive.”

LaRence Snowden

**Chairman of the Board of Commissioners
Houston Housing Authority**

Mexican Consulate

The Mexican Consulate, located along US 59/I-69 in Midtown Houston, was identified as being in conflict with the proposed project’s footprint and a potential displacement. To facilitate the consulate’s continuous service to Mexican citizens in 37 Texas counties, TxDOT negotiated to purchase property and an existing building in Westchase and swap it for the existing site. At the new location, the renovated four-story building will provide a larger facility, the property will provide more parking, and the location will have better access to transit.

