

# CHAPTER 11.0 - PUBLIC COORDINATION AND COMMENTS

## 11.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public and agency involvement is critical to the success of any project with the potential to affect the community. The planning for the University Corridor has involved extensive coordination and consultation with the affected public and agencies. The affected public includes not only the residents in the University Corridor, but individuals, businesses, groups, clubs, civic organizations, and others interested in the study area. The agencies include local governments and state and Federal agencies with regulatory oversight and permitting responsibilities. The planning process was structured and implemented to ensure concerns and issues related to engineering solutions, social impacts, environmental impacts, economic effects, financing, and other items of concern to the community were considered.

### 11.1.1 Public Outreach Activities and Information Exchange

The goal of the public and agency involvement program and process is to have an informed local community and government leadership to help make decisions regarding the impacts and implementation of a locally preferred alternative. The public and agency involvement process is open and inclusive to ensure interested parties have an opportunity to be involved in planning. Stakeholders had an opportunity to direct, review, and comment on the analysis and results at major milestones reached during the course of the study.

The program was conducted in a manner consistent with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 106 regulations. This program has been designed to be consistent with the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) of 1998 and Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) of 2005, and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) guidelines for public involvement including, but not limited to, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 12898 Environmental Justice provisions. The program is also consistent with Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas (METRO) and other local, regional, and state agency policies that seek to fully involve the public in the planning and project development processes.

#### 11.1.1.1 Early Outreach by Elected Officials

Briefing the elected officials began before the official start of the environmental process. METRO's Government Affairs Division provided the elected officials with summary information of the METRO Solutions Phase 2 Implementation Plan and the University Corridor in particular. Briefings were held with interested officials. After the environmental process began, several briefings were held with the officials at METRO and in the corridor to show the latest findings and record community concerns.

Early outreach with the community prompted three city council members to sponsor a series of 10 meetings along the corridor in April 2006. METRO senior staff were available for these public question and answer sessions on the nature of the overall transit plan to address their specific concerns with the University Corridor. This information from these city council member-sponsored meetings was used in preparation of the scoping meetings in June 2006.

**11.1.1.2 Mailing List Development**

The initial mailing list was developed in May 2006 using property ownership data for properties directly adjacent to the proposed conceptual alternatives. In addition to ownership data, addresses by zip code and business owner addresses were purchased. The initial mailing list was further augmented by including addresses from all attendees of meetings held on the University Corridor in 2005 and early 2006 prior to the Notice of Intent. Subsequently, the mailing list has been updated with addresses of all individuals attending the Scoping Meetings in June and July 2006, and all stakeholder and small group meetings held on the proposed project. The direct mailing list currently includes over 20,000 persons.

**11.1.1.3 Newsletters and Meeting Notices**

Throughout the development of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), stakeholders within the study area were kept informed. To date, a general newsletter was prepared in English and Spanish. The newsletter was distributed to the various stakeholders at meetings and through direct mail in spring 2007. By publishing this newsletter at the mid point of the development of the University Corridor DEIS, information about the status of the environmental studies and dates of upcoming meetings were provided to a broad audience. The newsletter helped to elevate the discussions about the importance of regional mobility, the purpose and need for the University project, and the short list of alternatives under consideration. Meeting notices in English and Spanish were used to provide notice of public scoping meetings through direct mail to the mailing list. These flyers supplemented the Public Notices advertised in the newspapers.

**11.1.1.4 Newspaper Advertisements**

Newspaper advertisements announcing meetings for the University Corridor were published by METRO in English and Spanish language newspapers as listed in Table 11-1.

**Table 11-1  
Summary of Advertisements for the University Corridor DEIS Public Meetings**

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Run Date</b>	<b>Type of Ad</b>	<b>Section</b>	<b>Language</b>
<b>Scoping Meetings – June 2006</b>				
The Houston Chronicle	June 11, 2006	General	Metropolitan	English
The Houston Chronicle	June 18, 2006	General	Metropolitan	English
The Houston Chronicle – La Voz	June 21, 2006	General	Metropolitan	Spanish
The Houston Chronicle – La Vibra	June 21, 2006	General	Metropolitan	Spanish
Houston Defender	June 18, 2006	General	Weekly	English
African-American News	June 21, 2006	General	Weekly	English
The Houston Chronicle	June 22, 2006	General	Weekly	English
El Dia	June 26, 2006	General	Daily	Spanish
RUMBO	June 26, 2006	General	Daily	Spanish
<b>Public Meetings – March 2007</b>				
The Houston Chronicle	March 18, 2007	General	Metropolitan	English
The Houston Chronicle – La Voz	March 21, 2007	General	Metropolitan	Spanish
The Houston Chronicle – La Vibra	March 23, 2007	General	Metropolitan	Spanish
Houston Defender	March 18, 2007	General	Weekly	English
African-American News	March 21, 2007	General	Weekly	English
The Houston Chronicle	March 22, 2007	General	Weekly	English
El Dia	March 23, 2007	General	Daily	Spanish

#### **11.1.1.5 Web Site**

METRO's web site ([www.ridemetro.org](http://www.ridemetro.org) then click on METRO Solutions) serves as an additional method of communication for the University Corridor. Current project information including presentations and other public involvement materials are posted on the web site. The web site also provides an additional opportunity for the public to offer comments on the proposed University Corridor project. A regular electronic newsletter is sent out to interested parties covering the status of various projects including the University Corridor.

#### **11.1.1.6 Media Coordination**

Throughout the development of the DEIS, the local media has attended both stakeholder and public meetings. Articles about the meetings and the conduct of the technical work were published in The Houston Chronicle.

### **11.1.2 Public Coordination Meetings**

Public meetings and open houses were held at locations within the project corridor to provide information to the affected and interested communities and parties. The primary purpose of these meetings was to inform parties of the study's process, ensure all interested parties were given an opportunity to be involved in the project's development, and to obtain input, comments, and suggestions regarding the study's process and results. The format of the scoping meetings was open house whereby interested parties may come and go in the early evening to view project exhibits and information, ask questions, provide input, and submit surveys and/or comments. Subsequent public meetings combined the open house format with the opportunity for citizens to participate in facilitated planning work sessions. The planning work sessions were designed to solicit the public's input on specific aspects of the project including purpose and need and alternatives considered.

The public meeting venues were fully accessible to the public including those with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The venues also provided free parking or METRO paid for parking. Each meeting announcement and advertisement offered accommodations due to disability or special communication needs. Individuals with these specialized needs were provided a point of contact so that reasonable accommodations could be arranged. Brief summaries of the public meetings follow.

#### **11.1.2.1 Public Scoping – Meeting June 27 and 29, 2006**

Public scoping meetings were held at two locations along the corridor during June 2006.

- Seventy-seven (77) people attended the first public meeting, held on June 27, 2006, at the Third Ward Multi-Service Center, located off Alabama Street near TSU and the UH - Central Campus
- Two hundred (200) people attended the second public meeting, held on June 29, 2006, at the Holiday Inn Select - Greenway Plaza, located along the Southwest Freeway near Kirby Drive.

The public scoping meetings were held in an informal, open house format. The open house format allowed visitors the opportunity to view presentation material at their own pace and to express their ideas and concerns individually to corridor team members. It gave visitors greater access to the knowledgeable corridor study team and helped stimulate productive two-way dialogue. Because of the free flowing style, people were able to come and go at their leisure and talk to the corridor study team freely and without restrictions.

Meeting materials consisted of a continuous loop PowerPoint presentation to describe the scoping process, more than 20 storyboards, each with a specific purpose of conveying study process or corridor issues, and aerial maps showing preliminary alignment alternatives. The first several boards detailed the purpose of the meeting, the proposed study area, and the known major issues of concern based on previous meetings. The next several boards discussed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for this type of project, as well as the definition and purpose of the scoping process. These boards were followed by a series of boards discussing preliminary corridor issues, the proposed vehicle technology and alignment alternatives, and the potential EIS analysis categories. The final few boards outlined the project schedule, including public input opportunities, and discussed methods by which the public may comment on the proposed project.

Attendees were encouraged to provide feedback regarding issues the corridor study team should be aware of in their particular neighborhoods. Everyone was encouraged to record his or her comments. The information was then collected and input into a comment database for future analysis. A variety of methods were available to accomplish this as follows:

- Completing a detailed comment form.
- Dictating oral comments to a court reporter.
- Writing comments on a flip chart.

#### **11.1.2.2 Public Scoping – Meeting July 18, 24 and 25, 2006**

The subsequent meetings in July were also held in an open house format with a brief presentation given on the status of the preliminary alignment alternatives. Display materials included aerial maps with detailed drawing depicting the alignment alternatives and typical cross sections along each alignment.

- Three hundred sixty eight (368) people attended the third public meeting, held on July 18, 2006, at the Holiday Inn Select - Greenway Plaza, located along the Southwest Freeway near Kirby Drive.
- One hundred thirty one (131) people attended the fourth public meeting, held on July 24, 2006, at the Third Ward Multi-Service Center, located off Alabama Street near TSU and the UH - Central Campus.
- Two hundred twenty five (225) people attended the fifth public meeting, held on July 25, 2006, at St. Paul's United Methodist Church located in the Museum District along the METRORail Red Line.

The primary issues/concerns identified by the public during scoping were traffic and circulation, business and residential access, flooding and drainage, construction impacts, and safety. Other issues identified included urban forestry (trees), transit service to major centers, noise, vibration, visual, property acquisition, land use, air quality, parking, historical, regulated materials, and parklands.

#### **11.1.2.3 Public Meetings March 26 and 27, 2007**

Public meetings to solicit input on the short list of alternatives were held at two locations along the corridor during March 2007.

- Two hundred fourteen (214) people attended the first public meeting, held on March 26, 2007, at the Renaissance Hotel Greenway Plaza, located in Greenway Plaza

- Seventy-six (76) people attended the second public meeting, held on March 27, 2007, at the Hilton Hotel at the UH, located on UH-Central Campus.

These public meetings were held with a combined the open house format and facilitated planning work sessions. The open house format allowed visitors the opportunity to view presentation material at their own pace and to express their ideas and concerns individually to corridor team members. The planning work sessions were designed to solicit the public's input on specific aspects of the project including purpose and need and alternatives considered.

Meeting materials consisted of a continuous loop, voice-over PowerPoint presentation to describe the process for short listing the alternatives and presentation of the short list of alternatives to be considered in the DEIS. The PowerPoint was presented in both English and Spanish. Boards displaying each short list alternative and the corridor's environmental constraints were shown.

In the facilitated planning workshops, participants were asked a series of questions by trained facilitators to solicit input on the proposed University Corridor project. These questions were as follows:

- Thinking about the video presentation/open house and looking at your handout – What words or images stand out for you? What was surprising? What excites you about this project? What concerns you?
- With respect to the proposed alignment – What is most attractive? What benefits could be realized?
- What challenges or concerns do you foresee given the proposed alignment? What can METRO do to address some of these challenges and concerns?

Scribes recorded each groups responses and a summary report of the responses was prepared and placed on METRO's web site.

**11.1.2.4 Presentations and Community Meetings**

METRO used many formats to help inform the community and public of the project such as presentations and attending community meetings. The dates and purposes of these meetings are listed in Table 11-2.

**Table 11-2  
Summary of Presentations and Meetings**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Meeting Purpose</b>
June 30, 2006	Washington Terrace Civic Club	Alabama better option; wider boulevard; noise/safety/traffic/vibration/safety/parking/ bright lights/construction.
August 25, 2006	Sunset Terrace Civic Club	Issues and concerns with the University Corridor project.
September 27, 2006	Washington Terrace Civic Club	Alabama better option; wider boulevard; noise/safety/traffic/vibration/safety/parking/ bright lights/construction.
January 12, 2007	Crescent Realty (1900 Main)	Want to be supportive but want to be at the table to discuss options and impacts to their complex.

**Table 11-2 (continued)**  
**Summary of Presentations and Meetings**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Meeting Purpose</b>
January 16, 2007	Greenway Condominiums (1900 Main)	Potential impacts to traffic circulation and their ability to get in and out; Lakewood Church traffic impacts; fire department access; noise/vibration; construction noise at night.
January 18, 2007	Sunset Terrace Civic Club (1900 Main)	Issues and concerns with the University Corridor project.
January 22, 2007	Sunset Terrace Civic Club	Want elevated version north of Childress scrapped; stray current; traffic/ parking/privacy, noise & vibration; property values; security; safety
January 24, 2007	Greenway Condominiums (5115 Buffalo Speedway)	Potential impacts to traffic circulation and their ability to get in and out; Lakewood Church traffic impacts; fire department access; noise/vibration; construction noise at night.
January 25, 2007	Greenway Condominiums (15 Greenway Plaza)	Potential impacts to traffic circulation and their ability to get in and out; Lakewood Church traffic impacts; fire department access; noise/vibration; construction noise at night.
February 1, 2007	Richwood Place Civic Club (1900 Main)	Support the Cummins option; do not want the Montrose/59 will destroy their neighborhood. Want the option removed immediately.
February 8, 2007	BOCA (1900 Main)	Do not want the Montrose/59 option will work do help support the other options. Concerned for the impacts to their neighborhood.
February 12, 2007	Sunset Terrace site visit (3803 Childress)	Want elevated version north of Childress scrapped; stray current; traffic/ parking/privacy, noise & vibration; property values; security; safety
February 23, 2007	Intown Chamber Breakfast	Presentation on status of University Corridor project.
March 2, 2007	Greenway Condominiums	Potential impacts to traffic circulation and their ability to get in and out; Lakewood Church traffic impacts; fire department access; noise/vibration; construction noise at night.
March 6, 2007	Sunset Terrace Civic Club	Want elevated version north of Childress scrapped; stray current; traffic/ parking/privacy, noise & vibration; property values; security; safety
March 13, 2007	Super Neighborhood Councils 64 and 88	Presentation on status of University Corridor project.
March 20, 2007	First Montrose Commons/Roseland Estates (4001 Stanford)	Security at stations, placement of stations; right-of-way concerns - narrowest part where they are located; what are we doing different from Main Street
April 2, 2007	Land, Sea & Sky - Leslie Swift (1925 Richmond)	Issues and concerns with the University Corridor project.
April 4, 2007	Texas Southern University (TSU Campus)	Presentation on status of University Corridor project.
April 4, 2007	University of Houston (4211 Elgin)	Presentation on status of University Corridor project.

Source: METRO, April 2007

**11.1.3 Public Comment Database**

From the onset of scoping in the summer of 2006, METRO has been collecting public comments and filing them within a public comment database specifically designed for the University Corridor. Currently this database contains 1,273 records. These records consist of returned comments cards from scoping meetings, public meetings, workshops, e-mails to METRO staff or board members, letters, petitions, METRO on-line comment forms, faxes, post cards, reports, and comments from the METRO Solutions website. Table 11-3 lists the topics that were reflected in the comments received. The comments are listed in descending order from greatest frequency to least. These comments were used to develop project goals, objectives, and evaluation criteria.

**Table 11-3  
Public Comment Database**

<b>Comment</b>	<b>No. of Records*</b>
Traffic/Congestion	370
Visual Quality/Aesthetics	312
Construction Impacts	253
Access to Businesses/Residences	249
Safety and Security	223
Transit Service to Activity Centers	151
Urban Forestry	129
Property Acquisition	119
Property Values	118
Noise/Vibration	114
No Build	93
Parking	91
Land Use	76
Flooding/Drainage	74
Project Costs	61
Air Quality	51
Quality of Life	51
Anti-Rail	42
Historical/Archeology	36
Parklands	14
Hazardous Materials	3

Source: METRO, April 2007  
\* Comments as of April 13, 2006

**11.1.4 Public Hearing**

The DEIS has been developed to comply with applicable state and Federal regulations and acts as public disclosure document by presenting the anticipated environmental consequences of each alternative with possible reasonable and feasible mitigation measures. As part of the NEPA process, the DEIS is being circulated for the required 45-day review and comment period. During the 45-day period, the document has been made available to interested and concerned parties including residents, property owners, community groups, the business community, elected officials, and public agencies. During this comment period, a formal public hearing will be held. The purpose of the public hearing is to provide interested parties an opportunity to formally submit comments on the project and the analysis contained in the DEIS.

### **11.1.5 Continuing Public Outreach Effort**

METRO will continue to meet with interested parties and stakeholders throughout the EIS process. All the public outreach methods used during the preparation of the DEIS will continue to be used.

## **11.2 AGENCY COORDINATION**

On May 22, 2006, a Notice of Intent was published in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 71, No. 98, and in local publications, announcing FTA's and METRO's intent to prepare an EIS. The environmental process begins with a scoping effort to solicit agency and public comment on transportation alignments and alternatives.

### **11.2.1 Early Agency Coordination and Scoping**

The agency scoping meeting held on June 28, 2006, at the Houston-Galveston Area Council, provided a formal opportunity for regulatory agencies to respond to the idea of a proposed transit investment and express issues of concern. Invitations were sent to 28 agencies. Thirty-three (33) people attended the agency scoping meeting and the following agencies sent representatives:

- City of Houston (planning and development, parks).
- Federal Highway Administration.
- Harris County Flood Control District.
- Harris County Independent School District.
- Harris County Public Health Department.
- Harris County Toll Road Authority.
- Houston-Galveston Area Council.
- Houston Airport System.
- Houston Police Department.
- Texas Department of Transportation.
- Texas Parks and Wildlife.

The agenda for the agency scoping meeting included:

- Welcome and introductions.
- Overview of METRO Solutions Phase 2 Implementation Plan.
- Overview of the University Corridor and major issues of concern.
- Overview of the scoping purpose and process.
- Overview of the potential alternative technologies and alignments.
- Round table discussion with agency representatives.

The purpose of the meeting was to establish early coordination and opportunities for agency input into the planning process. The representatives were given overviews of previous scoping activities and the responses received, and more specific details pertaining to the corridor were briefly presented. Agency representatives were then invited to comment on issues of special concern within the corridor. Agency comments and responses would be used along with other transportation and environmental data and analysis collected during the environmental studies to assist in the development of alternatives and ultimately with the decision-making process.

### **11.2.2 Coordination Plan and Letters**

The purpose of the University Corridor Coordination Plan is to identify the coordination that METRO is undertaking with Federal, state, and local agencies and the public during the NEPA process for the University Corridor in accordance with the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act-A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). This coordination plan defines the roles and expectations of various agencies; it establishes a commitment to review the NEPA document at specific milestones; and it establishes an issues resolution process. A copy of the coordination plan may be found in Appendix D in Volume 2.

Participating agencies for the University Corridor are Federal, state or local agencies who may have an interest in the project and include:

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).
- Federal Railroad Administration.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
- U.S. Department of Interior.
- Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).
- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.
- Texas Historical Commission.
- City of Houston (Public Works and Engineering, Planning and Development, Parks).
- Harris County (Public Infrastructure Department).
- Harris County Flood Control District.
- Houston-Galveston Area Council.

Per the coordination plan, invitation to participate sent out on February 28, 2007, (see Appendix D in Volume 2). In response, TxDOT has requested to be a participating agency and FHWA has requested to be a cooperating agency.

### **11.2.3 Tribal Coordination**

METRO researched and sent coordination letters on behalf of FTA to Native American tribes that may have interest within Harris County; only the Comanche tribe responded (see Appendix D in Volume 2) but had no immediate concerns or issues. Furthermore, no properties of traditional religious and tribal cultural significance have been identified in the area.