

## 6. PUBLIC AND AGENCY COORDINATION

This chapter describes the on-going community and stakeholder participation and coordination program conducted during the Alternatives Analysis (AA) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process.<sup>1,2</sup> It also describes the public hearing and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) review process and comments received during this process and responses to the comments. The comments were considered by the METRO Board of Directors in making a decision on the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Southeast Corridor.

The LPA provides for new light rail transit (LRT) service operating along a line extending from downtown Houston to a terminus on Griggs Road at Beekman Road east of Martin Luther King Boulevard, connecting downtown Houston with the universities area including Texas Southern University (TSU) and the University of Houston (UH), and the Palm Center. The service would operate in restricted lanes along Capitol Street and Rusk Street west of Avenida de las Americas. Between Hamilton Street and Nagle Street it would operate in a fully exclusive, bi-directional trackway on Texas Avenue. From Texas and Nagle to the intersection of Polk Street and Scott Street this trackway would traverse various land parcels. Within this segment, the trackway would occupy the south side of Dallas Street between Roberts and Scott. South of Polk the trackway would be situated in or along Scott Street, Wheeler Street, Martin Luther King Boulevard, and Griggs Road. The service would terminate at Beekman Road.

During the course of the project, over 90 meetings ranging from scoping meetings to open houses and workshops were held in order to inform and obtain input from the participants. The results of these efforts have been documented and can be obtained from Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) upon request. Additionally, extensive media and public relations activities occurred, including maintaining a dedicated website, issuing press releases, providing interviews, and mailing printed informational material including newsletters.

### 6.1 Public Involvement Program

A program was developed at the initiation of the AA/EIS process to identify how the public and other stakeholders would be engaged throughout the duration of this project. That framework is defined in the Public Involvement Plan (PIP) that was approved by METRO in 2004 and updated throughout the course of the process.

The PIP was used as a means of ensuring active involvement for the public, affected agencies, and others to become partners and interact effectively throughout the project. It was designed to be proactive and adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act

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<sup>1</sup> Acronyms and abbreviations are defined at their first use in each chapter. A complete list of acronyms and abbreviations used in this SFEIS is contained in Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> This FEIS incorporates by reference all technical information, studies, and other public documents produced for the Southeast-Universities-Hobby Corridor Planning Study Alternatives (AA) and the *METRO Solutions Transit System Plan* that support the SFEIS. These documents are considered part of the environmental compliance record and can be requested for review at the METRO offices.

(NEPA) and the requirements defined by Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Executive Order 12898 for Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice on Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (3 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 1994 Comp., p. 859), and the National Historic Preservation Act guidance (16 United States Code (USC) 470 et seq.). Below are a few of the strategic objectives and guiding principles that framed the public and stakeholder involvement for this project. The PIP includes the complete list.

### **6.1.1 Objectives**

- Dissemination of information about the Southeast Corridor to the general public and to directly affected communities.
- Identification of stakeholder groups most affected by and interested in the Southeast Corridor and active solicitation of their input.
- Efforts to ensure adequate community understanding and maximum input through tactically planned communication forums and mechanisms.
- Production of an environmental document that is sensitive to and adequately addresses issues raised by the selection of the locally preferred investment strategy (LPIS) and the corridor's multiple stakeholders.

### **6.1.2 Guiding Principles**

- Citizen participation will be solicited throughout the study.
- Efforts will be made to identify and reach out to all segments of the community.
- Two-way communication (i.e., the free exchange of information, ideas, and values between the project team and citizens) will be sought.
- Study status and findings will be reported regularly to the public using a variety of communication mechanisms.
- All reasonable and promising suggestions by the community will be given serious consideration by the project team.
- The project team will take proactive steps to establish and maintain a physical presence in the communities.
- The project team will promptly follow-up in response to citizen's inquiries.
- Public involvement activities and input will be documented and accessible to all interested parties.
- Public meetings will be informal and will present information in language geared to the lay public and in a bi-lingual format. These meetings will provide opportunities for the public to talk directly with project team members and comments will be documented to ensure project team consideration.
- A wide range of approaches for different groups will be employed.
- Multiple opportunities will be provided for citizen input.

## 6.2 Public Involvement Strategies and Activities

Throughout the project, it was important to reinforce the AA/EIS process and the role the public plays within that process. With this goal in mind, the project team has consistently attempted to keep the following objectives in mind when implementing the public involvement strategies:

- What kind of input is being sought?
- What will be done with that input?
- When can the public anticipate a response to their input?
- What is the next step?

To facilitate a smooth and effective public outreach process, project information was developed that clearly outlined the AA/EIS process and clarified the role of project participants within that process. Special care was taken to initiate public involvement strategies that kept the general public informed of the progress of the study on an on-going basis. Strategies best suited to this type of communication include working committees, individual and group stakeholder meetings, public meetings and hearings, project-specific links, and updates to the *ridemetro.org* public web site. At major milestones throughout the study process, opportunities were provided for interested individuals to congregate and discuss the overall project progress and findings to date. Public open houses were also augmented with smaller "issues forums" which focused on specific environmental elements such as alternatives analysis, traffic impacts, mobility, and social impacts.

The public involvement activities targeted affected audiences, including local, state and federal government offices, business owners, property owners and residents within the study area, elected officials, and the general public. These groups, and others identified over the course of the study, were integrated into the study process, informed on an on-going basis, and invited to participate in developing feasible alternatives.

Following is a discussion of the meetings held over the course of the project. The meetings consisted of scoping meetings, formal community stakeholder and public meetings, Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC) meetings, general public meetings, and community workshops and open houses.

### 6.2.1 Scoping Meetings

The official Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the *Federal Register* on January 9, 2002. Scoping is a study process designed to inform the public and involved agencies about the proposed project and to identify issues and concerns early in the review process. The scoping process helps to define the alternatives to be examined and the impacts to be considered, as well as to eliminate non-significant issues. Newspaper public notices and meeting notification mailers were the primary devices used to notify the public about the meetings. Public meeting announcements were mailed to everyone on the project mailing list, which at the time contained approximately 500 addresses. Additionally, the project team distributed

more than 2,000 flyers to local businesses, retail and transit centers, schools and churches throughout the corridor. Other meetings held in 2002 were also publicized via a project website.

Formal interagency and public scoping meetings were held on February 19, 2002 at the Jesse Jones High School and on February 21, 2002 at the Texas Southern University (TSU) School of Technology. These meetings were geared towards reviewing the study goals and objectives and identifying a preliminary list of potential alternatives. The purpose and need statement, initial alternatives, and an outline of the alternatives analysis was presented at these meetings. In addition to the two public scoping meetings, an agency scoping meeting was coordinated by METRO and focused on all three Advanced High Capacity Transit (AHCT) corridors. The agency scoping meeting was held at the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) offices on February 25, 2002.

### **6.2.2 Community Stakeholder Meetings and Public Meetings**

Formal community stakeholder meetings and public meetings were held with key stakeholders representing neighborhood groups, businesses, special interest groups, and political jurisdictions. The meetings were held to obtain input on community issues and to review alternatives. Initial stakeholder meetings were used to identify members of the community that represented the various constituencies in the corridor. Over the course of the study, the project team facilitated more than 125 stakeholder meetings. In addition, project team members have attended and made presentations to a variety of community and neighborhood organizations in the study area. Recent meetings, in December 2007 and March 2008, have occurred with the Downtown District to discuss options for developing LRT at-grade in the downtown area and the alignment from US 59 to IH 45.

### **6.2.3 Community Involvement Committee**

A CIC was established to obtain input from the community at large. The CIC met at regular intervals related to major project milestones. The CIC provided feedback on the public participation activities, assisted in identifying stakeholders, and served as a liaison to their respective constituencies.

The CIC consisted of approximately 30 members made up of special interests and economic development representatives, property owners, residents, business owners, neighborhood association representatives, school district and university representatives, and other stakeholder groups that were identified within the corridor throughout the study process. The CIC met to review and comment on the project purpose and need, goals and objectives, evaluation measures, and conceptual alternatives. The CIC met a total of eight times during the course of the AA/EIS. Following is a listing of the meetings and general topics discussed at each meeting:

- April 30, 2002 – The long list of alignment possibilities and their screening (including input from the CIC);
- May 28, 2002 – Transit-related economic development potential within the corridor; short list of route segments and their formulation into route alternatives;

- July 9, 2002 – Transit technology evaluation and conclusions, update on route alternatives, discussion of evaluation methodology;
- October 24, 2002 – Update on the short-list of route alternatives and review of the evaluation criteria;
- November 19, 2002 – Conceptual design of the short-listed route alternatives;
- February 18, 2003 – Initial findings regarding the route alternatives and corridor sectors; and
- February 23, 2006 – Discussion of the DEIS build alternatives and alignment options on Scott Street/Griggs Road and Wheeler Street/Martin Luther King Boulevard.
- May 23, 2006 – Discussion of the environmental impacts along both DEIS alignment options, Scott Street/Griggs Road and Wheeler Street/Martin Luther King Boulevard.

#### **6.2.4 General Public Meetings**

General public meetings were used to reach out to the general public, particularly area residents, business owners, and other stakeholders within the study area. A total of 12 general public meetings were held during the course of the AA/ DEIS.

Comments received during the AA phase were used in the development of goals and objectives for evaluation of alternatives. Community disruption seemed to be the primary concern regarding route location. Other concerns noted during the AA phase included the need for the selected route to support opportunities for revitalization, improved north-south connectivity, fear of gentrification, and the need for the project to be pedestrian-friendly and aesthetically pleasing.

During the DEIS phase of the project, comments were more focused on the potential impacts of the build alternatives under consideration and the alignment options. The following public meetings were held:

- Tuesday, March 30, 2004, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. at Pilgrim Community Center, 3118 Blodgett Street;
- Thursday, April 1, 2004, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. at the Palm Center Business Technology Center, 5330 Griggs Road;
- Tuesday, February 28, 2006, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. at Judson Robinson, Jr. Community Center, 2020 Hermann Drive; and
- Wednesday, March 1, 2006, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. at the Palm Center Business Technology Center, 5330 Griggs Road.
- Thursday, August 17, 2006, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. at the Palm Center Business Technology Center, 5330 Griggs Road.

During the 2004 public meetings, support for the build alternatives was positive from most of those in attendance at the meetings. Scott Street was identified as being a great opportunity for economic revitalization. Some attendees indicated a preference

for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway route because it would be less disruptive and provide the fastest travel time to downtown. Other recognized that the route would bypass TSU and the Third Ward community.

The primary concerns regarding the alignment on Scott Street focused on resident displacements and potential area gentrification, property encroachment, construction impacts, traffic flow impacts, and irreversible changes to the fabric of the Third Ward community. The location of stations was of particular interest to the attendees at the meetings. Station locations suggested for study included Scott Street at Elgin, Holman, Cleburne, Wheeler, Blodgett, and at Palm Center. Comments also were expressed about the need for a park-and-ride lot at the station in the vicinity of Palm Center or expanded parking at the Southeast Transit Center.

In June of 2005, a Town Hall meeting requested by Houston City Councilmember Ada Edwards led to a discussion about the potential impacts on Scott Street south of Wheeler Street. Following this meeting, a task force was appointed to examine the matter and provide a suggested alternative. On July 29, 2005, the task force met and provided the optional alignment of Wheeler Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard, and as a result, this option was added to the DEIS for evaluation.

During the 2006 public meetings, a preference for the LRT Alternative or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Convertible Alternative was expressed. In addition, support was expressed for the Wheeler-MLK alignment option over the base alignment option. Access to properties along Scott Street south of Wheeler Street and displacement of residents were major concerns of the base alignment option.

## **6.2.5 Community Workshops and Open Houses**

During 2004, METRO sponsored a series of area-specific workshops to obtain comments from residents, property owners, and business owners likely to be most directly affected by the project. METRO hosted a workshop for each of four segments of the study area – (1) downtown to Interstate Highway 45 (IH-45); (2) IH-45 to South MacGregor Parkway; (3) Old Spanish Trail/Griggs Road to Martin Luther King Boulevard; and (4) Palm Center to Wayside Drive. A total of eight community workshops and open houses were held during the AA/DEIS. At these workshops, attendees engaged in informal discussions on various topics relevant to their specific portion of the line. METRO and consultant team representatives were available to answer questions and address concerns. The meetings were conducted in an open house format. A summary of the comments received during each the four workshops are presented below.

### **6.2.5.1 Workshop 1: Downtown Area to IH-45**

This workshop for the downtown to IH-45 segment was held on June 23, 2004. A total of 76 persons attended. Comments received at this workshop focused on the downtown alignment options, the alignment along Scott Street to IH-45, and station locations. The concerns expressed at the workshop included economic development in underdeveloped areas of downtown, traffic congestion, construction disruption, and safety at crossings.

Some participants expressed concern over increased traffic congestion associated with the recently opened LRT line in downtown. Avoidance of traffic congestion was identified as the one of the major reasons supporting the subway option. Other comments were that the subway option would be less obtrusive, less disruptive during construction, and safer for pedestrians and vehicular traffic. Safety was a major concern because the number of accidents on the existing METRORail Red Line. It was suggested that the vehicles should be brightly painted and horns used at intersections. Also safety railings should be installed especially around schools and residential areas. Residents of downtown indicated that noise levels during construction should be kept to a minimum.

The majority of participants preferred the at-grade alignment on Capitol in downtown and the proposal to maintain four lanes for traffic on Scott Street. Some of the downtown community near Chinatown suggested a station on Rusk as near Chartres as possible to maximize economic development in the commercial area of Chinatown. Participants preferred carefully and strategically planned transit-oriented development. A desire was expressed for wider sidewalks to encourage more pedestrian-friendly development. Because of the many areas of industrial, underdeveloped, and vacant land use in this segment of the corridor, economic development opportunities are more numerous. Most supported the goal of increasing residential and commercial land use in the area. Additional public consideration of alignment alternatives in downtown was conducted during the Downtown Connector Study, as described in Section 6.6.

#### **6.2.5.2 Workshop 2: IH-45 to South MacGregor Parkway**

This workshop was held on June 24, 2004, and was attended by 30 persons. The vast majority of the participants expressed support for the Scott Street alignment – indicating that it equally serves both the UH and TSU communities. Because this area is primarily residential rather than commercial, the major concerns expressed at the workshop focused on traffic and community impacts.

Most participants voiced a preference for maintaining four lanes on Scott Street, as compared to reducing the street to two lanes, or one in each direction. Maintaining the existing number of lanes will improve traffic flow. Although residents indicated that the project team should be considerate of property encroachment; most thought that reducing the number of lanes would lead to congestion. There also was concern that the proposed traffic lane and sidewalk widths were too narrow. Wider sidewalks were indicated to be more pedestrian-friendly. Comments on the number of accidents along Main Street on the METRORail Red Line led to a discussion of additional pedestrian and vehicular safety measures. It was noted that guard rails may be necessary at cross-streets. Some expressed doubt that drivers would choose to travel around the block rather than make an illegal left-turn.

In general, the only station location receiving much comment was the Elgin Street station location. Some participants suggested that a Holman Street location would be a better location when considering ridership relative to students accessing the UH campus. Concerns regarding “gang activity” on and around that corner were also expressed. Most thought a station at McGowen Street was not a good location because of crime concerns.

### **6.2.5.3 Workshop 3: South MacGregor Parkway to Martin Luther King Boulevard**

This workshop was held on June 28, 2004. A total of 51 persons attended the workshop. The majority of the residents and business owners expressed support for the alignment, but wanted to be assured that METRO provided the same quality of design and aesthetics to the Southeast Corridor as in other corridors. The majority of comments expressed at this workshop focused on encouraging community revitalization and transit-oriented development. The community seeks the same kind of beautification, revitalization, and sensitized concern that occurred on Main Street along the METRORail Red Line.

Most participants supported maintaining four lanes on Scott Street and Griggs Road. Business owners expressed concerns about how construction will hinder access to their businesses.

A key agenda item at this workshop was to provide participants the opportunity to comment on the base alignment option. Most participants felt the option that was least intrusive, most cost effective and attracted more economic growth and transit-oriented development would be best. The written comments received were more supportive of the base alignment option. A few participants indicated the Griggs Road option seemed less obtrusive and more convenient for passengers and for the potential addition of parking. The base alignment option was considered more favorable for traffic flow.

### **6.2.5.4 Workshop 4: Martin Luther King Boulevard to IH-610**

This workshop was held on June 29, 2004, and was attended by 39 persons. Again, the vast majority of those in attendance supported the fixed-guideway alignment in their community, and expressed gratitude that their community was not being “by-passed.” Many felt the fixed guideway could revitalize their community as well as bring future generations of residents and retail back to this area.

A primary focus for hosting this fourth meeting with the area limits between Palm Center and Wayside Drive was to concentrate on engaging the residents and businesses in that area who have customarily been non-participants in the project development process. The demographics of the area indicate a diverse racial profile with high populations of both African-Americans and Hispanics. Despite extraordinary outreach efforts in the area specifically targeted to engage the Hispanic/Latino population and other residents/businesses east of Martin Luther King Boulevard, the majority of the participants represented interests near and west of Martin Luther King Boulevard along Old Spanish Trail and Griggs Road.

Similar to the prior three meetings, concerns were expressed regarding the need for revitalization of the community. Like the downtown segment, there is a substantial amount of underdeveloped and vacant land in the area. Upscale, sit-down restaurants, bowling alleys, movie theatres, retail, and commercial businesses that cater to the entire family both young and old are desired.

Participants repeatedly expressed a disdain for the inordinate number of industrial, stone, and concrete sites that currently occupy numerous sites in this area. Residents

indicated that they are noisy and unattractive and would prefer land uses more appropriate for residential communities.

## 6.3 Communications

The public involvement program for the AA/DEIS incorporated concentrated efforts in gathering information, encouraging community involvement as well as providing the public with information and education. At the same time, the public involvement team sought to:

- Build on the existing community partnerships and communication networks.
- Develop, distribute, and display high quality, innovative, user-friendly, and community appropriate information.
- Coordinate closely with local jurisdictions, community organizations, and neighborhood organizations.
- Respond in a timely manner to questions and concerns raised throughout the process.

Project-specific written and graphic materials were developed for targeted audiences. The project newsletter, "*For Public Record*" and [Metrosoutheastplan.org](http://Metrosoutheastplan.org) and [RideMetro.org](http://RideMetro.org) websites were the primary vehicles for public updates and feedback.

From May to August 2006, meetings were held with several groups including the MacGregor Trail Civic Club, Old Spanish Trail Coalition of Community Partnerships, Cuney Homes Residential Council, LaSalette-South Union Coalition of Civic Clubs, W. MacGregor Estates Civic Association, Friends of MacGregor Park, University Woods/Oak Manor Civic Association, Parkwood Drive Civic Association, and the S. MacGregor Super Neighborhood #83 Association.

### 6.3.1 Project Newsletter

From May 2002 through May 2003, three newsletters were distributed. The newsletters were developed to provide study updates and to keep people informed on the overall activities planned or underway. The newsletters also reflected remarks on *The Words We Heard* at other stakeholder meetings held throughout the corridor. Project newsletters were mass mailed to all database affiliates and placed at public locations within the corridor such as community and/or senior centers, churches, recreation centers, schools, and post offices.

- The first newsletter in May 2002 provided updates to key audiences and the general public with articles that described the status of the project, announced public participation and meeting opportunities, reported on relevant neighborhood and construction issues, provided the results of previous stakeholder meetings, and solicited feedback from the readers. The first newsletter was mailed to a database of over 2,000 stakeholders, interested citizens, and community leaders, and also was distributed at community meetings/presentations.

- The second newsletter in November 2002 provided updates on design issues, highlighted the long list of alternatives, explained the project development process, announced of the upcoming Public Meetings, and provided information about how to review and comment on the alternatives. The second newsletter was mailed to a database of over 2,000 stakeholders, interested citizens, and community leaders.
- The third newsletter in May 2003 provided a summary of the finding of the AA and highlighted the short-listed Alternative 2 (SL-2) as the recommended alternative for the Southeast Corridor LPIS. The third newsletter was mailed to a database of over 2,000 stakeholders, interested citizens, and community leaders.

Another newsletter was prepared in February 2006 to identify to the public that the Wheeler-MLK alignment option and BRT and BRT Convertible alternatives were being added to the alternatives under consideration in the AA/DEIS. The newsletter also announced the public workshops on February 28 and March 1, 2006. A special edition of the project newsletter entitled “DEIS Highlights” was published to provide a summary of the DEIS findings and to announce the locations where copies of the DEIS document were available for review. The newsletter also announced the upcoming public meeting on August 17, 2006 and the public hearing on August 29, 2006.

### **6.3.2 Project Web Site**

The project team had a project-specific web site, which provided project information and updates that enabled users to provide written feedback and electronic mail to the public involvement staff. Via the website, users were able to view and comment on details regarding the study process, the alternatives and analysis, and receive information about past and upcoming public involvement opportunities. Information on the site was updated as the study progressed to reflect project progress and documentation of major milestones. The website content included:

- Project introduction, overview, and schedule;
- Summary of the public scoping meetings;
- Presentation of the long list of alternatives;
- Presentation of the short-listed alternatives and May 2002 public meetings;
- Presentation of the alternatives analysis findings and March 2003 public meetings;
- Introduction to the AA/DEIS process and summary of the March 2004 DEIS round of public meetings;
- Summaries of the comments and input from the June 2004 round of DEIS community workshops and public workshops held in February and March 2006;
- After completion of the DEIS, the document was included on the website for public review; and
- Announcements of the August 17, 2006 public meeting and the August 29, 2006 public hearing.

Information about the project is currently available on the *Ridemetro.org* website.

### **6.3.3 Informational Materials**

Easily understood written and graphic materials were developed for targeted audiences. Informational materials were designed so that they could serve multiple purposes and be used for community meetings; staff, committee, and stakeholder briefings; as well as for public meetings; and open houses/public workshops. The informational materials prepared to aid public involvement communications included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Informational flyers and handouts;
- Project fact sheets;
- Stakeholder comment sheets;
- Stakeholder questionnaires;
- Promotional brochures, postcards, and invitations;
- Video simulations;
- Frequently asked questions sheets;
- Display boards, visuals, and aerial graphics;
- Electronic mail; and
- Telephone contacts.

These written and graphic materials were regularly distributed to local area residents, business owners, churches, schools, and project database participants to keep them apprised of project milestones and upcoming public involvement activities. Electronic mail and telephone contacts were employed when appropriate.

### **6.3.4 Project Database**

A database/ mailing list that included local government agencies, community groups, corridor stakeholders, and interested parties was developed, maintained, and used in disseminating project information and responding to concerns. The database also served as a public interaction tracking mechanism and was periodically updated to reflect meetings, participation levels, issues of concern, and follow-up. At the time of the DEIS publication, the project databases contain just over 2,800 entries.

### **6.3.5 Documentation of Written Comments**

Public interaction and resulting comments were documented in the form of meeting minutes, notes, and official records of public meetings and community workshops. Following the meetings, the purpose of the meeting and the input received was documented and provided to the project team members for consideration and response as necessary.

### 6.3.6 Media Outreach

Information about the project was disseminated through various local, regional, and national media outlets, including print publications, radio stations, and television stations. Inquiries from media outlets requesting information on the project were forwarded to an appropriate METRO representative for response. The following media outlets were used to carry public notices, news releases, news items, and/or interviews:

#### Newspapers

- *African Community News Digest*
- *African-American News & Issues*
- *El Dia*
- *El Mexica*
- *Forward Times*
- *Houston Business Journal*
- *Houston Defender*
- *Houston Newspages*
- *Houston Press*
- *La Informacion*
- *La Voce Italiana*
- *La Voz de Houston*
- *South Belt-Ellington Leader*
- *Southern Chinese Daily News*
- *The Daily Cougar*
- *The Dateline-- UH Downtown*
- *The Egalitarian-HCC*
- *The Houston Chronicle*
- *The TSU Herald*
- *Semana*
- *U.S. Asia News*
- *Voice of Asia*

#### Television Stations

- KHOU, Channel 11
- KHWB, Channel 39
- KRIV, Channel 26
- KTRK, Channel 13
- KXLN Channel 45

#### Radio Stations

- KBXX-FM (97.9)
- KCOH-AM (1430)
- KHCB-FM (105.7)/KHCB-AM (1400)
- KHJZ-FM (95.7)
- KHMV-FM (96.5)
- KIKK-AM (650) and FM (95.7)
- KILT-AM (610) and FM (100.3)
- KKBQ-AM (790) and FM (92.9)
- KKRW-FM (93.7)
- KLDE-FM (107.5)
- KLOL-FM (101.1)
- KLVV-AM
- KMJQ-FM (102.1)
- KODA-FM (99.1)
- KPFT-FM (90.1)
- KPRC, Channel 2
- KPRC-AM (950)
- KQQK-FM (107.9)
- KRBE-FM (104.1)
- KRTS-FM (92.1)
- KSEV-AM (700) The Voice
- KTHT-FM (97.1 and 106.9) The Point
- KTJM-FM (98.5)
- KTRH-AM (740)
- KTSU-FM (90.9)
- KUHF-FM (88.7)
- KXTJ
- KXYZ-AM (1320)
- KTBZ-FM (96.5) The Buzz

### **6.3.7 Additional Activities for Increased Community Involvement**

The project team initiated, conducted, and participated in additional activities to gather information and to encourage public participation. Information tables, booths, and comment hubs were set up at community events as an additional component of our team's community involvement efforts. Public involvement team members were also available to respond to inquiries and to document suggestions. Some of the specific events attended include:

- East End Chamber of Commerce Luncheon – August 15, 2002
- Houston Bikeway Program – September 19, 2002
- Chocolate Bayou Community Festival – February, 2003
- Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo – March, 2003

In an effort to continue public involvement throughout the remaining phases of the project, METRO opened a Community Involvement Office within the Palm Center Community Center. The grand opening of the Community Involvement Office to the public was held on Saturday, December 1, 2007.

## **6.4 Meetings with Elected Officials**

The METRO Government Affairs department initiated and coordinated the exchange of information with elected officials within the Southeast corridor. As needed and requested by METRO, public involvement team members were available to clarify and give details on the project and respond to questions or comments. The objective was to coordinate closely with local public officials and give each the opportunity to share concerns and suggestions for progress.

The District D METRO Rail Taskforce was developed by Councilmember Ada Edwards and State Representative Garnet Coleman. This task force held multiple meetings to discuss the project with community members and develop a recommendation. Issues of particular concern to task force members included transit ridership, neighborhood preservation, economic development, environmental soundness, public safety, and hazard mitigation. The group expressed a preference for the Wheeler-MLK alignment option.

## **6.5 Agency Coordination**

The project team requested input, comments, and recommendations from a diverse group of working committees comprised of multi-agency representatives, technical advisors, and local area stakeholders. METRO met with technical and project administration level staff and representatives of local government and private sector agencies throughout the region. The project team periodically met with the designated agency representatives regarding major milestones, public involvement activities, to review citizen input, and to solicit input on direction of the study.

### **6.5.1 METRO Solutions Interagency Steering Committee**

METRO established the Interagency Steering Committee for the METRO Solutions Transit System Plan (METRO, 2003) in December 2002. The purpose of the committee was to provide a regional perspective on the planning studies being conducted in high priority travel corridors throughout the METRO service area. The committee was charged with providing feedback, comments, and suggestions on the planning process and presentation of the results from the perspective of other implementing and regulating agencies. Members consisted of key staff from the following agencies:

- Federal Transit Administration, Region VI
- Federal Highway Administration, Texas Division
- Houston-Galveston Area Council
- Harris County Public Infrastructure
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Representative of the 14 Multi-Cities
- City of Houston, Planning and Development Department
- City of Houston Public Works Department
- Harris County Toll Road Authority
- Houston Airport System
- Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County

Meetings of the Interagency Steering Committee were scheduled to correspond with key milestones in the planning process. The committee met quarterly during the AA/DEIS process on the North-Hardy Corridor, Southeast Corridor, and Uptown-West Loop Corridor.

### **6.5.2 Additional Agency Meetings**

In addition to the meetings indicated above, the project team facilitated a number of agency-related meetings over the course of the project. Contacts were made with several public agencies, including the City of Houston Public Works Department, City of Houston Aviation Department, Texas Department of Transportation, and H-GAC to coordinate efforts, to inform agencies of issues and aspects of the project, and to address agency concerns about the project. Recent meetings in February 2008 included discussions with the City of Houston Parks Department for inclusion in the Southeast Corridor project development and establish future involvement in the aesthetic design of the MacGregor Park Station. Meetings were also held with the Texas Historical Commission (THC) to review the results of the National Register of Historic Place (NRHP) determinations for the Southeast Corridor and to discuss mitigation of effects to historic resources within the Third Ward Community.

## 6.6 Public Involvement for Downtown Connector Study

A decision was made during the AA to further consider downtown alignment alternatives and refinements in a separate study from the remainder of the Southeast Corridor. In the spring 2004, METRO, working with an advisory group sponsored by the Downtown District, initiated the Downtown Connector Study (Connector Study) to develop downtown alignment alternatives that would provide the greatest system benefits with the fewest impacts to downtown Houston.

Nine meetings were held specifically related to the Downtown Connector study. The meetings were held as follows:

- Downtown Management District on Monday, January 5, 2004;
- Downtown Management District Steering Committee on Thursday, February 5, 2004;
- Downtown Management District on Friday, February 27, 2004;
- Downtown Management District meeting held on March 30, 2004;
- Downtown Management District meeting held on April 28, 2004;
- East Downtown Management District meeting held on Wednesday, May 19, 2004;
- Downtown TIRZ meeting held on Thursday, May 27, 2004;
- Susan Williams at the Commerce Residential Towers on Monday, June 21, 2004; and
- Downtown Midtown Residents Association at the Magnolia Hotel on Monday, June 28, 2004.

This study resulted in the identification of the downtown alignment options analyzed through the DEIS process, as described in Chapter 2.

## 6.7 Section 106 Coordination and Public Involvement

The PIP for the Southeast Corridor also included the public involvement activities required under the implementing regulations of Section 106 (36 CFR Part 800 "Protection of Historic Properties"). The program's specific objective is to maintain open lines of communication, active engagement, and maximum participation of the public throughout the scoping, strategy screening, alternative evaluation, and impact analysis phases of the EIS process.

Opportunities for on-going public input on historic and archeological resource issues will continue throughout the remainder of the project development process. Historical and archeological resource studies were provided at one of the information stations at the Public Hearing in the DEIS. Members of the public were provided the opportunity to review and comment on the cultural resource surveys and determination of effects reports as part of the DEIS public hearing and public comment period.

In addition to input from the public as described above, Section 106 regulations require specific and formal consultation with a number of parties. In accordance with the regulations, consultation with the THC and the City of Houston Historic Preservation Officer has been on-going during the EIS process. As mentioned above, meetings were held with the THC to review the results of the National Register of Historic Place (NRHP) determinations for the Southeast Corridor and to discuss mitigation of effects to historic resources within the Third Ward Community. The draft amended MOA is included in Appendix H.

## **6.8 Public Hearing**

In accordance with federal regulations, the DEIS was available for public comment for 45 days after the publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) in the *Federal Register* (July 28, 2006 – September 11, 2006). Copies of the document were sent to affected and interested local, regional, state, and federal agencies. Parties with a known interest in the project were notified by direct mailing of the availability of the document and the public comment period.

The public hearing took place on August 29, 2006 at 6:30 p.m. at the Third Ward Multi-Service Center at 3611 Ennis St., Houston, Texas 77004. The comments received during the circulation period for the DEIS and responses to the comments are contained in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

## **6.9 Comments Received on the DEIS**

The FEIS incorporated comments received on the DEIS during the 45-day comment period following publication of the NOA in the *Federal Register* on July 28, 2006. The FEIS identified the name and address of the person, agency, or organization submitting the comment, the date the comment was received, how the comment was received, the response to the comment; and if the comment required text to be changed in the FEIS.

## **6.10 Comments on the SFEIS**

The SFEIS will be available for public comment for 30 days after the publication of the NOA in the *Federal Register*. Copies of the SFEIS will be sent to affected and interested local, regional, state, and federal agencies. Parties with a known interest in the project will be notified by direct mailing of the availability of the document and the public comment period. A public hearing will be held on the SFEIS. The comments received during the public hearing and the circulation period for the SFEIS will be incorporated into the Record of Decision (ROD).