

**House Committee on Public Education**  
**Verbal testimony: HB 1263**  
**The City of Houston**

Good morning Honorable Brad Buckley and Committee, my name Ian Hlavacek. I am a Managing Engineer in Houston Public Works, and I oversee our Vision Zero efforts, as well as railroad and school safety programs.

The City of Houston understands and appreciates the underlying premise of HB 1263 and its inherent desire to ensure the safety of school children. We see potential benefit to a revised bill, but in its current state, we have concerns about unintended consequences that could, paradoxically, introduce safety concerns around schools. We believe our proposed amendment would protect against those unintended consequences by requiring a traffic engineering study for school speed zones around high schools. It would then spread the safety benefits of the bill to all municipalities in the State of Texas.

Our current policy allows for installation of school speed zones around elementary and middle schools but not high schools. We do intend to reevaluate that policy in coordination with local stakeholders and our Vision Zero efforts. However, we believe that several of our current safety programs bring bigger benefits than do speed zones. First, our School Group regularly conducts traffic safety analyses around schools, including high schools, by request. They may recommend enhancements to signage, pavement markings, and overall traffic patterns. We also have a Pedestrian Safety Program that can bring improvements to schools. If we receive a request for pedestrian crossing improvement at a location, we will review traffic counts, speeds, and other roadway features. We prioritize funding and installation of crossing improvements within a quarter mile of schools, including high schools. Finally, our Traffic Impact Analysis program ensures that we work with any entity that redevelops property, including schools, to conduct a traffic engineering study and safety improvements to serve their users.

We have several examples of projects where we have used newer policies and standards to implement safety benefits for high school students. On a project where we recently implemented bike lanes on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, we worked with the community to identify crossing improvements for students at Heights High School. For another example, as part of our Pedestrian Safety Program, we assessed streets around North Forest High School. We identified the need for significant safety improvements on the street, and we applied for and received \$534,00 from the Federal Government and TxDOT to implement those improvements in 2025. Even with pedestrian beacons, we may not get the desired effect from drivers. Pavement markings and signage could be more effective at reducing unsafe speeds.

We're not stopping there. In coordination with Vision Zero, we will also be updating our Safe Routes to School Program to bring further benefits to schools.

The challenge with this bill as proposed is that it forces us to implement roadway features that may not comply with engineering standards. We need to ensure traffic control matches the land use and street context to ensure that we do not defy driver expectations that could lead them to unsafe driving behavior. We need to allow our professional engineering judgement to guide the responsible practice and implementation of safety features.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our amendment to HB 1263.