



MEETING NOTES

14013-17, Lower Westheimer Mobility Study

First SAC Meeting Notes

Date: May 3, 2016

Time: 5:00 PM

Location: The Lighthouse of Houston, 3602 W. Dallas

Stakeholder attendees

Steve Costello (Montrose TIRZ), Katy Caldwell (Legacy Community Health), Kurt Luhrsen (METRO), Clint Harbert (METRO), Travis Younkin (Upper Kirby TIRZ), Phillip Morgan (ULI Houston), Bobby Heugel (Anvil), Tony Allender (Montrose Management District), Greg LeGrande (Neartown), Caroline Garry (Winlow Place Civic Club), Michael Shirl (The Women's Home), Houston Mayor Pro Tem Ellen Cohen (Houston City Council), Brooke Boyett (Aide to MPT Cohen), Dale Rudick (PWE), Pat Walsh (PDD).

Other attendees

CM David Robinson (Houston City Council), Carol Haddock (PWE), Jeff Weatherford (PWE), City staff and consultant team

Opening remarks: Pat Walsh

Welcome remarks: Mayor Pro Tem Ellen Cohen

- Lower Westheimer is one of the most culturally significant corridors in the City. This is an opportunity that can affect what our future would be like.
- It's a pre-engineering study; design and construction will come at a later time.

Introduction of stakeholders and opening statements

Stakeholders introduced themselves and were asked to succinctly state their thoughts about the corridor and its importance in their opinion. Stakeholders mentioned walkability and pedestrian safety, prioritizing non-automobile modes of travel, character, cultural identity and diversity as important.

Study objective

The study purpose is to develop a concept level design for Lower Westheimer (pre-engineering). It's a starting point for the design.

The study team would like to know the interests of the community.

We will be working with this group (SAC), but also a broader group.

We want to understand what are seen as the most important values of this community and how those values could help shape the design of Lower Westheimer.

This project is a partnership of two COH departments: Planning and Development Department (PDD) and Public Works and Engineering Department (PWE).

Public engagement, legacy thoroughfares and context sensitive design will be considered.

Process

It's a legacy corridor. It's an old street with constrained Right-of-Way (ROW).

We want to hear from the public and stakeholders what is important about this corridor and attempt to balance all the different needs of the corridor.

Historical, cultural issues and community significance will be considered.

We want the preferred design resulting from this study to reflect the community's interests and your input.

Cooperation and coordination with the public, City stakeholders, METRO and other groups will be important.

There is an active planned CIP along this corridor in the 2017 to 2021 Capital Improvement Plan.

There will be three (3) SAC meetings prior to each of the three planned public meetings. The second public meeting will follow a design workshop format to engage the public.

Purple/yellow comment exercise summary

- [Purple] What do you love about Westheimer?

Density, diversity, location, restaurants, eclectic, walkability, bus lines, diverse shops and business, storefronts, tree canopy

- [Yellow] What could make Lower Westheimer better?

Infrastructure, drainage, less criminal activity, sidewalks, parking, access management, lane width, accessible bus stops, walkable area, turn lanes, widening (more space for buses, pedestrians, and vehicles), difficult area to improve due to ROW.

SAC stakeholder comments

The character of the corridor needs to be considered by asking "who" lives, shops and eats in the Montrose area.

The identity as transit corridor, commercial area and neighborhood can't come together due to a lot of constraints. Suggest traffic calming.

It's not an activity center. It's actually a neighborhood where people walk and live. Residential neighborhood is lost.

It's a lot of people and food there. It's a lot of energy. How to make everybody there keep that energy is important.

Neighborhood is supporting the nature of businesses in the area.

Neighborhood comes first and then commercial business.

How to deal with the density of neighborhood. It can be really cool if designed properly.

High speed of vehicles. Not safe for pedestrians crossing Westheimer. It's a beautiful place but difficult for walking and crossing.

Make it smooth with its own identity as transit corridor.

Dynamics of the corridor need to change? No answer yet.

Need to consider the impacts on adjacent corridors. The roadways are reaching capacity. It doesn't make sense by simply widening the streets, which will only result in the peak traffic period extending.

Where to break the corridor based on different characters?

- Mandell. Mandell West has different character than Mandell East due to travel time.
- Dunlavy. More alcohol sales and restaurants. Bars. Different land use according to the alcohol sales and uses around Dunlavy.
- Mandell and further east. Less and less sidewalk. Harder and harder for pedestrians. ROW is narrow. Most crowded area. Narrow area for driving and walking.
- Bagby. Sidewalks narrows down before getting to Montrose. ROW around curves getting worse.

Existing conditions

There are both constraints and opportunities.

The character: safety, land use, mobility and access.

Based on data, Lower Westheimer is functioning for both mobility and access, with slightly more emphasis on access.

- Land use: Mainly commercial and residential.

- MTFP: It's a major thoroughfare. COH is considering context sensitivity. Shepherd and Montrose are the study area's major intersections.
- Transit: Route 82. Highly used route. Ridership is high. Boarding data: about 11,546 boardings in the weekdays. It begins at HW 6 to transit center in downtown. Critical route and very important anchor route to METRO. Frequency is about 6 minutes at peak times and 10 minutes off-peak. It's a balance between number of stops and access to bus stops. Need to coordinate with METRO by improving pedestrian amenities along the corridor to decrease the number of bus stops or frequency of service with higher capacity buses.
- Pedestrians/Cyclists: Need better pedestrian facilities and accessibility. Need ideal crossing locations to improve safety. Major bike route is on Hawthorne St., parallel to Westheimer. Six bicycle crossings need to be looked at closely.
- AM peak LOS: Operating well. LOS C or better.
- PM peak LOS: Some LOS D at the major intersections at Montrose and Shepherd. No failing operation.
- Volumes: 1999: The patterns are not changing; same demands have been observed over the last 10 years.
- Crash density: Dunlavy to Bagby experience a high density of crashes. Reasons: sideswipe crashes due to narrow lane widths, and conflicts with parked vehicles and head-in parking. *(Comments: Use person instead of vehicles so that the public better understands crash rates).*
- On-street parking: Parking allowed along the majority of the corridor. It operates as a two-lane roadway for portions of the day. *(Comments: some on-street parking zones are seldom used because it feels unsafe to park.)*
- ROW: 64 head-in parking spots along the study corridor. Very limited ROW (60-80 feet). Wider ROW are mostly closer to major intersections.

Poll questions

1. What is the most important function?
 - A. Access to local business
 - B. Means to travel through
 - C. Recreation and entertainment destination.

Voting result: A 28%; B 0%; C 72%.

Main function: Recreation/destination, access to local business, travel through.

Comments: Choice A and C are highly related to each other. Need to reword this question if it is going to be used at the first public meeting.

Rephrasing C as place-making. Frame as current vs. future.

2. Given limited ROW, what are your modal priorities?
 - A. Vehicular
 - B. Transit
 - C. Ped realm
 - D. Bike
 - E. On-street parking

Choose two answers. C was the highest selection (46%), then B (25%), A (15%), D (10%), and E (4%).

Comments: Add taxi and valet service to the choices.

Project contacts

Active webpage: <http://www.lowerwetherimerstudy.org>

Email address: mobility.planning@houstontx.gov

Next steps

Reach out to and interact with your constituency. Send survey to fill out.

First public meeting (June 6); the second design workshop will take place later in the summer.

Additional comments

The project is not funded for construction yet.

Talk with HPD about crime and how to improve security.

Welcome agencies and any involving groups to engage.