10.0 Public and Agency Involvement

This chapter describes the extensive public and agency involvement conducted for the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study. The PIP developed for the study provided the framework for all public and agency involvement activities.

The PIP was a critical activity that commenced during the scoping and project definition phase and continued throughout the planning process, enabling the public to be fully involved in the development and evaluation of the alternatives. Public involvement activities continued through system plan assembly. The plan complies with all rules and regulations set forth under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA).

Throughout the duration of the AA phase of the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study, the project team has performed extensive public involvement, endeavoring to create a climate for the open exchange of ideas and views. A variety of outreach and communications strategies were employed to engage the public and facilitate discussion with citizens, interested community, business, and environmental groups, elected and appointed officials, agencies and jurisdictions, tasks forces, and minority populations. The PIP ensured that all issues were addressed and presented to the general public before key project decisions were made. Public participation activities were scheduled to ensure that public input was received before related technical work was conducted.

The PIP was structured to collect information from many different audiences. Public comments were received and documented throughout the planning process. Additionally, the public was provided opportunities to request information about, or comment on the project by way of correspondence, e-mail, a project website (www.uptownwestloop.org), community, scoping and public meetings, working group sessions, other agencies and key stakeholders, and special outreach efforts, as well as newsletters, fact sheets, visual materials, and media advisories (see Table 10.2 - Public Involvement Program Activities).

10.1 Agency Coordination

Agency coordination continued throughout the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study process involving coordination with local, state and federal agencies. Agency coordination included agency interviews prior to scoping, a pre-scoping meeting, a formal scoping meeting, public involvement working group meetings (PIWG), as well
as ongoing meetings with TxDOT, H-GAC and others. Agency coordination was intended to provide METRO with an overview of agency concerns in the corridor. Project staff continued to coordinate with agency representatives as the project advanced.

An Interagency Steering Committee was formed consisting of representatives from various federal, state and local governmental agencies. The Steering Committee provided technical guidance and information as the study progressed. It was extremely important that any improvements examined for the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study were compatible with other agency plans.

Specific agency participation was necessary for the successful development and evaluation of Uptown-West Loop conceptual alternatives. The timing was very important because at the time, TxDOT was in final design for the reconstruction of IH 610W and IH 10. The TxDOT project has since commenced and is underway. Their participation and input was an integral component of the development and review process for the alternatives considered. METRO also maintained agreements with TxDOT for the preservation of alignments so as not to preclude the analysis of viable alternatives occurring in TxDOT ROW.

The City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department also provided important input into the process. The City of Houston maintains park properties that affected the evaluation of two alternatives that were considered. Potential impacts by the alternatives on significant publicly-owned parks and recreational land as cultural resources was identified in the AA. Both Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Act of 1966 and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Codes apply to publicly owned parks and recreational space. Additional agency participation, as it related to scoping, is described in Section 10.2.1.

10.2 Public and Agency Participation

The public involvement program included formal scoping meetings (5 sessions), stakeholder identification and interviews, stakeholder briefings (4 meetings), public information meetings (4 meetings), agency steering committee meetings (2 meetings), informal public/stakeholder meetings (25 throughout the corridor), newsletters (2), updates, and project information available in a variety of media (website, oral, written and internet feedback form). Table 10.1 summarizes the various types of meetings that were undertaken at key milestones during the AA phase of the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study.
### Table 10.1  
**Summary of Public and Agency Meetings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Type</th>
<th>Date and Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting #1 | January 31, 2002  
5-6:30 p.m. | Williams Tower Mezzanine Level Houston, TX 77056 | To brief SAC on project scope and solicit input |
| Public Scoping Meeting #1  
Public Scoping Meeting #2 | February 12, 2002  
Meeting #1: 11 a.m.-2 p.m.  
Meeting #2: 6-8 p.m. | J.W. Marriott Hotel Exhibition Center Houston, TX 77056 | To solicit input on project scope and identify issues of concern to citizens and groups |
| Agency Scoping Meeting & Public Open House | February 27, 2002  
Agency Scoping Meeting: 3-5 p.m.  
Public Open House: 5-7 p.m. | Houston-Galveston Area Council 2nd Floor Houston, TX 77027 | To solicit input on project scope and identify issues of concern to citizens and groups  
The open house was held to brief concerned citizens and groups on the project scope and to solicit input |
| Public Information Meeting #1  
Public Information Meeting #2 | February 21, 2002  
Meeting #1: 11 a.m.-2 p.m.  
Meeting #2: 5-7 p.m. | Williams Tower Mezzanine Level Houston, TX 77056 | To brief citizens, agencies and concerned groups on project status and solicit input on the Long List of Conceptual Alternatives |
| Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting #2 | May 16, 2002  
5:30-7:00 p.m. | Williams Tower Mezzanine Level Houston, TX 77056 | To brief SAC on project status, screening of conceptual alternatives and solicit input |
| Public Information Meeting #3 | June 13, 2002  
5:00-8:00 p.m. | St. Martins Episcopal Church Bagby Parish Hall 717 Sage Road Houston, TX 77056 | To brief citizens, agencies and concerned groups on project status and solicit input on screening of conceptual alternatives |
| Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting #3 | July 25, 2002  
5:30-7:00 p.m. | Williams Tower Mezzanine Level Houston, TX 77056 | To brief SAC on project status and solicit input on Short List of Conceptual Alternatives |
| Public Information Meeting #4 | October 24, 2002  
5-7:30 p.m. | St. Martins Episcopal Church Bagby Parish Hall 717 Sage Road Houston, TX 77056 | To brief citizens, agencies and concerned groups on project status and solicit input on Short List of Conceptual Alternatives |

Table 10.2 summarizes the wide range of activities and materials used to involve the general public and agencies to solicit input at key milestones during the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study.
## Table 10.2
Public Involvement Program Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Summary of Key Elements or Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Project Email**<br>uptown-westloop@ridemetro.org | • Received numerous emails throughout the project  
• Most were requests to be added to the mailing list  
• Significant number of emails were dedicated to voicing an opinion on a particular alternative being considered |
| **Project Website**<br>www.uptownwestloop.org | • Includes project publications, maps, materials for download and general project information  
• Provides overview of project and project schedule  
• Identifies the alternatives and technologies being considered  
• Provides comment area  
• Provides links to other METRO Mobility projects and www.ridemetro.org, the METRO website  
• Identifies opportunities to get involved with the study  
• As of December, 2002 – Website received: Page Views: 13,790; Sessions: 7,172 |
| **Comment Cards** | • Designed for specific meetings to ensure they were attributed to the correct event and documented in the appropriate context  
• Designed to elicit as much information as possible for accurate input into comments database  
• Available at all public meetings  
• Received numerous cards at public meetings and after meetings by mail |
| **Databases** | • Designed to synchronize with other project databases to build one central database for METRO  
• Used to categorize comments and document information from people involved or wishing to become involved in the study  
• Over 1,400 entries (mailing addresses and comments) made since project inception |
| **Meetings with Agencies, Task Forces, and Key Stakeholder Groups** | • Held to solicit input, provide project updates and address relevant issues  
• Held frequently to keep interested agencies and others up-to-date at key decision points  
• 5 Scoping Sessions  
• 25 Key Stakeholder meetings throughout |
| **Stakeholder Identification** | • Used to identify those who would potentially be most affected  
  • Employed various sources including the City of Houston, TxDOT, METRO, H-GAC, local businesses and others |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC)** | • A group of key stakeholders representing a group or interest in the study area  
  • Meet regularly to discuss project status, updates and issues  
  • Pivotal in helping the project team understand the issues of residents and businesses in the study area  
  • Meetings held in a central part of the study area  
  • 5 SAC meetings to date |
| **Public Meetings/Open Houses** | • Held regularly to solicit input from the public at-large and to inform about project status, updates and issues  
  • Held in a convenient, easily accessible location in the project area  
  • 4 Public Information meetings to date |
| **Coordination with Agencies** | • Met regularly with agencies to update on project status, solicit input and inform about key issues  
  • Helped to keep affected agencies up-to-date  
  • Useful in building rapport and avoiding potential conflicts |
| **Newsletters** | • Used to provide project status and key information at major milestones  
  • Announced time, date and location of upcoming public meetings and opportunities to participate in the project  
  • Mailed to residents, businesses, elected officials and agencies  
  • 3 newsletters distributed to over 4,500 people |
| **Post Card Meeting Notification** | • Mailed to inform public of upcoming meetings and opportunities to comment on the study  
  • Mailed to over 1,000 parties in the study area |
| **Media and Public Relations** | • Newspaper and other printed media  
  • Announced time, date and location of meetings |
10.2.1 Public and Agency Scoping Meetings

Public Meetings
On January 9, 2002, a Notice of Intent was published announcing METRO’s intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the Federal Register, Vol. 67, No. 6, and in local publications. The publications corresponded with the implementation of METRO Mobility 2025, a long-term plan to improve transportation efficiency and effectiveness throughout the Houston region. Both the plan and the federal environmental regulations direct that the process begin with a scoping effort in order to solicit agency and public comment on potential transportation improvements and alternatives. The major focus of the scoping process for the Uptown-West Loop corridor was the timely distribution of information to the public. To that end, METRO staff maintained a web page featuring links to the METRO Mobility 2025 planning studies. METRO staff was also accessible by e-mail and telephone during the scoping process. For a limited time, a scoping announcement flyer was distributed on all METRO buses, and there was a report on METRO on public television inviting the public to the scoping meetings. The culmination of the scoping process was a series of public meetings held during February 2002. Table 10.1- Summary of Public and Agency Meetings, lists the dates, times and locations of the scoping meetings.

Agency Meetings:
While the general public was invited to both types of meetings, the agency scoping meeting was intended to be a formal opportunity for regulatory agencies to respond to the idea of a proposed transit investment and express issues of concern within certain corridors. The following agencies sent representatives to attend the agency scoping meeting:

- City of Houston (planning, parks, public works, air quality, transportation programming)
- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Aviation Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- Harris County
- Harris County Tollroad Authority
- Harris County Flood Control District
- Houston-Galveston Area Council
- Houston-Harris County Agency on Aging
- Houston Airport System
- Houston Archeological and Historical Commission
- Houston Police Department
• Texas Department of Transportation
• Texas General Land Office
• Texas Historical Commission
• Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission
• Texas Parks and Wildlife
• U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
• U.S. Coast Guard
• U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
• U.S. Geological Survey
• U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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 each corridor were briefly presented. Agency representatives were then invited to comment on issues of special concern within each corridor. METRO staff recorded the comments and separated them by issue and corridor for distribution to each corridor’s planning team. Agency comments and responses were used along with other transportation and environmental data and analysis collected during scoping to assist in the development of alternatives and the evaluation process. Agency representatives generally responded favorably towards the development of transit investments in the study area. Agency representatives stated that the following issues are of special concern:

• Air quality
• Subsidence and drainage
• Flooding
• Hurricane evacuation routes
• Long range demographics, with particular emphasis on the elderly population
• Accessibility
• Data collection and interpretation
• A variety of commute patterns (e.g., suburb to suburb travel)
• Historic resources

10.2.2 Public Information Meetings

Four public information meetings were held during the AA phase of the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study. The public information meetings were designed to inform and involve members of the general community in the study process at significant milestones. The main goal for the public meetings was to foster valuable two-way communication between the study team and members of the community.
The meetings were held in central locations, accessible by bus and by persons with disabilities. The meeting formats consisted of open houses and presentations followed by a workshop style question and answer and comment session. Mounted displays were arranged around the meeting room so that people could circulate and absorb information prior to, or following, the presentation. Project staff answered questions and recorded comments.

10.2.3 Stakeholder Advisory Committee

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) was comprised of 62 representatives from key neighborhood associations and agencies within the project area. The SAC complemented the larger scale public outreach meetings. Their input was critical in refining many of the ideas and solutions presented and in the screening of the alternatives.

10.2.4 TMA Coordination

The project team coordinated with transportation management associations (TMA) and providers, such as Trip Reduction Efficiency Council (TREK), to solicit and share information on access, facility and distribution/collection requirements.

10.2.5 Public Involvement Working Group

The PIWG, made up of members from the consultant teams, TxDOT, H-GAC and METRO, was formed to maintain agency communication among project teams and to share ideas about what worked best in terms of public involvement and outreach. Meeting monthly, the PIWG shared information and strategy on past and future outreach efforts and assessed the effectiveness of efforts of the past in order to improve upon outreach in the future. Working closely together, the PIWG has successfully demonstrated the value of idea exchange and strategy development in order to communicate the goals of METRO and the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study to the public at large.

10.2.6 Coordination with Existing, Planned and Proposed Developments

The project team coordinated activities with planned and proposed developments within a 1,500-foot walking distance of potential alignments. The team met with developers, management districts, property owners and/or tenants to assess potential impacts of planned development.
10.3 Communications

10.3.1 Communications During Scoping

The following is a summary of the main themes and key issues derived from the public and agency scoping phase of the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study:

**Issues**
- Provide service and connections to the rest of the region
- The study should address short-term traffic and mobility issues
- The study should consider the land use and transportation relationship and factor transit-oriented development and induced growth, as part of the analysis

**Environmental**
- Memorial Park land should be preserved, however, transit connections to the park and rest of the city would be beneficial
- Negative impacts should be considered in the analysis including noise, aesthetics, environmental justice/community cohesion, and construction

**Mobility/Connectivity**
- The analysis should consider how this corridor and any prescribed alternatives are integrated into the larger context of the region; without connecting linkages, this study may be of limited use. Consider linkages to:
  - High capacity transit corridors under study
  - Inner-Katy corridor
- The planning effort should not be conducted in a vacuum; rather, inclusive of other planning activities occurring regionally
- Multi-modal concepts should be explored
- Integrate existing and planned transit center facilities into study effort
- Proposed improvements should integrate pedestrian and bicycle facilities

**Other transit issues:**
- The analysis must consider how pervasive traffic issues will impact any transit improvements; and how any transit solution may impact traffic
- Interim improvements should be considered
- Address freight railroad impacts on local traffic
- This exercise should consider the input and efforts of past studies, but not be a repeat of past studies after which little improvement occurred.
- The study should not be duplicative of any current studies, e.g., the Westheimer Traffic Study
Economic

- The analysis should not rely solely on growth projections provided by others but include potential economic development that might be induced by specific types of transit investments

Corridor Specific Issues

- The IH-10 expansion project directly impacts the northern portion of the corridor. The expansion project detracts from considered alternatives and improvements
- Recommendation that a transit advocacy group should be formed for the study area to ensure that the LPIS goes forward and receives funding; this structure has proven politically effective in other districts
- Underground or below grade technologies should be considered
- Alternatives should not infringe on Memorial Park (park property is located on both sides of IH-610W)
- The prevalence of non-home based traffic, due to the various office, hotel, retail and entertainment sites is unique to this corridor

10.3.2 Communications During Evaluation Phase

Numerous opportunities were provided to engage the public in discussions of mobility improvements for the Uptown-West Loop study area. More than 360 people attended public information meetings and participation in the SAC was high. Other outreach included conducting key stakeholder meetings and presentations to civic clubs and interested groups such as the Galleria Chamber of Commerce. Input from the stakeholders and general public was incorporated into the evaluation of alternatives. Their concerns were addressed by modifying elements of the alternatives or determining that certain alternatives generated environmental or community impacts that could not be easily mitigated and should be dropped. Over 475 individuals submitted comments through the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study website (www.uptownwestloop.org), project e-mail, letters and comment cards. A summary of written and oral comments follows:

Screening of the Long List of Conceptual Alternatives
Comments received during the screening of the long list of reasonable alternatives shared several themes. Many attendees voiced support for METRO and for the process allowing opportunity for their input and for their concerns to be heard. With the description of the screening process provided, attendees understood how non-performing alignments would be eliminated from further consideration.
During this phase of screening, the vast majority of respondents voiced concern over alignments using Sage Rd. and Chimney Rock. There was general consensus that any preferred alignment should steer away from predominately single family neighborhoods with limited ROW available for transportation improvements.

In all venues where the conceptual alternatives were presented, there was an overwhelming opposition to any alignment using aerial structures in the vicinity of residential neighborhoods. Especially in the northern segment of the corridor, residents felt that elevated structures eliminate any transit benefit for the community while forcing neighborhoods to absorb all negative impacts associated with the project such as noise, visual, construction, and safety impacts. Generally, meeting attendees were in favor of the typical sections depicting an alternative running in the median of N. Post Oak Rd.

Regional connectivity was a major concern. Participants felt that any planning effort or transit project should be examined in the broader context of the region. Statements were offered that this corridor would not be successful without meaningful connections to other major activity centers within the region.

Concerns expressed in the written comments also included potential impacts of the project on traffic in the Uptown-West Loop study area, increased traffic congestion near intersections, pedestrian access and safety, impacts on property value, making the system useful to study area residents, and environmental impacts on Memorial Park. Questions and comments were fielded on the technologies be considered including noise and air quality.

**Evaluation of the Short List of Conceptual Alternatives**
Comments received during the preparation and presentation of the short list of conceptual alternatives shared many commonalities. Residents generally favored improving mobility and access in the Uptown-West Loop study area and believed there was a real need for AHCT in the Houston region. However, METRO must address the larger context of the region when considering transit by providing regional connectivity. Any transit investment should be examined in the broader context of the region.

The vast majority of comments received were from S. Post Oak Ln. area residents who felt that the Woodway Dr./S. Post Oak Ln. segment of Alternative 3 was flawed. Potential impacts to their neighborhood included the deterioration of traffic LOS due to a reduction in capacity because of minimal ROW. Other potential impacts to S. Post Oak Ln. included visual and noise impacts, which would be a detriment to the
low-density character of the neighborhood. The elimination of an alignment using S. Post Oak Ln. was announced at a public meeting held on October 24, 2002.

Concerns voiced at meetings or by written correspondence also included impacts of the project on traffic in the Uptown-West Loop corridor, increased traffic congestion near intersections, pedestrian access and safety, impacts on property value, including ridership analysis, and environmental impacts on Memorial Park. Numerous questions were asked regarding BRT and LRT technologies.

Oral and written comments regarding impacts to Memorial Park were received. The City of Houston Parks and Recreation and Memorial Park Conservancy voiced strong concern about the potential for park impacts associated with the at-grade alternatives. They expressed strong support for transit and enhanced access to the park. They favored alternatives with least potential for park impacts.

10.3.3 Comment Summary Matrix

The Comment Summary Matrix is the product of a specific query made to the Comment and Participant Database that was updated and regularly maintained during the course of the Uptown-West Loop Planning Study. A record of public comments was maintained by the project team to provide input to the analysis of alternatives. The summary is a cumulative collection of comments accessible by various comment fields and entries. The full Comment Summary Matrix is available in Technical Report H.

Comment and Participant Database

The project team maintained a database of elected and appointed officials, agencies at the federal, regional, state and local levels; interested parties; individual stakeholders (business or resident) and groups; civic associations; and developers. The database included the following information: first name, last name, title, street, city, state, zip code, company, affiliation, source, telephone number, facsimile number, e-mail address, recipient of specific documents e.g., Notice of Intent (NOI), invitation to meetings, and comment during scoping, public meetings, public hearings and AA circulation. Individuals and groups listed in the distribution database received printed project-related materials and notices.