



**QUESTIONS FOR 2009 HOUSTON MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES**

The Citizens' Transportation Coalition (CTC) is an all-volunteer grassroots transportation advocacy organization. Formed in 2004, we are interested in transportation planning issues and opportunities across the 8-county Houston region. CTC reaches more than 10,000 readers, many of whom live within the City of Houston. If elected, you will directly influence transportation policy in our city, and our readers are very interested in your views on several topics!

**We would appreciate your responses by midnight Friday, September 25, 2009.**

However, we will post all responses as they come in. Questions and answers will be posted on CTC's website at [www.ctchouston.org](http://www.ctchouston.org) and shared via our email list. If we do not hear back from you, we will list your answer as "No response."

You can get your answers to us in either of two ways:

<b>BEST: By EMAIL</b>	<b>OK: By Fax</b>
<p>Save this Word document to your computer, and be sure to include your name in the file name.</p> <p>Open the document in Word and type your answers in the boxes provided. (Boxes will expand as needed.)</p> <p>Save the file when you're finished.</p> <p>Email your completed questionnaire to <a href="mailto:candidates@ctchouston.org">candidates@ctchouston.org</a>.</p>	<p>Print this document.</p> <p>Write or type your answers to each question in the boxes provided.</p> <p>Fax your completed questionnaire to <b>(713) 529-1392</b>.</p> <p>Please call Ian at (713) 576-9574 to report that the fax has been sent. Thanks!</p>

Thank you in advance for your participation!

**Candidate name:**

**Council Member Jarvis Johnson**

Position sought:

**Houston City Council Member District B**

**1. General**

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is a federally-required planning document. While cities like Atlanta, Denver, and Portland have made "improving quality of life" a top priority in their regional plans, Houston's 2025 RTP named "reducing traffic congestion" as the top goal.

**Q1a:** What should be the City's top priority in regional transportation planning?

I believe that the City's top priority should be to make public transportation accessible to all of the citizens within the city of Houston.

**Q1b:** If elected, what would be your most important initiative(s) to address this priority?

1. Create quality development.
2. Ensure of better Infrastructure
3. Aid in the creation of more quality after school programs

## **2. More transportation alternatives**

One in five adult Texans cannot or does not drive. According to the 2009 Houston Area Survey, 62.4% of respondents said it is "very important" to the future success of Houston to develop a much-improved mass transit system.

**Q2a:** Do you support more transit for the Houston region?

Absolutely I believe that public transportation that is accessible to all the citizens of Houston will play a big part in the reduction of pollutants in the environment and bring us closer to the goal of being an international attraction for future tourists.

**Q2b:** What should the City do to enhance the usefulness of the developing light rail system?

I believe like all decisions made that affect the public. We should involve the community in the planning and expansion of light rail, I believe by doing that the community will be more receptive to the growth and expansion that must take place in order to make the City of Houston a more efficient City.

Nationally, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires that new rail projects demonstrate how station development will support ridership. METRO's ability to win federal rail funding may therefore hinge on City of Houston planning regulations, but those regulations require suburban-style auto-dependent development with 25-foot setbacks on most major roadways. The new urban corridor development ordinance allows for reduced setbacks along specified roadways, but building pedestrian-friendly development elsewhere requires navigating a cumbersome variance process.

**Q2c:** Should the City legalize urban, pedestrian-friendly development along all roadways?

I believe that this process could be a very helpful if the planning is inclusive of the creation of pedestrian friendly development which will encourage residents to do more things in their communities such as walking cycling and enjoying their natural surroundings.

Houstonians fund transit with a \$.01 sales tax. In 1992, Bob Lanier diverted ¼ of our transit tax collections to the General Mobility program. This money is shifted to local jurisdictions within the METRO service area to fund road improvements across the region. In fiscal 2008, more than

\$130 million of METRO's transit tax collections was allocated to the General Mobility fund, and \$94.7 million was claimed by the City of Houston. Since 1992, more than \$1.6 billion has been diverted from transit, funds which may have lost us more than \$1 billion in federal matching dollars. An additional \$1 billion will be diverted from transit to General Mobility projects between now and September 2014, when the current agreement ends.

**Q2d:** Do you support ending the diversion of our transit tax dollars to the General Mobility program when the current agreement expires in 2014?

The City's intent for this program was to use it as tool to evaluate individual projects for their mobility benefits and downstream impact. The CMP tool was meant to enable conceptual layout of transportation improvements of on up-to-date population and land use data as well as the modeling of development impacts. However after several year in existence I believe that the contract expiration there must be a complete evaluation of this agreement.

As a fiduciary of taxpayer funds we must evaluate how fiscally responsible it would be to continue to bind tax payer dollars. Especially if the programs does not show a return of our investment.

### **3. *Balancing interests within the transportation system***

Mobility is multi-modal. The City's public right-of-way includes roadways, utilities, sidewalks, and street trees, from property line to property line. This right-of-way must serve trucks, cars, buses, bicycles, pedestrians, wheelchairs, scooters, and transit users. Reconstruction of a single highway overpass or intersection can affect access for all of these uses.

**Q3a:** Should the City require every transportation infrastructure project within the City of Houston – regardless of the implementing agency – to preserve and/or enhance the full spectrum of mobility uses, including auto, pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access?

No the City must always consider the Human impact of any of their actions.

**Q3b:** Should the City fund the construction and maintenance of sidewalks?

Yes, I believe that the city should be responsible for the construction and maintenance of sidewalks along there thoroughfare and within the neighborhoods we must insist that developers to provide both the construction and maintenance.

### **4. *Regional transportation planning***

Three million new people are projected to arrive in the Houston area over the next 30 years. Where they live and work, and how they get around, will have a tremendous impact on quality of life in Houston communities.

As the population increases, so does demand for goods and freight. How freight moves in and through our region will also affect quality of life. Further, Houston's economy is tied to the port and the efficient movement of goods through our region.

Truck traffic is a significant cause of roadway congestion, and freight rail is a more efficient, more environmentally-friendly alternative. However, Houston's freight rail system is at capacity and often disrupts neighborhoods because of its antiquated facilities.

**Q4a:** Do you support public investment in improving the freight rail system? What role should the city play in this?

I believe that the safety measures of freight rail should be improved. I have seen an increase in the amount of human casualties from un kept railways. I truly believe as a government that public investment for safety purpose should be utilized if necessary to ensure that the community is safe.

Commercial airline travel uses at least six times more energy than intercity passenger rail for trips of fewer than 600 miles. Experience across the world has shown that passengers prefer high speed rail to airplanes on trips of 2-3 hours, which is possible between Houston, Dallas, Austin, and San Antonio. Recently the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) initiated a national High Speed Rail program which includes federal grant funds. Houston could potentially connect to New Orleans via the Gulf Coast Corridor and to Dallas/Ft. Worth, Austin, and San Antonio via the Texas T-Bone.

**Q4b:** Do you believe it's important to develop high-quality rail connections for passengers between Houston and other major Texas cities?

Yes, I want Houston to become a more global city. We must ensure that we improve transportation both inter and intra state. A city that provides a quality public transportation benefits our residents in more ways than one.

Achieving the highest efficiencies of rail transportation requires careful planning. Intercity rail service requires long, uninterrupted rights-of-way. Additionally, commuter rail requires seamless connections to job centers, which in turn requires connections to light rail and local bus as well as convenient station locations.

**Q4c:** Should the City of Houston participate in identifying and developing appropriate corridors and station sites that will connect regional and statewide transit to urban employment centers?

Yes, good communication between all governmental agencies is necessary to ensure quality statewide transit.

In the Houston region there are more than 1,200 at-grade intersections of rail lines and roadways. These at-grade crossings inflict both economic and social costs on Houston, including surface congestion, neighborhood disruption, delayed emergency response, and crashes. Grade separations resolve these issues. In addition, grade separations are essential to enable high-speed rail.

**Q4d:** Should the City of Houston dedicate significant ongoing funds to invest in grade separations?

Although grade separation of streets can be costly, dramatic reductions in motorist delay and reduced accident potential can be achieved. This technique was used in Houston during the 1980s and 1990s by developing a rail-highway intersection priority list; this process should be re-examined and funding targeted for corridors near high-volume railroad lines.

The proposed Grand Parkway, a 180-mile loop toll road, would run through mostly uninhabited and undeveloped areas in nearby unincorporated Harris County. Its construction will spur development on the Katy Prairie which will result in the loss of valuable greenspace and wildlife habitat as well as increased flooding in existing Houston neighborhoods. Ironically, the Grand Parkway will also increase traffic congestion on other Houston area roadways because projected employment along the corridor is minimal and all new residents will thus have to commute long distances to their workplaces.

**Q4e:** Should the City of Houston take a position regarding whether to construct projects such as the Grand Parkway that stand to impact the City but that lie outside its jurisdiction?

This is a very sensitive topic, while I respect the sovereignty of other jurisdiction I do believe that the City of Houston should have some input in upcoming projects.

Across the Houston region, there are more than 40 public agencies building transportation projects. This work is coordinated to some extent by the Transportation Policy Council (TPC), which has responsibility for allocating federal transportation dollars to local governments. While many of these projects affect City of Houston residents and the City appoints 3 members to the TPC, the City has not historically played a strong role or used its voice to influence regional transportation planning.

**Q4f:** Should the City play a more active role in regional transportation planning? How?

Absolutely I believe that public transportation that is accessible to all the citizens of Houston will play a big part in the reduction of pollutants in the environment and bring us closer to the goal of being an international attraction for future tourists.

## **5. City of Houston organization and process**

As Houston has grown, private development has generally followed public investment in infrastructure. The City's decisions regarding where to improve public infrastructure result in de-facto planning for our future growth. The City in turn depends on property taxes from private development for revenue and thereby stands to benefit from strong growth.

**Q5a:** Should the City strategically plan infrastructure investments to influence the city's growth?

Absolutely, City spending should be guided at the facilitation of Infrastructure, further creating a cycle which produces jobs in communities that are currently socioeconomically deprived. Here we can see the development of economic means for families in the form of jobs, in return the city benefits by the existence of. This in regard creates a cycle and further development of economic growth independence throughout the city.

Our city must live with the infrastructure choices we make today for generations to come. Some options create or relieve social impacts that are difficult to quantify. However, the best long-term solution often costs more in dollars to confer neighborhood benefits. For example, consider

the trade-offs between depressed and elevated structures. An overpass limits access to property and subjects the neighborhood to noise and visual impacts. An underpass addresses these issues, but at a monetary cost. In some situations, the benefits of the higher-cost solution will warrant the additional expense.

**Q5b:** Under what circumstances should the City not choose the least-expensive solution?

Where Quality would be sacrificed.

## **6. Accommodating growth**

According to the US Census, the City of Houston is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) forecasts that the City of Houston will add 23,000 people and 9,000 housing units per year for the next ten years. The format of this growth will be governed by Chapter 42 of Houston's Code of Ordinances, which was originally written in 1982 to govern greenfield development. However, much of the forthcoming population growth is expected to happen in denser, infill developments, and these will also be guided by Chapter 42.

Increasing density can make a city more livable and sustainable if essential infrastructure is in place. This infrastructure includes improved streets and drainage, guest parking, transit access, parks and green spaces, upgraded electric and utility distribution, and space for staging solid waste collection. Imposing unplanned, piecemeal residential density without first having these infrastructure requirements in place burdens residents with unacceptable neighborhood environments. In its current form, Chapter 42 fails to anticipate or address the cumulative impacts of increasing density, and this summer's amendments to Chapter 42 not only fail to resolve this issue; they expand the impact to all areas within Beltway 8.

**Q6a:** What policies should the City implement to better anticipate and address the impacts of inevitably increasing density?

I believe we must address a more efficient means of planning and development, implementing policies to ensure quality development. We must address public transportation accessibility throughout the City of Houston.

We pay for roads, storm sewers, wastewater lines, and utilities by the mile. The lower the density of development, the farther people must travel to reach jobs, stores, and entertainment, and the more we pay to build and maintain infrastructure.

It would be fiscally-responsible for the city to incentivize denser development where the infrastructure is already sufficient. For example, costs of development in Midtown, which has a lot of street capacity, good utilities, and excellent transit access, should be less expensive than elsewhere.

**Q6b:** Should the City use performance measures or other means to steer dense development to areas where appropriate infrastructure exists or is planned?

Yes, the manner in which we can steer the increase in dense development will directly affect the quality of life for every Houstonian.

Parking is a contentious issue in many neighborhoods, and improper management of parking infrastructure can degrade the quality of development. Parking requirements that are not case-specific can stifle growth by raising the cost of development and can deaden what would otherwise be vibrant urban places by replacing activity centers with parking lots. However, for all areas outside downtown, the City of Houston has one-size-fits-all parking requirements that consider neither the specific characteristics of a given neighborhood nor the vision held by residents for their neighborhood.

**Q6c:** Should the City adopt new context-sensitive parking requirements that consider factors such as access to transit and presence of shared parking?

Absolutely, Planning will ensure a proactive thought process in the area of development. Proactive planning will reduce the amount of issues that are caused when all of our actions become reactive.

Shared parking facilities can enable disparate developments to consolidate parking, thereby transforming land that would have otherwise been used for bland parking facilities into vibrant activity centers. Furthermore, properly managed shared parking facilities could be tapped as a revenue source for the City.

**Q6d:** Should the City participate in providing shared parking outside of the central business district?

The city must be fair and equitable in any allocation of services within the City of Houston

That's it! You're done! Thank you again for your participation, and good luck on November 3<sup>rd</sup>!

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