

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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01

INTRODUCTION



THE 2017 HOUSTON BIKE PLAN

The 2017 City of Houston Bike Plan (Bike Plan) is a year-long planning effort to update the City's Comprehensive Bikeway Plan, originally adopted in 1993. The Plan comes at a critical time. Plan Houston, the City of Houston's first general plan adopted in 2015, calls for the development of a "citywide plan for bicycling." The City and the Houston region have made great strides in improving people's ability to bike to more destinations, even earning a Bronze-level Bicycle Friendly Community award from the League of American Bicyclists in 2013. New trails are being built along our bayous, a new protected bikeway has been installed, and more people are riding all over the City. The Bike Plan builds on these efforts to develop a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges for bicycling in Houston.

The Bike Plan seeks to make Houston a safer, healthier, more accessible, bicycle-friendly city. The plan provides a framework for the development of a shared vision and goals for biking in Houston, and identifies future projects to create a citywide bicycle network. The future citywide network will serve a broader spectrum of people who bike at all skill levels. It will provide more transportation choices with both on-street and off-street facilities connecting key origins and destinations such as employment centers, parks, and schools.

The plan identifies key supporting policies and programs that help build a more bicycle-friendly culture covering issues like bicycle safety, expansion of bike parking, bike share options, and increased integration with transit. The plan also looks at best practices in bicyclist and driver education, enforcement, and facility maintenance to help all users of the City's transportation system integrate well together on high quality facilities. The Plan builds on current efforts, such as the Bayou Greenways Initiative, to create an inter-connected bicycle network. By providing better access through the construction of key connections, there is great potential to increase ridership and maximize the investment in this major trails expansion project.

Public input plays a critical role throughout the planning process. A Bicycle Advisory Committee, made up of representatives from Houston's bicycling community, implementing authorities, community leaders, and other representatives, will guide the development of the Bike Plan. Citizens will be able to participate at public meetings and through online activities and feedback tools.

The City of Houston Planning & Development Department, in coordination with the Public Works and Engineering Department and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, is leading the Bike Plan update.

The City has greatly benefited from the support of the project funding partners:

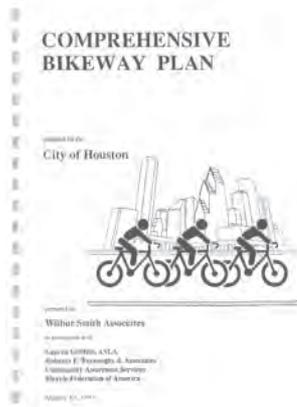
- BikeHouston;
- Houston Parks Board;
- Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC);
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA);
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA); and
- Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).

THE HOUSTON BIKEWAYS PROGRAM (WWW.HOUSTONBIKEWAYS.ORG)

The Houston Bikeways Program has served as a clearinghouse for the efforts to improve the ability of people to safely bike in the City of Houston. The Program includes oversight of major Rails-to-Trails projects in the City, such as the MKT Trail through the First Ward and Heights, and the Columbia Tap Trail connecting Brays Bayou to downtown through the Third Ward. The Program supports bicycle facility planning such as the new separated bike lane on Lamar Street in downtown Houston, which was designed and implemented by the City's Public Works and Engineering Department.

The Program leads events such as Bike to Work Day and has also been a leader in developing and rolling out online bicycle education programs (www.bikeed.org) in partnership with the League of American Bicyclists.





1993 City of Houston
Comprehensive Bikeway
Plan

HISTORY OF BICYCLE PLANNING IN HOUSTON

In 1993, to address growing roadway congestion, air quality issues, and federal mandates, the City of Houston undertook the development of a Comprehensive Bicycle Plan. The Plan sought to create an extensive system of bikeways that would support increased ridership. The Plan was particularly focused on promoting opportunities to increase home to work trips during peak hour when congestion is highest.

The Plan was developed with significant community input and established a recommended network and implementation approach that led to a significant amount of the bicycle facilities that exist in Houston today. Building on previous work by the Citizen's Environmental Coalition, trails were proposed along many of the bayous which served as a precursor to the development of the Bayou Greenway Initiative. Many of the City's existing bike lanes were also developed through the Plan.

The Comprehensive Bikeway Plan was the last time the City of Houston took a holistic assessment of its bikeway system, but in the interim, many additional policies, planning efforts, and programs were implemented to help improve the conditions and comfort levels for bicycling in the City.

Figure 1.1 shows the existing Houston Bikeway Network with a classification of

bikeway types for facilities that are in use today. This map is based on existing bikeway maps developed by the City of Houston and others, and further refined based on aerial maps and site assessments from riding through the City.

BICYCLE LEVEL OF COMFORT

Facility types are not the only factor that impact people's ability to bike, and many Houstonians would recognize that in the wide variety of conditions experienced on designated bike lanes around the city. Separation from traffic, intersection crossings, speed of traffic and width of the bicycle facility play an important role in the bike rider's experience.

A key element the map in Figure 1.1 shows is a classification of various comfort levels for a typical bicycle rider. In general, bicycle

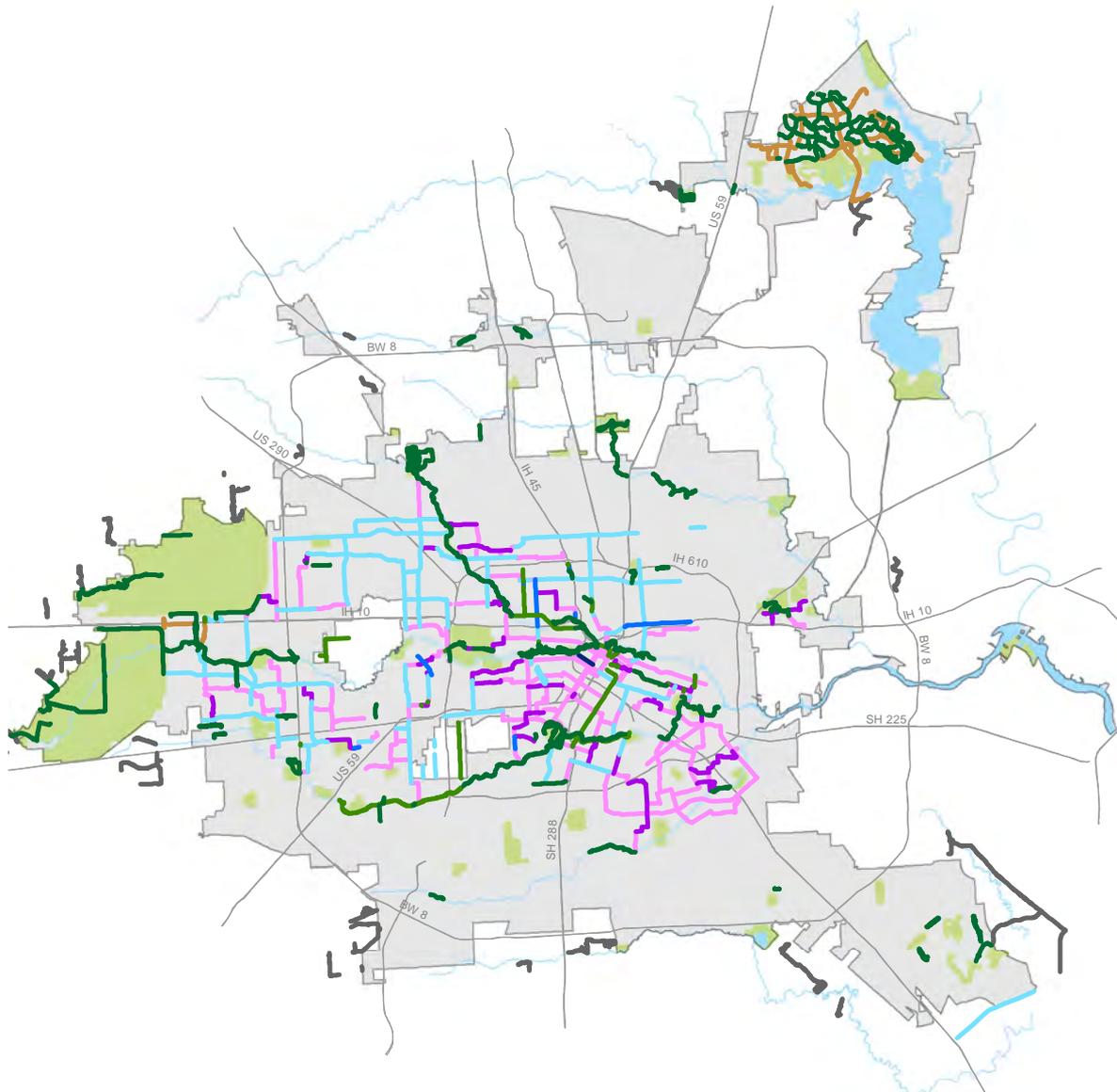
Lower Comfort
(Lighter)

Higher Comfort
(Darker)



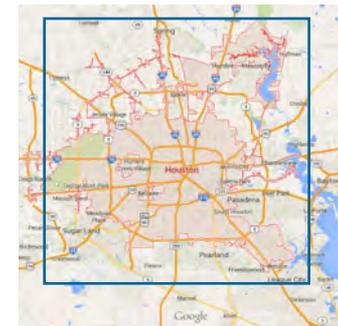
Figure 1.2 Level of Comfort:
General Map Colors

Figure 1.1: Existing City of Houston Bikeways



LEGEND

- Off-Street Facilities
 - High-Comfort Walk/-Bike Path
 - Walk/Bike Path
 - Shared Sidewalk
- Dedicated Bike Lanes
 - Separated Bike Lane
 - Bike Lane
 - Low-Comfort Bike Lane
- Shared On-Street Facilities
 - Neighborhood Bikeway
 - Shared Lane/Bike Route
- Facility outside of City of Houston
- Parks



Map Locator



Source: City of Houston; Team Analysis & Site Visits

facilities that are shown on the maps in this report will be darker if they are assessed to be a higher comfort level and lighter if they are lower comfort levels. Higher comfort bicycle facilities have been shown to correlate with increased bicycle ridership where they form a network connecting key destinations. Many of the existing segments of the Houston bikeway network are lower comfort. There is a clear opportunity to increase ridership through the expansion of high comfort facilities in the bicycle network. Level of Comfort is a concept that is discussed in greater detail in **Chapter 2: Existing Conditions and Opportunities**.

EXISTING PLANS, PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

The following sections outline many of the policy and planning efforts that have led to the current state of bicycling in Houston. They have set a strong foundation to support the development of a new comprehensive Houston Bike Plan.

Planning

Many existing plans were either entirely or partially focused on improving bicycling in Houston. The plans and studies reviewed and considered for incorporation into the Bike Plan are listed in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Existing Plans in the City of Houston

- 1993 COH Comprehensive Bicycle Plan
- 2010 Ensemble HCC Livable Center
- 2010 Fourth Ward Livable Center
- 2010 Northside Livable Center
- 2010 Upper Kirby Livable Center
- 2011 Clear Lake Bike Ped Study
- 2011 Fifth Ward Bike Ped Study
- 2011 Downtown/EaDo Livable Center
- 2011 Energy Corridor Livable Center
- 2011 West Houston Trails Master Plan
- 2012 Airline Livable Center (Harris County)
- 2012 East End Mobility Study
- 2012 Independence Heights Northline Livable Center
- 2012 Washington Avenue Livable Center
- 2013 Inner West Loop Mobility Study
- 2013 Urban Houston Framework
- 2014 METRO Bike & Ride Access and Implementation Plan
- 2014 TMC Mobility Study
- 2015 Heights-Northside Mobility Study
- 2015 Northwest Mobility Study
- 2015 West Houston Mobility Study
- 2015 Energy Corridor Master Plan
- 2015 Strollin' & Rollin' Southeast Houston
- 2015 Houston Park Master Plan
- Health/Built Environment Plans: CTI & Healthy Living Matters
- Other Management District and Neighborhood Plans

Houston was founded and has grown up around its bayous. The **Bayou Greenways Initiative** (BGI) is a transformative effort that is adding and maintaining many miles of voter approved trails, shared-use paths, and linear park space along the major bayous in the City. Trail development along the city's bayous is a great foundation from which to build a citywide bicycle network.

The Bayou Greenways Initiative provides great east-to-west connectivity for the network. To provide north-south connectivity as well as other off-street links around the city, a 2014 agreement between the City and Centerpoint Energy will allow hike and bike trails to be built along **Utility Corridors**. This will greatly expand the opportunity to build out the off-road trail network and connect to many more activity centers, neighborhoods and other destinations.

Policies

The **Executive Order for the Houston Complete Streets and Transportation Plan** (EO 1-15) outlines the steps necessary to develop a multimodal transportation network for the City of Houston of which the Houston Bike Plan is a critical component. The order calls for the development of a multimodal transportation network to allow Houstonians to travel safely between their desired destinations, regardless of their mode of transportation, age, physical ability, or financial resources. The Order envisions achieving this network as part of a long-



Utility Corridor Trail
Spring Branch District

term plan that will be accomplished through both new and redeveloped transportation projects, and the development and enforcement of supporting plans and policies.

A **Safe Passing Ordinance** was adopted by City Council to protect more vulnerable road users by mandating that motorists passing bicyclists maintain a three-foot passing distance.

Programs

Goal Zero is a joint safety program between the City and Bike Houston to support safety improvements across Houston's transportation system with a goal of zero fatalities. The program includes improved education, enforcement of regulations like the Safe Passing Ordinance, and the development of this updated Bike Plan.

Houston received a bronze-level designation of the **Bike Friendly Communities Award** from the League of American Bicyclists. This points to the progress made, particularly in bicyclist education, but also the opportunity to continue to become more bike-friendly.

Multiple Bike to Work Days across the city in locations like Downtown, the Texas Medical Center and the Energy Corridor as well as the **Tour de Houston** are other City supported events that contribute to a bike-friendly culture. These events get more people to experience what bicycling is like in Houston.

Sunday Streets are seasonal, monthly events where sections of streets are closed to motor vehicles. Thousands of people have used these streets to be active by walking, biking, and playing while discovering new parts of the city, shops, and other businesses.

Over 10,000 people ride from Houston to Austin every year as part of the **MS 150** and thousands of others participate in other rides like **Critical Mass** or the **First Sunday Bayou Rides**.

Houston B-Cycle is a growing network of bike share stations that let people rent bikes for short periods of time to travel between stations. Currently people use these for a mix of recreation, entertainment, and as part of their daily commute. In addition, not everyone is traveling between stations. For example, in Third Ward, the bike share station at Project Row Houses is used most by residents that need to access a destination through a short trip within their neighborhood. They return the bike to that station.



*Houston B-Cycle
Market Square*



*Bike to Work Day Ride
White Oak Bayou Bridge Downtown*

Existing programs in the City of Houston that support growing Bicycle

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