

Uptown Plan Boosts Mobility, Benefits Park

April 21, 2013

Ed Wulfe



Plans for Post Oak Boulevard include the widening of the roadway for bus rapid transit lanes within the median while still preserving six lanes of automobile traffic.

The visionary proposal to expand and extend the [Uptown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone](#) (TIRZ) is a transformative solution that ensures economic vitality in this important and growing urban core.

This initiative, at its heart, is a creative and cost-effective opportunity to connect people to jobs by addressing mobility and congestion challenges and, at the same time, ensures that Memorial Park will be restored to its former beauty as an accessible

environmental jewel for future generations. Both endeavors will greatly enhance Houston's quality of life and quality of place.

By extending Uptown's boundaries, more of its resources can be applied where needed and boldly and innovatively infuse the necessary funds required to address mobility and the area's future growth while restoring the park.

By redeveloping Post Oak Boulevard and connecting it to Metro's regional

busway network, mobility and accessibility needs will be collaboratively addressed to serve the areas in which the majority of Uptown's workers live.

Uptown is one of the most successful mixed-use urban environments in the United States and a leading economic driver of Houston; yet, Uptown has been historically underserved by public transportation. This is a major concern expressed by employers in the area or those considering a new

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location in Uptown because a functional and efficient means of mobility for their employees is critical to productivity and an ability to retain and attract workers.

More than 75,000 people work at the 2,000 plus businesses in approximately 23 million square feet of offices, 5 million square feet of retail and 7,000 hotel rooms. Sixty-five percent of Uptown's workforce currently lives in the Sugar Land, Westpark, Katy or Cypress areas, and the ability and need to connect workers to Uptown is an ongoing and increasing challenge.

This plan, while primarily designed to serve the workforce of the Uptown area, also enables movement to, from and through the corridor more efficiently in both directions.

The widening of Post Oak Boulevard will allow for construction of bus rapid lanes within a landscaped median while still preserving six lanes totally

dedicated for automobile traffic.

The plan is designed to connect with Metro's [Northwest Transit Center](#) and the proposed [Westpark Transit Center](#). Exclusive bus lanes will remove buses from general traffic lanes while augmenting pedestrian access. The existing traffic signal system and left turn lanes will remain as is, and Post Oak Boulevard's signature oak trees will be preserved.

The plan before City Council has evolved based on growing transit needs in and around Uptown, and discussions with the city and the [Memorial Park Conservancy](#) to ensure the restoration, preservation and improvement of Memorial Park, a major amenity and connector to downtown Houston.

Due to hurricane damage, severe, drought-related die-out of its forests and significant areas of invasive species, the beauty and long-term sustainability of the park is threatened. Without a dedicated plan and

sufficient dollars allocated to Memorial Park's restoration, this important green space is endangered. Extending the life of the Uptown Houston TIRZ makes initiatives affecting the park possible in the near-term and provides much-needed resources for the future.

The development of a comprehensive master plan for Memorial Park will identify and prioritize projects for implementation, allocating responsibility for design and construction as well. Overall, this plan will materially reinforce our quality of life.

Available funds will be used to: reforest and add grasslands; provide a system of delivering water to important areas of the park; rebuild the park's infrastructure; provide better drainage and reduce erosion throughout the park; beautify and embellish park trails; help create additional amenities and "people places," and help connect Uptown, the park and the bayou to the new Buffalo Bayou Park

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between Shepherd and Sabine.

It is an opportunity to bring Memorial Park back to its natural state and make it a true landmark for Houston, supporting and strengthening our ability to attract employers and employees.

The Uptown TIRZ has a proven track record of addressing mobility and quality-of-life improvements in a sensitive, transparent and responsible manner.

The TIRZ has shown time and again that collaborative, creative public/private partnerships can work to the benefit of all. This proposal is such a model.

At the end of the day, this initiative is about connecting people to jobs and propelling economic vitality. It's about preserving the legacy of Memorial Park.

We must seize this once in a lifetime opportunity. It's a win-win for Houston and Houstonians.

Wulfe serves as a director of the Uptown Management District, chairman of the Greater Houston Partnership's Quality of Life Committee and co-chairman of the Bayou Greenway Initiative.