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February 25, 2008

To: Honorable Bill White, Mayor, and
Members of City Council, City of Houston
PO Box 1562 Houston, Texas 77251-1562

Cc: Michael Marcotte, Director of Public Works & Engineering, City of Houston
611 Walker, Houston, Texas 77002

Dr. Carol Lewis, Chair, City of Houston Planning Commission
900 Bagby, Houston, Texas 77002

TRAFFIC IMPACTS OF PROPOSED SOCCER STADIUM SITES

The City of Houston is considering purchasing six blocks for a proposed soccer stadium. We urge City Council to consider alternate sites or design requirements that will preserve street grid access on Capitol and Rusk.

The current proposed site is bounded by Texas Ave on the north and Walker St. on the south. If a soccer stadium occupies the entire proposed six blocks, closing Capitol and Rusk where they run through that area, that would take out 2 of the 4 remaining streets that connect Downtown to the East End between Bell and Congress, reducing traffic capacity by 50%.

Closing streets may have been acceptable when the area just east of Downtown was largely warehouses. But now it's sprouting new townhouses, condos, and apartments. Planners expect population density to increase dramatically. New residents will surely generate more traffic. And so will soccer games.

There are alternate parcels of undeveloped land nearby where the City could site the proposed soccer stadium without cannibalizing the remaining street grid. For example, there are six contiguous blocks of parking lots located between Texas and Preston that have the same footprint as the currently proposed stadium site.



Let's consider priorities and get them right

According to the *Houston Chronicle*, the Dynamo owners have also expressed interest in an alternate six-block site nearby. Consider the merits:

	Proposed stadium site	Minute Maid parking lots
Parcel size	Six contiguous blocks	Same
Traffic impact	Blocks two east-west streets, making it harder for people who live east of US-59 get to work downtown, forever.	Blocks no east-west streets.
Light rail impact	Requires the Southeast light rail line to jog around it, making tens of thousands of daily transit trips a bit longer.	Affects no rail alignments.
Bikeway impact	Will require rerouting north end of Columbia Tap shared bikeway	Affects no bikeways.
Business impact	Displaces at least one business.	Affects no businesses.
Ownership	Privately-owned, much of it by a former Houston City Council member.	Publicly-owned by a government agency whose purpose is building sports stadiums
Falls within boundaries of East Downtown TIRZ 15?	Yes	Yes

A complete street grid is not only the most effective way to carry vehicle traffic, but also the easiest way for pedestrians and bicyclists to get around. As population and employment density increase in East Downtown, the street grid will matter more and more.

In places where we don't have a good grid, like Uptown and the Medical Center, we are regretting it. Why should we break the grid where it's still intact?

We cannot undo the damage the convention center did, or the damage the ballpark did, or the damage the basketball arena did. But we can avoid doing even more damage.

Now is not the time to further cut the East End off from Downtown or to add a traffic bottleneck that doesn't need to exist.

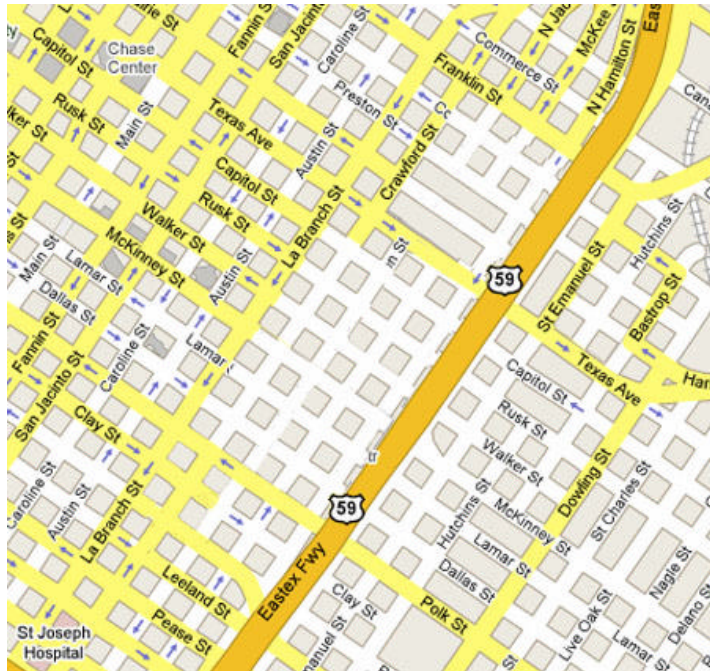
Thanks and best regards,

Robin Holzer, Chair
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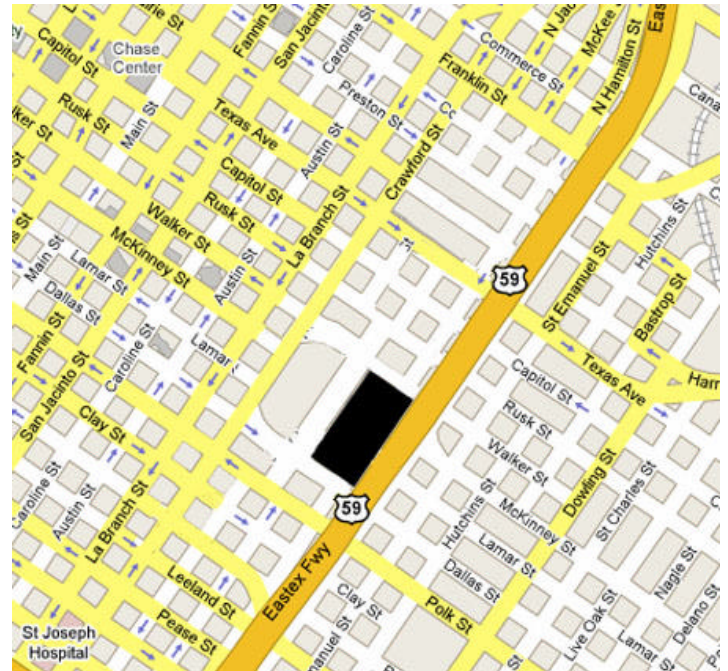


A history of street grid closures between East End and Downtown

In 1984, there were 9 streets that connected Downtown to the East End between Bell and Congress. The building of Union Station had closed one street in 1911. Construction of US-59 blocked another street and rerouted Bell in 1966.



Then, in 1987, the city opened the George R. Brown Convention Center, closing 2 of the 9 streets.



In 2000, the opening of Minute Maid Park closed another street.



In 2003, the convention center was expanded and Toyota Center was opened. Thus, even before the soccer stadium, there are now only 4 through streets where there were 9.

