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August 23, 2007

The Honorable Bill White  
City of Houston  
[mayor@cityofhouston.net](mailto:mayor@cityofhouston.net)  
P.O. Box 1562  
Houston, Texas 77251

Dear Mayor White:

Please stop the project to widen Kirby Drive from San Felipe to US 59. The project as currently described will destroy the walkable environment and pedestrian scale of this vital thoroughfare. The existing sidewalk and the mature, soft, landscaped right-of-way green space (which serves as a pedestrian buffer zone) will be removed and will be replaced by a sidewalk adjacent to the curb and the planned faster flowing traffic. A total of 274 trees will be removed, 174 of them between Westheimer and US 59. Many of these trees have been donated over the last 20 years in an effort to enhance Kirby Drive for residents, retail and restaurant patrons, and others who drive down this street.

Is it in the city's best interest – long or short term – to convert Kirby Drive into another concrete canyon? We have an opportunity to aid Kirby's redevelopment by designing the infrastructure to support walking, shopping, working, and living in it as a neighborhood – a source of pride, comfort, safety and, efficiency. The project seems to favor a short term interest in a wide street rather than consumers' long-term interest in such issues as livability, drainage, transportation, recreation, and aesthetics.

It appears that there will be a light rail station at Kirby and Richmond, which is appropriate for the growing pedestrian-orientation of the area. That intersection needs to become more dedicated to pedestrians, not less.

City guidelines are cited to justify the nearly borderless widened street, including a 72" underground storm drain line from Westheimer to Richmond. The need for this new storm drain is not in question. How it is to be achieved is in question. The construction of this storm drain line can be accomplished without widening Kirby Drive. The city has already begun work on Kirby's sewers south of US 59 without expanding the street.

As additional justification, Metro buses are now said to require 11-foot lanes, but those buses have been functioning for the last two decades since the city introduced 9-1/2-foot lanes.

Widening this segment of Kirby will have spillover effects. Each end of the widened Kirby will feed into narrower Kirby segments in River Oaks and West University, causing bottlenecks and additional congestion.

This effort to carry faster traffic on Kirby is an ill-advised response to the increasing residential density in the Kirby area. The area cries for a balanced response, not a "through traffic wins" response.

The city says that the push for this project comes from the Upper Kirby Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ). The TIRZ says it is bending to the will of the city. These responses sound like both the City and the TIRZ favor the project. This project has not been clearly explained to citizen stakeholders, and lacks public endorsement.

The vitality of our city depends on the use of best practices in urban planning which must include livability and green infrastructure. Occupancy, property values, sales, and the tax revenues they generate all depend on an area having an appeal to homeowners, businesses and shoppers. The Kirby Drive project falls far short of any reasonable approach to enhancing the urban community, and will be a significant step backwards for the quality of life of the city and all users of Kirby Drive.

I urge you to stop this project until a better solution can be found.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John E. Cutler." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the beginning of the name.

John E. Cutler  
President, Trees For Houston

cc:

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