

# frequently asked Questions



## 1. Why are we doing a plan?

More than 6 million people now live in the region and as many as 10 million people could live in the 13-county area by 2040. The Houston Galveston Regional Plan is an important opportunity to look ahead and answer questions such as “Where will those residents live?” “How will they get around the region?” “How can we grow in a way that is both economically competitive and sustainable?, and “How will change affect quality of life?”

## 2. What is the Houston Galveston Regional Plan?

In 2010, The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), along with 24 consortium partners, was awarded a \$3.75 million grant to develop a regional plan for sustainability. The region consists of Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Liberty, Harris, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, and Wharton Counties.

The theme of the plan is People, Places and Prosperity. The plan will provide options for communities and citizens to make these three critical elements stronger and better. To achieve this, it will look at strategies in the areas of housing, transportation and infrastructure, the environment, the economy, and healthy communities.

## 3. Who is doing the Plan?

The Houston-Galveston Regional Plan is being led by a partnership of representatives from non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and local governments from around the region working in collaboration with the H-GAC. The content of the plan will be developed with Work Groups representing the different areas of the region (coastal, rural, suburban and urban) and the plan topics (housing, transportation and infrastructure, the environment, economic development, and healthy communities). A Government Advisory Committee consisting of local elected officials will also help to oversee the process.

## 4. What is sustainability?

The word sustainability means different things to different people and in different communities. People sometimes define it as “taking care of our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” or “Thinking about what kind of place you would like your grandchildren to live in.” Sustainability is a way to think about the future and to make informed decisions that help ensure access to the things we need and want like clean air and water, good jobs, safe neighborhoods, quality housing, transportation options, and open space and parks. A critical part of the involvement process is to find out what sustainability means to people in communities around the region and to use that input to help shape a vision for the future.

## 5. Why is public involvement important?

To be a success, the plan must reflect ideas from residents, businesses, community organizations, and neighborhood groups from around the region. The entire two-year planning process will include extensive public participation that will help to shape the plan’s vision, goals, and recommendations. Residents can share their ideas as part of upcoming public meetings to be held in each county, a survey, and on-line forum.

## 6. What is the difference between the Houston Galveston Regional Plan and the Regional Transportation Plan?

The Houston Galveston Regional Plan will create an overall, strategic vision across multiple topics, including transportation. The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) will focus more specifically on transportation investments. The RTP happens every four years, when H-GAC identifies the transportation investments that will be made in the next few years, as well as long-term transportation strategies. Both plans will begin with the ideas received from the public during this first phase of outreach. Input gathered from meetings, surveys, and on-line discussions will help to set overall priorities and goals and shape strategies and recommendations for both plans.

## 7. How does the Houston Galveston Regional Plan relate to local plans?

The Regional Plan does not replace any plans undertaken by local communities but looks to build on previous work that has been done. Local governments can choose from a menu of options that complement their own plans and initiatives.

## 8. Is the goal of the Houston Galveston Regional Plan to make the whole region look and function the same way?

No. A goal of the plan is to preserve the special character of all the region's diverse communities. The plan will include policy options for communities in urban, suburban, rural and coastal areas. Communities can choose to adopt the options that are the best fit.

## 9. Isn't this just an excuse for the government to get more involved in our lives?

The process does not require local governments to adopt any of the policies in the plan. The plan is not about limiting peoples' current choices but expanding them. For example, strategies might include giving people better access to different types of housing or transportation. People make their own decisions about where and in what kinds of houses they live and how they travel inside and outside of their communities. But new ideas related to neighborhood design or transit, walking and biking could help to make even more options available for residents.

## 10. Who is going to pay for all the ideas generated by this plan? Will this cause my taxes to go up?

Since the plan does not require communities to implement strategies, local governments will not have to take on new projects or costs that they would not otherwise have chosen. A goal of the plan is to give local governments more information about the public investments they already make related to transportation, infrastructure, and use of land. Information can help to support better decisions that are more coordinated, efficient, and effective. If governments choose to undertake a project, the plan can also help to attract different kinds of funding which could include grants or private investment.

## 11. Is this just another "green" thing?

Protecting natural resources is an important goal of the plan. But it will also explore strategies in areas like jobs creation, education, infrastructure, and transportation. Instead of focusing on one aspect of sustainability, the plan asks a bigger and broader question that covers many areas: "What are the resources and opportunities that we need to be successful and prosperous in the future?"

## 12. Why should I care what happens in other counties?

Some decisions made at the local level, especially those related to transportation, infrastructure, economic development, and natural resources, have an impact on people all around the region. The loss of trees and open space or changes in watersheds in one place, for example, can affect the safety and well-being of other communities. The intent of the plan is not to limit local choices but to highlight how interconnected we are. The region is also a very important economically. Outside decisions about private business investment and employer location sometimes depend on the quality of life, assets, and identity of the region overall. A healthier region means better opportunities for everyone.

## 13. How will the Houston Galveston Regional Plan be implemented?

The consortium of regional partners will present the plan to the Houston-Galveston Area Council Board of Directors for regional adoption. Local governments, regional organizations, private sector partners, and others can voluntarily adopt the plan or specific plan elements.

## 14. What are the Benefits of the Houston Galveston Regional Plan?

Change is inevitable in any region, particularly one that is as diverse and fast-growing as the 13-county area. This plan is a first-of-its kind opportunity to anticipate that change and shape it to create places that are safe, healthy, attractive, and prosperous for current and future residents. The plan can help to:

- Make future public investments better coordinated and more efficient
- Expand the choices that people around the region have for housing and transportation
- Protect important natural resources
- Keep the region and its communities economically competitive