



Robert Eckels
County Judge

Media Alert

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HEIGHTS AREA RAILROAD RIGHT OF WAY SHOULD REMAIN IN PUBLIC DOMAIN

The Texas Department of Transportation has indicated it may sell the old MKT Railroad right of way running from IH610 through the Houston Heights to downtown Houston as it is not needed for state projects. "The right of way must remain in the public domain for the benefit of the community," said Harris County Judge Robert Eckels.

The right of way is ideally suited for a recreational or transit use as a hike and bike trail or possible extensions of the Metro Light Rail or other Trolley systems to link the Houston Heights to other communities. In most of the old rail line there is enough right of way for both.

The rail right of way is a continuation of the line purchased by the state for the Katy Freeway project and could connect at the Eureka yard near Loop 610 to the potential Hwy 290 and Hwy 249 commuter rail routes Harris County initiated studies on last year.

In August the Harris County Commissioners Court authorized the Harris County Toll Road Authority to negotiate with the Texas Department of Transportation to purchase the right of way.

"There is no plan to build a toll road through the Heights," said the Judge. "The Toll Road Authority is the only entity in County government that has the resources and the relationships to work with the City of Houston, Houston Metro, TxDot and the community to develop a plan for the right of way." In spite of some rumors that the Toll Road Authority's involvement means high occupancy toll lanes through the neighborhood, Judge Eckels assured Houston Mayor Bill White and neighborhood representatives that there are no such plans.

"I have deep roots in the old Houston Heights," said the Judge. "My grandparents moved into the area over 90 years ago. My mother is a graduate of Reagan High School. My sister won the "good brick" award for historical preservation at her Heights area home in 1992. There is no need for toll lanes beyond the immediate Hwy 290/Loop610/I-10 interchange and I will not support a tollway through this neighborhood," added the Judge.

"The rail right of way can be a tremendous asset to the Heights and, through improving the Heights, to the city and region. All of us at Harris County look forward to working with the community, the City, Metro and the State to build a consensus on the best use of this community treasure."

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