

Houston rail, reborn

Bus Rapid Transit in Uptown deserves funding to create right-of-way for buses.

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Editorial

Houston mass transit is dead, long live Houston mass transit. That seems to be the message from the Uptown Houston Management District, which is planning to build its own Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in the wake of Metro facing a multi-decade roadblock in light rail expansion plans.

The dream of uniting central Houston in a comprehensive rail system always hinged on expanding routes through Greenway Plaza and the Galleria area, connecting Houston's mini-downtowns with the Texas Medical Center and the central business district. But with the November referendum limiting Metro dollars to buses and Rep. [John Culberson](#), R-Houston, blocking any help at the federal level, it doesn't look like Metro will build the University or Uptown lines until at least 2025. Meanwhile, these neighborhoods grow denser and traffic is approaching a breaking point.

Nowhere is this trend more apparent than Uptown,

where off-duty police officers feebly try to direct traffic jams that reach Calcutta levels and new high-rises promise it will only get worse. Economic growth should not be a bad thing. But without traffic solutions, Uptown's new offices and residences will undermine the area's livability. So it makes perfect sense that Uptown Houston is taking matters into its own hands, and we're pleased that Metro is on board - viewing the plan as a partner rather than a competitor.

The \$177.5 million project will create an exclusive right-of-way for large buses that will act more like light rail, without the rail, running from the planned [Westpark Transit Center](#) near U.S. 59 up to the [Northwest Transit Center](#) at Interstate 10, traveling along feeder roads and an expanded Post Oak Boulevard. These paths could even eventually be upgraded to rail.

Linking the system with the Metro transit centers will provide some much needed transportation

options for Uptown commuters, who are distinctly underserved by Metro's park-and-ride system. Uptown has 15 percent of Houston's Class A office space, but only three percent of Metro's daily park-and-ride buses.

The whole plan will be funded with local tax increment reinvestment zone dollars and state and federal transportation funds. But it still falls on the [Houston-Galveston Area Council Transportation Policy Council](#), which distributes Houston area federal transportation funds, to ensure that Uptown gets the money it needs to make this plan a reality.

Houston shouldn't let Metro's problems get in the way of moving the ball forward on transit. And by the time this BRT plan is completed, hopefully 2017, perhaps Metro will be in a better place to build that important connector between Uptown and Downtown: The [University Line](#).