

RTP 2045 Enhance Travel and Tourism

Transportation is an integral part of tourism industry. The H-GAC MPO participated in a consortium to develop the “Our Great Region 2040” plan, which included a 24-partner coordinating committee, government advisory committee, members of the public, local leaders and regional workgroups. Transportation strategies related to tourism travel for the H-GAC MPO to lead in implementing include¹:

- Optimize existing transportation network through a ‘FIX IT First’ strategy and by using technology and improved incident management to maximize system capacity.
- Create a regional framework for expanding transit across the Region.
- Develop and implement policies to improve transit, pedestrian, and bicycle access between and within activity centers, connecting residents to job centers.
- Include economic, safety, and quality of life costs and benefits of transportation projects in funding prioritizations.

Travel and tourism is a growing industry for our region. It brings a lot of money and helps with the economy. On an annual basis, the Metropolitan Statistical Area attracts 14.8 million visitors which generates \$1.1 billion in local and sales tax revenue. Travelers are primarily local and visit arts, festivals, sports, (special events such as the Super Bowl, final Four, PGA Golf, as well as College and Professional Football, Baseball and Basketball), and world renowned cuisine, as well as to attractions such as the Kemah Boardwalk, The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Houston Zoo, Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge, George R. Brown Convention Center, museums, shopping malls, NASA space center, and Galveston Cruise Terminals, (see Figure 1). Galveston Island saw 6.5 million visitors in 2016 and almost 14 percent of these were cruise travelers, an increase of 5 percent from the previous year.² In addition to this, people come from around the world for medical treatment in what is perhaps the number one medical Center on Earth, with over 10 Million patient visits in a typical year.³ Travel originating from outside of the region is also generated from a significant business presence that includes five Fortune 500 companies and many high-density employment centers. The tourism industry alone employed 129,000 in 2016.⁴

The 2045 Regional Transportation Plan has substantial investments dedicated to improve roadways, transit and bicycle and pedestrian capacity that provide access to major attractions such as universities, medical facilities and other essential destinations as mentioned above.

¹<http://www.ourregion.org/download/OurGreatRegion2040-FINAL.pdf> (page 30 and 31)

²<https://www.chron.com/neighborhood/bayarea/news/article/Galveston-hits-record-high-tourism-revenues11175775.php>

³http://www.tmc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TMC_FactsFiguresOnePager_07052018-1.pdf

⁴<http://www.houstontx.gov/council/c/committee/20150625/tourismmasterplan.pdf>

The Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and “Our Great Region 2040” plan regard tourism as regional needs and provide strategies and recommendations for further travel and tourism improvements. The region has also seen a host of local planning activities supported by Economic Development Administration grants and similar funding geared toward furthering economic development to attract business and encourage tourism.⁵ Programs are being implemented by the City of Houston, Bay City, Conroe, Dayton, Galveston, and others.

An engagement process soliciting the feedback of public officials and members of the public was utilized to form a SWOT analysis, helping to shape the goals and strategies of the CEDS. These goals have been aligned with the “Our Great Region 2040”, including the preservation of natural resources especially along waterways to promote recreation and tourism opportunities. One of the strategies supporting natural resource preservation recommends the creation of a regional campaign to promote eco, coastal and wildlife tourism options across the region. Another strategy encourages developing a regional toolkit to capitalize on future growth sectors including tourism.⁶

⁵<http://www.h-gac.com/community/CEDS/regional-economic-development-plan.aspx> (page 16)

⁶ <http://www.h-gac.com/community/CEDS/documents/CurrentCEDS.pdf> (page 20)

Figure 1 – Travel and Tourism Destinations

