



## Goal 6: Leverage Transportation Infrastructure to Support the Continued Economic Vitality of the City

A primary goal through the course of the development of the Comprehensive Mobility Plan has been to identify opportunities where improving mobility will enhance the economic vitality of the City. Each roadway, bike path, sidewalk or transit investment should be considered based on the connectivity it creates and the corresponding interactions and activities that are enabled. These interactions can support the continued growth of the economic base of the City, resulting in increased job growth and sales and ad valorem taxes. These allow the City greater flexibility in the investments it makes in future mobility projects and potentially lowers the tax rates for other residents. The City also has infrastructure that support a large percentage of the economic activity that occurs and making the greatest use of this infrastructure will be critical.

Addressing each of the other seven goals of the Comprehensive Mobility Plan will have a potential economic benefit to the City of Sugar Land. And the discussion of those goals has identified significant opportunities to improve modes of transportation including driving, walking, cycling and using transit that will have potential benefits to supporting economic development. This is particularly true of recommendations that support the economic development goal of the City to become a “Regional Business Center of Excellence”. Being a Regional Center of Business Excellence implies a larger job base, more economic activity and therefore greater demands on the mobility systems the City has in place. This will be true for residents who live and work in Sugar Land as well as employees looking to get to work from outside of the City. This was expressed though this projects public involvement process, frequently by employers whose staff may be unable to afford to live in the City of Sugar Land. So while much of the discussion in this chapter will revolve around the mobility of freight rail and other modes that are not as explicitly discussed elsewhere, all travel modes will be required to provide the mobility levels needed to achieve the parallel economic goals the City has in place.

### Strategies that Leverage Transportation Infrastructure to Support the Continued Economic Vitality of the City

#### Strategy #1 – Effectively Capitalize On Rail Infrastructure Assets While Limiting Impact on Connectivity

The City of Sugar Land is fortunate in that it has two major Class I rail lines either within its boundaries or adjacent to its ETJ (**Figure 9.1**). The first of these rail lines is the Union Pacific line that parallels US 90A. This line currently has about 32 trains per day and will increase to around 70 trains in 2035. The second line is the BNSF line along FM 2759 and FM 762. This line currently has about 12 trains per day and will increase to around 25 trains per day in 2035. Because of the increased train traffic on these lines, it may be difficult to provide new rail access to developing properties such as the land that currently houses the Central Prison west of Sugar Land Regional Airport, a parcel that is planned for future industrial development upon relocation of the Prison facility. With the significant growth in train

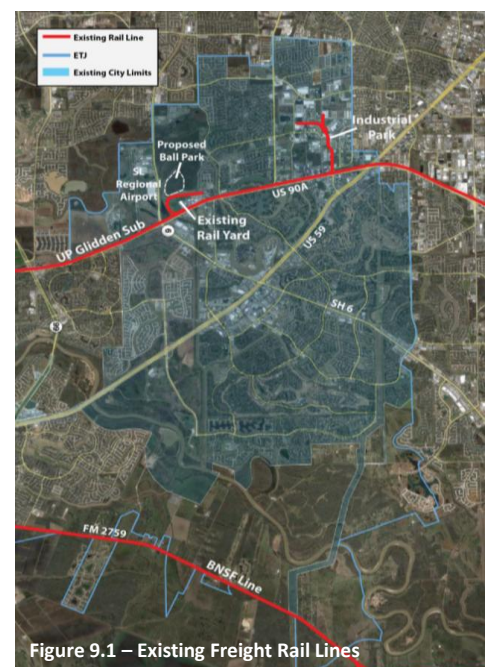


Figure 9.1 – Existing Freight Rail Lines



volumes and the plans for the Union Pacific to double and possible triple track its line, the City must be aware that any new rail access points to new light industrial should be coordinated with other rail access points. To develop additional opportunities to utilize this infrastructure to support economic development, opportunities that provide potential benefit to both the City and the rail operators may be required. This can include operational improvements (grade crossings, improved sidings) as well as additional development that benefits the rail road operators.

## Strategy #2 – Develop Transportation Infrastructure to Support the Airport as a Driver of Job Creation and Economic Activity

### 2A – Evaluate the potential to relocate existing UP Imperial Sugar rail spur to the proposed industrial park west of the Airport

With the high train volumes and the plans for the Union Pacific to double and possibly triple track its line, the City should be aware that any new rail access points to new light industrial that are shown on the master plan for the current Central Prison site may be difficult to obtain. However, the City may want to explore the option of relocating the current Union Pacific Rail Yard that is located east of Highway 6 and north of US 90A to collocate with the potential industrial park. This rail yard is currently a maintenance yard and also a delivery point for cars that are headed to and picked up from the Sugar Land Business Park near US 90A and Dairy Ashford. As this is already served by the UP, a potential concept for providing freight rail service to the new park would be to relocate this rail yard near the airport. The relocation of the rail yard would reduce the impact of the existing freight rail operations near the Imperial Sugar Factory area, allowing additional redevelopment to occur east of SH 6 and improving the feasibility of extending University Boulevard north of US 90A. If the rail yard was located in the new light industrial area, the UP may be more receptive to adding freight customers within the City as they could stage the delivery of the cars with the yard deliveries. A conceptual view of this potential relocation and rail served light industrial park is shown in **Figure 9.2**.

While this above plan provides rail access to the park, the City must weigh the potential impacts with the Airport's Master Plan. However, an industrial park which is served by three modes – rail, highway and air – provides a unique market potential that is not easily duplicated elsewhere in the country.

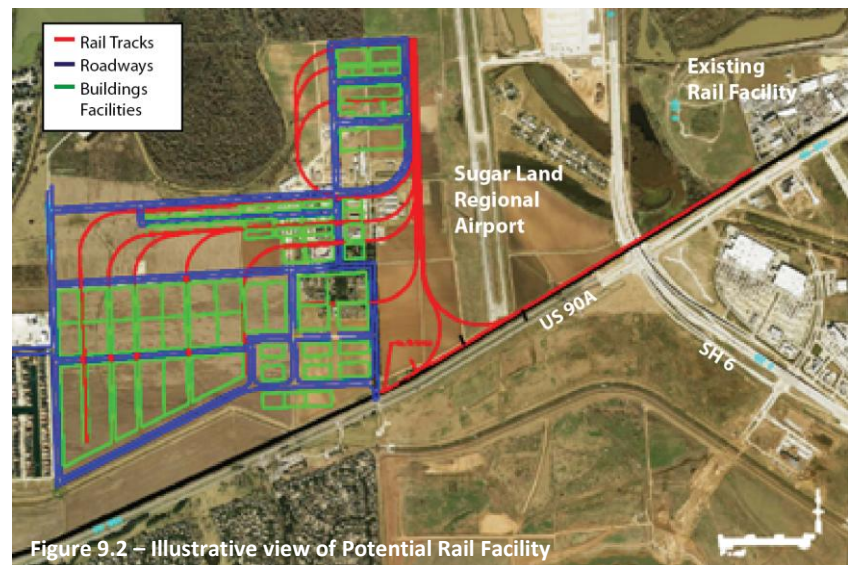


Figure 9.2 – Illustrative view of Potential Rail Facility

Strategy #3 – Consider potential commercial uses south of the Brazos River

3A – Evaluate need for a business park with potential rail access in the City’s ETJ (north of FM 2759), including impact on the existing City Land Use Plan and other Master Plans

While the City has benefited from the rail served Sugar Land Business Park located near Dairy Ashford and US 90A, the opportunities for additional areas to be zoned for industrial development are limited within the existing city limits. One area that would be a potential opportunity area for increase light industrial facilities would be for the City to examine a new, freight rail served, light industrial park in the ETJ, south of the Brazos River. If evaluated and determined to be a positive opportunity, providing for a grade separated structure for FM 2759 would be desirable. By having FM 2759 elevated, a new rail spur off of the existing BNSF rail line could be provided underneath the overpass structure. This will allow for limited impact to the adjacent roadway network as the area develops.



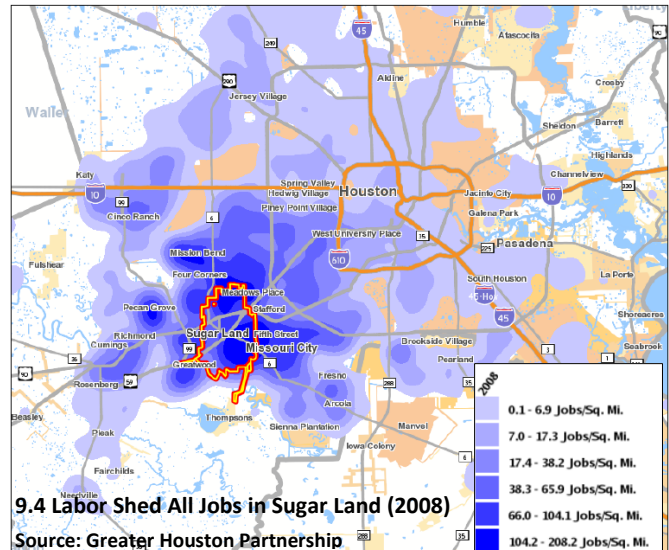
Figure 9.3 Light Industrial Opportunity Area in Sugar Land ETJ

Strategy #4 – Support objectives and initiatives in the Economic Development Plan

Initiative 4A - Implement initiatives to establish Sugar Land as a "Regional Business Center of Excellence", reducing demand for regional commute trips by residents

The City’s Economic Development Plan (City of Sugar Land, Economic Development Plan, 5-Year Strategic Roadmap, 2011-2016, April 2011) includes initiatives to increase the number of local jobs and establish Sugar Land as a “Regional Business Center of Excellence”. Implementation of the initiatives in the Economic Development Plan, as well as rising gas prices and the desire of people to reduce their carbon footprint, will likely increase the number of Sugar Land residents who both live and work in the City, thus, reducing the demand for regional commute trips by residents. The total impact on mobility will be affected by how closely the profile of jobs in the City match the skills of the local population base as well as, potentially, the availability of housing for employees at all levels of the organization who wish to live and work in Sugar Land. Regardless, increased economic activity will increase the total trips to and within the City which will need to be supported by mobility improvements.

Although the demand for regional commute trips will likely be reduced by creating additional employment opportunities for residents of Sugar Land and Fort Bend County, the need to provide services for commuter mobility will not go away, and, in fact, will increase the demand to fulfill other commuter needs. As Sugar Land

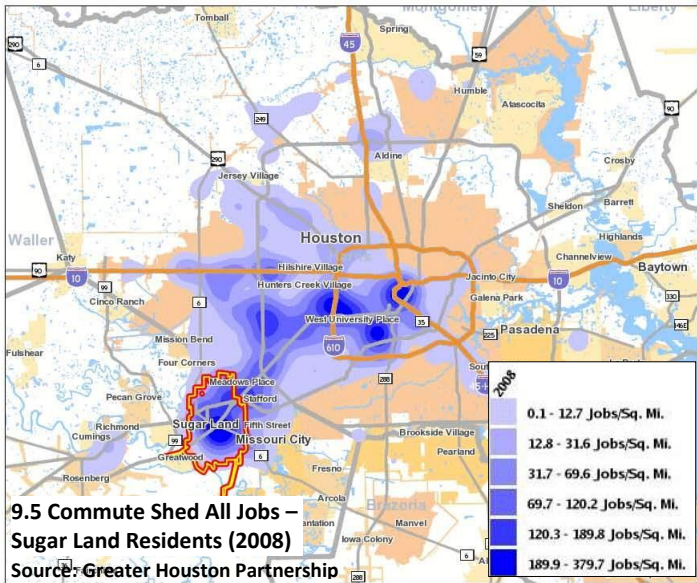


9.4 Labor Shed All Jobs in Sugar Land (2008)

Source: Greater Houston Partnership



becomes a regional business center, the number of reverse commute trips Sugar Land will increase resulting in the need to think about transit services that provide more frequent, bi-directional service or circulation around the City between activity centers. The current Labor Shed (where people who work in Sugar Land live) for jobs within Sugar Land is shown in **Figure 9.4**. The figure shows that most Sugar Land jobs are filled by people who are relatively local to the area though this is likely to broaden as the job base grows.



**Figure 9.5** indicates that while many Sugar Land residents work in the Sugar Land area, there is also a high concentration of residents working in Downtown Houston, Galleria/Uptown, Greenway Plaza and Texas Medical Center. The City will affect the number of Sugar Land residents working in Houston over time, as Sugar Land becomes a “Regional Business Center of Excellence”; however, it is likely that many Sugar Land residents will continue to be employed by Houston companies.

As any mobility improvements should support continued economic vitality in the City, so to should new developments be implemented with mobility outcomes in mind. The City should

ensure that multimodal connections to the individual employment centers that will comprise the “Regional Business Center of Excellence” are incorporated into the design of the development sites. These connections should consider local employment trips, freight movement, as well as the reverse commute trips, including access by bicycles, pedestrians, intracity transit services and high capacity commuter transit. This will create a virtuous cycle supporting continued economic prosperity and improving mobility outcomes.

**Metrics**

There are significant potential benefits for the City of Sugar Land with the development of mobility projects that support the continued economic vitality of the City. Tangible metrics are needed to determine the effectiveness of the outcomes for these and other mobility projects. Options include:

**Employment Base (Total employees or per capita):** The employment base of the City is an indicator of the economic vitality of the City. Jobs within Sugar Land potentially will limit increased roadway and commuter congestion and give current a future resident more career options close to home, increasing quality of life

**Sales Tax:** An indicator of the economic strength of the community and the success of local retail option of attracting consumers within and from outside the City.

**Ad Valorem Tax from Industrial Base:** Industrial land uses can be a major contributor to the overall taxes from property values in the City. Continued growth that is not detrimental to the overall quality of life in the City should be encouraged.