

11th Street redo for cyclists heats up

Nearby residents fear long traffic waits and awkward deliveries; bike fans eyeing safety

By Dug Begley
STAFF WRITER

A discussion planned to laud Houston's efforts to expand bicycling access Thursday turned into a debate on the merits of a two-mile stretch of 11th Street. The city's plan to reduce 11th

to one lane in each direction from Shepherd to Studewood — cheered by cyclists — has faced late opposition as construction nears. Residents concerned over the traffic impacts of taking away an automobile lane and the benefits of adding protected bicycle lanes used a scheduled

discussion about the city's bike lane progress to reiterate their concerns to City Council's transportation, technology and infrastructure committee.

Critic Ann Derryberry, who lives near 11th, said numerous residents have raised alarms, concerned that adding bike lanes will force residents to sit in heavy traffic longer, reroute cars onto nearby residential streets, complicate deliveries for area

businesses and lead to little safety benefit for cyclists.

"You say it is a protected lane, but it will be mostly painted because of all the driveways and alleys," Derryberry told council members and their staff, noting the need to paint green warnings where cars and turns will turn across the lane.

Rather than reduce and slow traffic, critics of the plan said the city should commit to cycling

and safety improvements elsewhere, and perhaps add a signal at 11th and Nicholson where the Heights Hike and Bike Trail crosses.

Cyclists and safety advocates argue that diverting attention from 11th would be ignoring that the street is the problem and speeds along it are what make traveling by car, bike or foot unsafe.

Street continues on A8



Godofredo A. Vásquez / Staff photographer

Stephanie Pedigo of GSM Architects shows off the refrigerators in the kitchen of Harmony House's new 128-bunk dormitory on the north end of downtown. The facility will have its ribbon-cutting ceremony today.

Meetings a chance to steer traffic planning

By Dug Begley
STAFF WRITER

Rather than sitting in Houston-area traffic, drivers are being asked by regional planners this month to shape it.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council, which doles out federal mobility money for the eight-county Houston metropolitan area, is updating the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan, which sets out the highways, transit, bike lanes, sidewalks and streets local governments will build over the next 25 years.

As part of updating the plan, eight meetings are scheduled along with a virtual hearing. People also can leave comments or take a survey on the plans.

"We want to hear what the people of the region think," said Kristina Michel, a senior writer for H-GAC's communications team. "What do they want to see more of in their communities? Wider roads? More bike lanes and sidewalks? Safer road designs that slow traffic down? More connected streets? More transit? Commuter rail? How can we improve freight movement? How can we relieve congestion? Improve air quality and reduce emissions?"

If you ever have thought "why didn't they do this 20 years ago," it is because officials never put it in the plan or never found the will to move it from the plan to reality.

The plan changes every few years and is formally updated every five. Combined with the state's unified transportation plan, it is the playbook of what will come in terms of new highways, toll roads, trains, buses and trails.

By 2045, demographers expect the region to be home to 10.7 million people — up from 7.1 million today — all with somewhere to go. To allow that travel to happen, planners expect the region to spend \$147 billion, more than one-third of which will go simply to maintaining the area's roads.

Meanwhile, \$64 billion will be *Traffic continues on A8*

Downtown living on the cheap

By R.A. Schuetz
STAFF WRITER

On the north end of downtown, where Interstates 10 and 45 cross, the hallways of a sleek new residential building feature floor-to-ceiling windows showcasing views of the skyline, with POST Houston's leafy rooftop garden in the foreground.

But the most striking fea-

For working men who otherwise would be homeless, Harmony House a safe haven

tures of the new housing can't be seen from the outside — they lie in the affordable rents, which go for \$235 a month (beds also can be rented by the week or the day) and the accessible, around-the-clock staff.

That's because the newest Harmony House building is fo-

cused on serving working men who otherwise would be homeless.

Harmony House CEO Meg Pohodich paused on a recent weekday as she walked through the worker dormitory, which was being readied for its ribbon-cutting ceremony

Friday.

A community kitchen, with stovetops that heat special cookware by means of electromagnetic fields, are a new amenity, as are bedside lights and outlets installed alongside each of the eight beds per dorm room. Each person will be able to close off his bunk by drawing a privacy curtain, and each will receive his own locker, under-

Harmony continues on A7

Survey shows 6M Afro-Latino adults in U.S.

By Olivia P. Tallet
STAFF WRITER

A Pew Research Center survey has found that 6 million adults in the United States identify as Afro-Latino, noting that this population experiences higher levels of discrimination than Hispanic people who do not identify as Afro-descendant.

The nonpartisan think tank

said in a report released this week that 12 percent of the adult Latino population in the country identifies as Afro-Latino, a distinct identity with deep roots in Latin America that can often exist alongside a person's Hispanic, racial or national origin identities.

The demographic portrait of Afro-Latino adults, who represent 2 percent of the U.S. population, indicates that 49 percent

were born in the U.S. when Puerto Rico is included. The report is based on a survey conducted from November 2019 to June 2020 and an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data, and incorporates data from another survey, from March 2021.

Among Afro-Latinos, 29 percent come from Mexico; 23 percent from Puerto Rico; 18 percent from the Dominican Republic; 7 percent from Cuba;

and 5 percent from El Salvador, the survey found. An additional 14 percent belong to other non-identified Hispanic or Latino origins.

"The most interesting thing we found in our research was the fact that when you ask about Afro-Latino identity of the overall adult population in the U.S., you get a small share of those who identify as Afro-Latino *Survey continues on A8*

Top House Dems stand behind Cuellar

By Jasper Scherer
AUSTIN BUREAU

House Democratic leaders, facing pressure from abortion rights advocates to drop their support for U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar ahead of his primary runoff, are backing the anti-abortion Laredo Democrat as he fights to retain his District 28 seat against progressive attorney Jessica Cisneros.

Rallying with Cuellar in San Antonio on Wednesday night,

House Majority Whip James Clyburn — the No. 3 House Democrat and one of the party's most influential figures — reaffirmed his support for Cuellar, days after a leaked draft opinion signaled the U.S. Supreme Court is set to overturn the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision.

Clyburn, addressing a crowd of several dozen people at an outdoor restaurant near downtown San Antonio, acknowledged he disagrees with Cuellar on certain issues but pointed to Cuellar's

key role — as one of his chief deputy whips — in wrangling votes on numerous key issues.

Clyburn said after the rally that Democrats are a "big-tent party" with room for a member such as Cuellar who opposes abortion.

"I don't believe we ought to have a litmus test in the Democratic Party," Clyburn said. "This whole notion that you've got to agree with everybody on everything is pretty sophomoric to *Cuellar continues on A8*



Billy Calzada / Staff photographer

U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, still has the backing of the Democratic establishment despite his anti-abortion stance.

CORONAVIRUS AT A GLANCE

515,963,356
Confirmed cases worldwide

81,683,856
Confirmed cases in U.S.

6,753,419
Confirmed cases in Texas

6,246,899
Deaths worldwide

996,879
Deaths in U.S.

86,599
Deaths in Texas

780
Confirmed patients in Texas hospitals

65.28%
Texas population 5+ fully vaccinated

Source: WHO, CDC, Texas DSHS, Johns Hopkins University

I-69 at 610 by Bellaire will close for next 3 weekends

By Dug Begley
STAFF WRITER

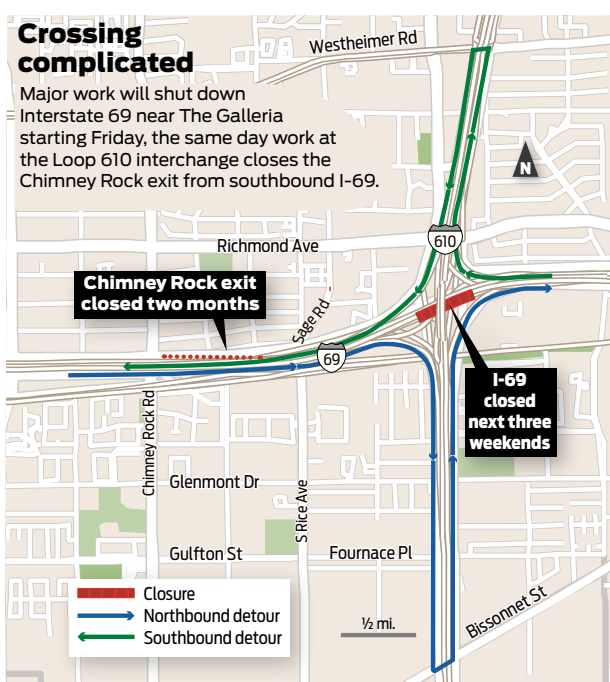
As forecast, work is heating up at the Interstate 69 and Loop 610 interchange near Bellaire, leading to three weekends of closings starting today.

Crews will close I-69 in both directions at Loop 610, starting at 9 p.m., Texas Department of Transportation officials said. The lanes will reopen by 5 a.m. Monday. Detours will send drivers onto 610, where they will make a U-turn and return to I-69. The closings will repeat May 13-16 and May 20-23.

"We're at the point the work we have is going to have some closings associated with it," TxDOT spokesman Danny Perez said last week, as officials prepared for a busy for months of construction.

With sizzling temperatures forecast for Houston, the closing is set to get people's blood boiling. Drivers should expect delays and avoid the area if possible, officials said. Police will direct traffic if needed.

Complicating travel, highway officials said crews also will close the exit from southbound I-69 to Chimney Rock for two months, starting Friday



night. Until summer, drivers will be directed to Fountain View, where they can make a U-turn and return to Chimney Rock.

More than four years in rebuilding the freeway interchange — by most measures the worst bottleneck in Texas — workers are moving to one of the most daunting parts of the project: rebuilding main lanes of Loop 610 spanning I-69. To rebuild the lanes, many of the old ramps and supports have to be demol-

ished, necessitating traffic staying off I-69.

The closings are the latest in what has been years of lane shifts and detours for area drivers, and follow the demolition of the ramp from southbound I-69 to southbound 610, which closed last weekend. The new ramp will not open until mid-2024, highway officials said, as one of the last parts of the \$270.9 million interchange project.

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Boy accidentally shot in head dies

By Sam González Kelly
STAFF WRITER

A 4-year-old boy who was accidentally shot in the head by his brother Monday has died, according to Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez.

The boy's uncle, 32-year-old Francisco Lupian, allegedly left the gun unattended while visiting the family's home in the 22300 block of Guston Hall Lane, according to the Harris County Sher-

iff's Office. He was charged with illegal possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

The boy and his 9-year-old brother found Lupian's unsecured gun and were playing around with it when the older boy, who was showing his brother how to pull back the gun's slide, accidentally pulled the trigger and shot the younger boy in the head, court documents show.

The 4-year-old was rushed by helicopter to a

local hospital in critical condition. Gonzalez tweeted Thursday afternoon the boy had died of his injuries at the hospital.

Lupian had previously taught the 9-year-old how to pull back the slide, prosecutors alleged in court documents.

Lupian remains in custody at the Harris County Jail on \$100,000 bond, court records show. He is due back in court July 14.

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Godofredo A. Vásquez / Staff photographer

Harmony House CEO Meg Pohodich says the agency's new dormitory is a "huge upgrade" over the previous building. "I can't wait until the guys see it," she said.

HARMONY

From page A3

bed bin, and refrigerator chest.

"This is a huge upgrade," said Pohodich, who joked that the former dormitory had been held together with "duct tape and love." "I can't wait until the guys see it. The guys are going to love it."

Eleven years in the making, the 128-bed dormitory for working men is serving a much-needed niche in Houston's housing market — homes for those who have an income but who would not otherwise be able to secure housing.

Many do not make enough to cover rent in the Houston area, which averaged \$1,220 this April, according to the multifamily data firm Apartment Data. Others face difficulty satisfying common requirements to rent a home, which can include proof of income, a driver's license and a clean background check.

"We're always full," Po-

hodich said. She said the dormitory's waiting list bore testament to the community's need for such housing, which can be hard to finance and get permits for because many are unfamiliar with the concept.

The new facility will be home to a Harris Health clinic (which also will provide dental services), a computer lab and a small store selling food items such as microwavable dinners and ice cream.

Harmony House was established in 1992 by a group of social service, medical and business professionals who saw an unmet need in Houston's homeless population.

While they originally envisioned the organization as a church, it instead has become a nonprofit agency focusing on housing homeless Texans. Besides its dormitory for working men, it provides services to people who have qualified for what's known as permanent supportive housing.

Its original dormitory

was next door to its current location, where it had 103 beds. Pohodich had hoped that, upon the new facility's opening, the non-profit would more than double its beds for workers, but the 103-bed facility was lost to an electrical fire in October. The men living there were moved into hotels until the new building was completed.

Although rents for the Harmony House worker dorm cover its operations, the nonprofit turned to a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone, the city's Housing and Homeless Bond, the Houston Housing and Community Development Department and foundations to fund the new facility. GSMA was the architect for the project, and Axis Builders was the general contractor.

Harmony House will begin moving workers into the new dormitory as soon as its certificate of occupancy is issued, Pohodich said.

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