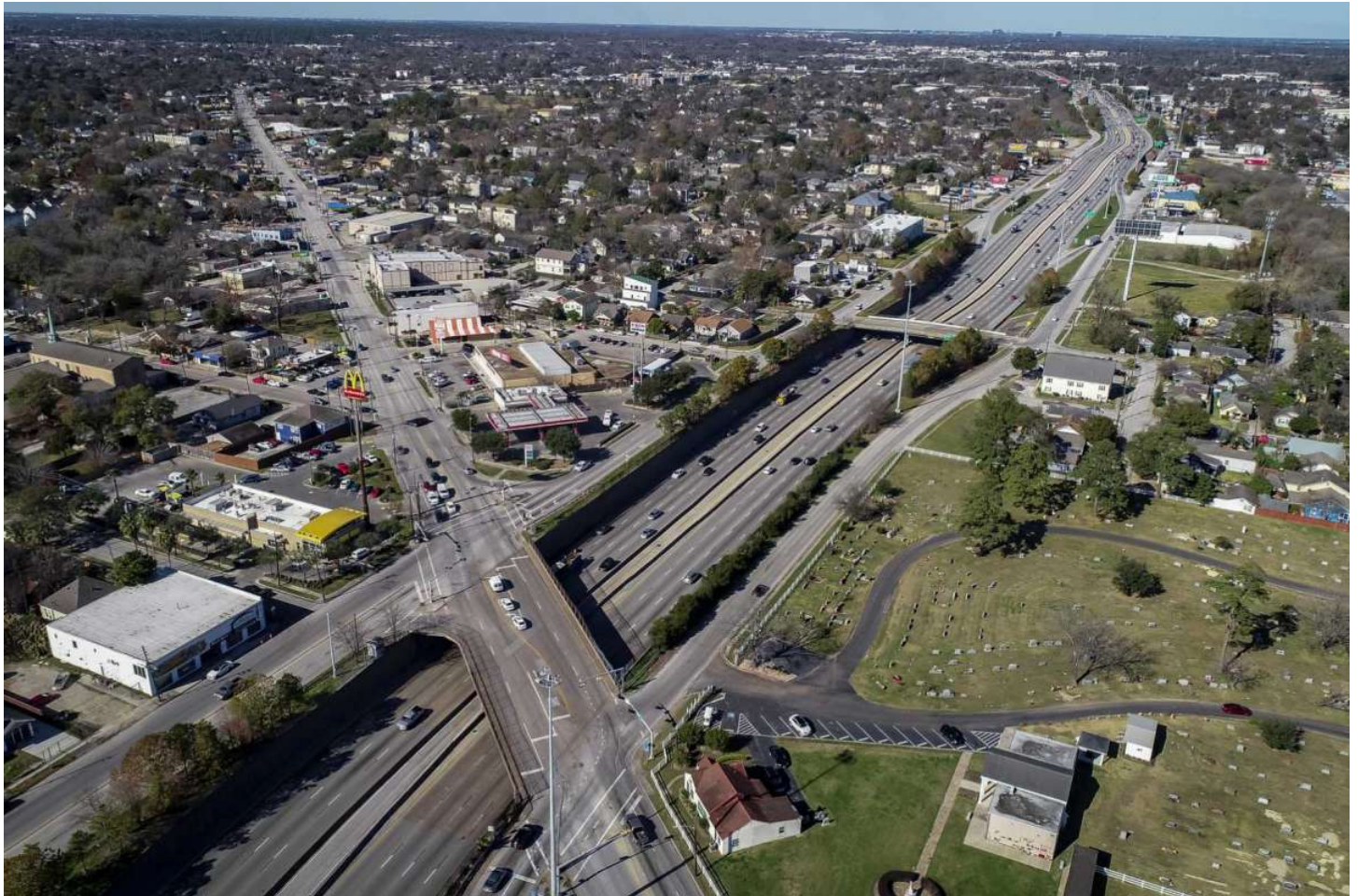


LOCAL // TRANSPORTATION

Bolstered by racial justice debate, critics of I-45 project call for protection of vulnerable communities

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Interstate 45 runs past the Hollywood Cemetery at North Main Street in Houston, seen on Jan. 7, 2020. The impending Interstate 45 project will drastically change the area's infrastructure.

Photo: Mark Mulligan, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer

Bolstered by the ongoing national discussion on race and public policies, critics of a planned redesign of Interstate 45 are seeking more assurances that vulnerable communities are protected as the \$7 billion project approaches a key milestone.

Members of the Houston-Galveston Area Council's transportation advisory committee this week voted to keep portions of the I-45 project in the area's short-term transportation plan, but with a host of caveats. Chief among those conditions is that the Texas Department of Transportation respond in detail to a set of requests from Houston planners outlining exactly what they can and cannot do to stay within the freeway's existing boundary and agree in writing to protect displaced residents and businesses.

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The lack of clear commitments worries skeptics, who fear neighborhoods affected by the massive redesign from downtown north to Beltway 8, such as Northside, Independence Heights and Fifth Ward, will continue to bear the brunt of TxDOT and Houston's highway expansion. For decades, neighborhoods along I-45, I-69 and I-10 north and east of downtown have felt the effects of living within shouting distance of the freeways, as mostly white officials routed the thoroughfares through black and Hispanic communities.



A new Holiday Inn being built along Interstate 45 sits next to Hollywood Cemetery at North Main Street in Houston, seen on Jan. 7, 2020. The impending Interstate 45 project will drastically change the area, where many businesses along the freeway will be acquired.



Interstate 69 crosses Buffalo Bayou northeast of downtown next to the Clayton Homes, a Houston Housing Authority complex in Houston, seen June 12, 2019. Clayton Homes would be demolished if current plans for redevelopment of Interstate 45 proceeds as planned.

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