

# HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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## TxDOT gets creative as real estate runs out



Mark Mulligan / Staff photographer

More vehicles along Interstate 69 head toward downtown. Transportation officials look to make better use of the space they have.

### Transportation projects shift focus from wider freeways to managed lanes

By Dug Begley  
STAFF WRITER

The story of Houston's growth and its roads has always been about bigger. More people has meant more concrete, farther into the suburbs and wider in the

dense core.

Now, state transportation officials are starting to rewrite that, planning major projects focused on managed lanes along key freeways that encourage transit and carpool use, while potentially providing places to test new

types of transportation.

For some commuters, it is long past time transit and carpool options were provided, while others long for even more open road for solo cars.

Texas Department of Transportation officials simply recog-

nize they are running out of room, cannot rely on toll lanes to curb congestion and need support from across the region to accelerate projects they are planning.

"This is about transportation  
*Freeways continues on A13*

## HPD loses 'gentle soul,' dedicated servant

By St. John Barned-Smith  
STAFF WRITER

Harold Preston had just bought a breakfast taco at a Whole Foods in south Houston on Tuesday when the call came in: Two officers at a domestic dispute on Holly Hall needed help.

The 65-year-old sergeant headed their way. Preston, who



Preston

joined the Houston Police Department in 1979, had handled countless domestic calls over his long career.

But at 9:25 a.m., a 51-year-old man shot and killed Preston as he tried to escort the man's es-

tranged wife into the apartment to collect her things.

On Wednesday, the impact of Preston's death was still setting in, as friends, family and colleagues mourned a man who gave more than four decades of service and who was devoted to his community. He is survived by his parents, Annie and Robert Preston, his daughter, Alison

**Probe continues**

» Salvadoran man held on capital murder charge. **Page A3**

Preston, and his fiancée Flenda Whitney.

Preston grew up in the shadow of Texas Southern University.  
*Officer continues on A13*

## Workers to pay price as oil firms consolidate

By Paul Takahashi  
STAFF WRITER

Mergers and acquisitions are sweeping the oil and gas industry, creating ever larger companies that can better withstand the crude market's boom and bust cycles.

ConocoPhillip's \$9.7 billion takeover of Concho Resources and Pioneer Natural Resources' \$4.5 billion pursuit of Parsley Energy — both announced this week — are the latest attempts by beleaguered energy companies to pool resources and slash costs in the wake of the historic oil bust caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The deals come on

the heels of Chevron's nearly \$12 billion acquisition of Houston-based Noble Energy this month, and Devon Energy's plans to purchase WPX Energy for nearly \$2.6 billion.

But this new wave of consolidation will leave behind a smaller industry with fewer players employing fewer workers, analysts say. That's bad news for Houston, the nation's energy capital, which has already lost thousands of jobs in recent oil busts.

"Everybody knows that when two companies come together, the sum of the two is not going to survive," said Karr Ingham, a pe-

*Oil continues on A14*



Elizabeth Conley / Staff photographer

A wave of mergers and acquisitions in the oil industry to cut costs and pool resources will mean fewer employees.

## Pontiff supports gay civil unions

Francis' remarks in film welcomed by LGBT allies, unsettle bishops

By Jason Horowitz  
NEW YORK TIMES

Pope Francis expressed support for same-sex civil unions in remarks revealed in a documentary that premiered Wednesday, a significant break from his predecessors that staked out new ground for the church in its recognition of gay people.

The remarks had the potential to shift debates about the legal status of same-sex couples in nations around the globe and unsettle bishops worried that the unions threaten what the church considers traditional marriage — between one man and one woman.

"What we have to create is a civil union law. That way they are legally covered," Francis said in "Francesco," which debuted at the Rome Film Festival, reiterating his view that gay people are children of God. "I stood up for that."

Many gay Catholics and their allies outside the church welcomed the pope's remarks, though Francis' opposition to same-sex marriage within the church remained absolute.

His conservative critics within the church hierarchy, and especially in the conservative wing of the church in the United States, saw the remarks as a reversal of church teaching.

*Pope continues on A14*

### ELECTION 2020

## Will final debate get even more personal?

By Jonathan Lemire, Bill Barrow and Steve Peoples  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASHVILLE — President Donald Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden are set to square off in their final debate Thursday, one of the last high-profile opportunities for the trailing incumbent to change the trajectory of an increasingly contentious campaign.

Worried about losing the White House, some advisers are urging Trump to trade his aggressive demeanor for the first debate for a lower-key style that puts Biden more squarely in the spotlight. But it's unclear whether the president will listen.

Biden, who has stepped off the campaign trail in favor of debate prep, expects Trump to get intensely personal. The former vice

*Debate continues on A14*

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## FROM THE COVER

## FREEWAYS

From page A1

real estate,” said James Koch, TxDOT Houston district planning director. “It’s just real estate out there. We are obviously not going to double the size of the facilities we have, so what do we do with the space we have.”

Making Houston’s freeways handle more traffic within the same space will mean more projects relying on new ideas, such as elevated express lanes or managed lanes for transit, carpools and, perhaps, electric or self-driving cars, transportation officials said. Koch said the next step is adding the assorted projects to upcoming regional plans, so local elected officials and the community see how individual projects along Interstate 10, Interstate 69 and Loop 610 combine to create what he called a “box” where commuters could have a more viable option than add to the road congestion.

“Part of the message here is, you don’t have to bring your car into downtown,” Koch said, explaining that some of the planning aligns with where Metropolitan Transit Authority expects to add or expand park and ride lots and transit centers.

## Making multi-modal possible

Houston transportation leaders, however, will build their new vision in pieces – albeit large pieces. Specific projects added to the long-range plan include a rebuild of I-10 within Loop 610 with two managed lanes in each direction. The \$2.2 billion proposal would replace the direct connector into downtown.

Along Loop 610 from I-10 to I-69 in Uptown, Koch said TxDOT is planning express lanes – perhaps elevated – to allow transit and automobiles not bound for Westheimer, Post Oak and other local streets a way to avoid traffic. The cost: \$558 million.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council’s Transportation Policy Council, which does out locally controlled federal highway funding, added the two projects to its long-range transportation plan in August, along with a handful of

## Box steps

TxDOT officials are exploring how managed or express lanes can create a faster freeway and transit system in a “box” created by the redesigned downtown freeway system to the east, Loop 610 to the west, I-10 to the north and I-69 to the south.

## Loop 610

TxDOT tweaked designs that create express lanes, potentially elevated, between I-10 and I-69, so through traffic is not fighting local access.

**Status:** Included in regional plan with \$558.4 million cost for work as early as 2026.

## I-10

A \$316 million project to add transit lanes could be redesigned later as managed lanes or managed lanes parallel to it.

**Status:** Included in regional plan with \$2.2 billion cost that includes total freeway rebuild, as early as 2026.

## Downtown

Part of the \$7 billion-plus rebuild of I-45 north of downtown, including shifting I-45 to the east side, the project remakes all nearby freeways.

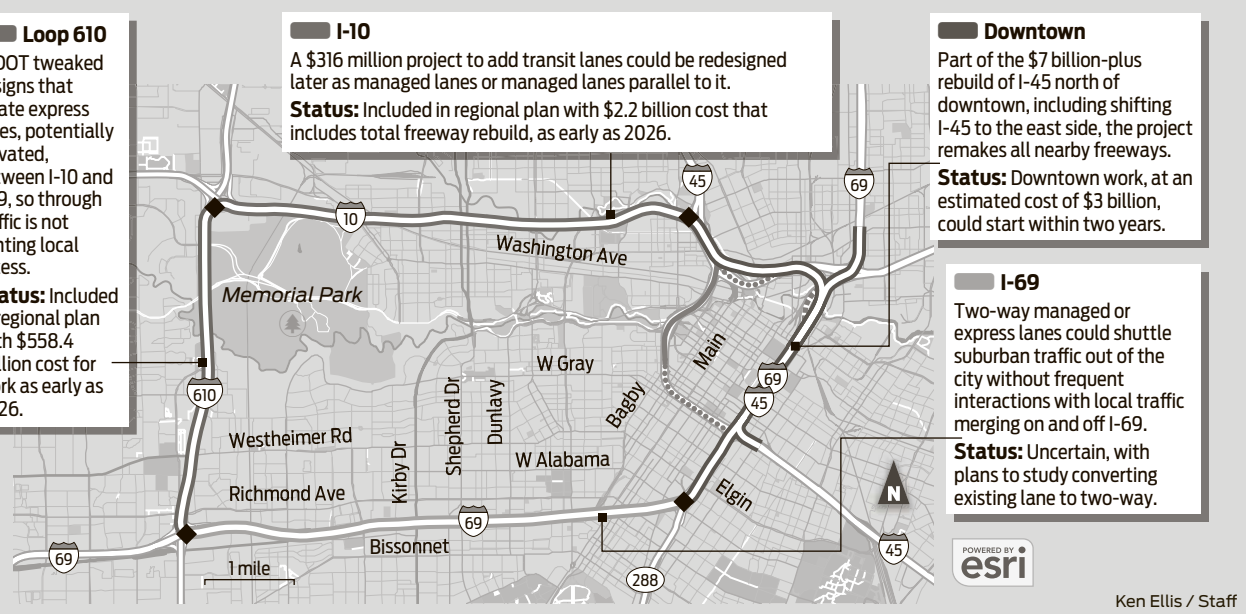
**Status:** Downtown work, at an estimated cost of \$3 billion, could start within two years.

## I-69

Two-way managed or express lanes could shuttle suburban traffic out of the city without frequent interactions with local traffic merging on and off I-69.

**Status:** Uncertain, with plans to study converting existing lane to two-way.

Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council, Texas Department of Transportation; ESRI



others.

Koch said his reason for including the various road redesigns in the regional transportation plan is to lay all of the options in front of local officials – and get officials thinking about how the pieces fit together and how they connect to other smaller projects and Metro’s long-range plan for more bus rapid transit and rail in the area. That way, TxDOT, Metro and city and county officials can avoid hiccups that often act as a drag on building local projects.

The I-10 and Loop 610 projects are revisions to previous plans, some that had caused alarm among residents. Along both freeways, some homeowners worry building the freeways higher has drawbacks because it could also raise noise and pollution levels in the surrounding areas.

“I don’t think anyone wants to look out their window and see trucks flying by,” said Michelle Rhodes, 40, who lives in the Rice Military neighborhood near I-10 and Durham.

Drivers who commute to downtown from neighborhoods northwest and southwest of Houston, meanwhile, are likely to welcome any work to speed trips up. Irshan Mohammed, 33, said that since moving jobs five years ago he has wondered why there is not a faster way to take transit downtown from Sugar Land.

“The closer you get, the worse

it is,” Mohammed said of the delays.

Managed lanes, if built as Metro expands park and ride and local bus service, allow commuters to take a car to one location to access transit to another. That way, Koch said, commuters or those headed to an event, such as an Astros game or downtown theater, could quickly access crowded parts of Houston where they may not need a car or may want to avoid the hassle of parking.

Express lanes along Loop 610, meanwhile, would make trips along the freeway easier for those just passing through – including Metro buses bound for Bellaire and Meyerland.

Managed lanes fulfill both TxDOT’s current marching orders from elected officials to eliminate use of tolls in future freeway plans and the need for nimble options. After nearly 20 years of major projects including tolls, with voter-approved cash infusions to TxDOT in 2014 and 2015, elected and transportation officials turned back to tax-funded freeways.

Though managed lanes to many drivers may mean carpool lanes with solo drivers paying to use them, such as the Katy Managed Lanes along I-10, they could offer more options. As autonomous automobiles advance, Koch said, managed lanes could offer a place to let them operate so a com-

muter could let the car drive for most of the trip and take over when approaching downtown.

“It is just space out there, and what does that space allow you to do?” he said. “Where can you get on and get off? How will goods move around the area? A lot of people are getting stuff delivered. I see those trucks in my neighborhood. Are they using the Grand Parkway? Are they using the Beltway (8)? How is freight moving around the region?”

## Planning ahead

Koch said projects also must consider developments in electric and automated vehicles. Those changes will inform the next two decades of transportation planning in Houston, something Koch predicted will go smoother if the region irons out its differences along the way.

“I want to have these discussions now so it is done well in advance and the whole region is on the same page,” Koch said.

Local transportation planning veterans agree.

“Clearly it works very well for DFW,” said Maureen Crocker, assistant director for transportation and drainage planning at Houston Public Works.

The Dallas region, many argue, has benefited from a unified message when it goes to Austin to compete for state transportation funds. Metroplex leaders nearly

four decades ago came up with a plan for regional light rail and now have a system five times the length of Houston’s MetroRail system.

“They were all lined up and saying ‘This is great, give us money,’” said Koch, who worked in Austin for TxDOT at the time. “What I am trying to do is pull us all together.”

Still, long-term plans do not always go smoothly, no matter how much effort is put in if the public pushes back.

For example, differences of opinion dominate a final decision on the massive I-45 widening project from downtown Houston north to Beltway 8. After 15 years of planning, TxDOT is facing opposition from local officials and groups related to the effects the project will have on air quality and neighborhood integrity as it pivots from planning the project to seeking the hundreds of millions of dollars in state and federal funds needed to build it.

Officials always will face some opposition when it comes to major, long-sought projects, Harris County Precinct 4 Commissioner Jack Cagle said, because so much can change between when they are planned and when they are built, including public opinion.

“It is that dynamic of ‘I want the final design before I can look at it,’ but there is a lot of work to get to that final design,” Cagle said.

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## OFFICER

From page A1

on Wentworth Street, recalled City Council Member Carolyn Evans-Shabazz. At the time, she lived one street over, and often saw him as she pedaled around the neighborhood.

“I never saw him in an altercation with anyone, which is sort of unusual, especially when you’re growing up,” she said.

Preston attended Jack Yates High School, graduating in 1973, then went to Texas Southern University. He studied sociology and graduated in 1978. A year later, he joined HPD.

He was a member of Academy Class 86, and spent the first 14 years of his career working assignments in northeast Houston, the department’s former jail and North Patrol. In May 1999, he transferred to Southwest Patrol, where he stayed for the rest of his career.

## ‘We all looked up to him’

Colleagues remembered him as a calm, steady supervisor, who never lost his enjoyment for the job and loved mentoring new patrol officers.

Michael Jackson, a now-retired officer, met Preston when the ser-

geant transferred to Southwest.

He tried to mimic Preston’s unflappable, reserved manner, particularly as he became a more veteran officer whom new patrol officers looked up to when they first arrived at Southwest.

Sgt. Jennifer McQueston met Preston in 2010 during one of her first assignments at HPD, as a Southwest Patrol officer.

She returned to the station years later. Preston, a “real mellow” supervisor, had never left.

He was a creature of habit, starting every shift by going to Whole Foods to get breakfast tacos and drinks – so much so that it became a long running joke. “Man it’s time to go to Whole Foods,” he’d crack.

As he did for many other officers at the tight-knit station, he quickly became a mentor.

“This station is different, it has a family feel,” she said, recalling how Preston addressed practically everyone he met as “Hey guy!”

“We all looked up to him,” she said.

They bonded over photography, one of his favorite hobbies – though they disagreed on whether Nikon or Canon made better cameras.

He loved stepping outside, to shoot pictures of the department’s helicopter – Fox, as it’s called – landing on the helipad behind the

Southwest Patrol Station on Nitida.

Though he could have retired years ago, or looked for an assignment that didn’t require street work, he never stopped patrol work, colleagues said.

“He was running and gunning with all of us,” McQueston said.

During the protests against George Floyd’s death earlier this year, the entire department mobilized on 12-hour shifts, and many had to be ready to quickly deploy to demonstrations around the city.

McQueston was dispatched to one protest, but Preston ordered her to stand down.

“I got it,” he said.

## Retirement plans

In recent months, he had decided to put in his retirement paperwork, and he told subordinates he’d bought a motorcycle over the weekend. He ordered one in simple silver, because he wanted to have a custom design – of a camera aperture – painted on its side.

Special Victims Sgt. Drunnie Ward-Boxie first met Preston as a rookie on patrol in 1999. By that point, he’d already been on the force for 20 years.

“He was the veteran who knew everything,” she said.

After a stint in other assign-

ments, she returned to Southwest in 2017. Preston was still there.

She used to joke with him about when he would finally retire.

Preston always demurred.

They held a surprise party for him on his 40th work anniversary, shortly after he returned from a monthslong absence recovering from double knee surgery. They surprised him with a cake and a plaque.

“Are you all trying to push me out?” he teased.

Jay Chase, a retired lieutenant, worked with Preston in Northeast, where he was an administrative sergeant.

Chase remembered him as a steady, “extremely helpful” sergeant who avoided gossip and could be counted on to get the job done.

“Anything I needed, he’d go above and beyond,” Chase said. “I never saw him angry. He may be the most gentle soul I’ve ever met.”

Decades later, after getting married and raising a daughter, Preston moved back into his childhood home to help support his aging parents.

On Tuesday, he’d planned to turn in his retirement papers, said Evans-Shabazz, though he’d told friends he was hoping to return to TSU to work there training new

police officers.

“He still wanted to serve, but in a different capacity. That’s how I know him: as a servant, a pleasant person, always willing to offer assistance,” she said.

“He went full circle. He was raised in Third Ward. He went to school in Third Ward,” she continued. “He was doing police work in District D, in Third Ward. He was totally dedicated to the community and law enforcement.”

On Tuesday evening, Jackson returned to the station to visit his old comrades. He saw dozens of people Preston had mentored; sergeants, lieutenants, even commanders and assistant chiefs who had worked with him.

He thought of the advice Preston gave him, which he didn’t understand at first, but which took on greater meaning as the years went by.

“You might go home late, but you’ll go home at the end of the day.”

And he remembered their jokes, as they grew older, about retirement, about all the times he teased Preston that it was time to trade his badge for a fishing rod by a lake.

Preston always responded: “Probably next year.”

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## MANZANO

From page A3

The encounters culminated in a shootout at Manzano’s apartment in the 2600 block of Holly Hall, where Preston and two other officers were watching over the woman as she planned to leave the residence.

Gunfire erupted when Manzano’s 14-year-old son opened the door. Manzano shot the 41-year HPD veteran in the head and wounded Officer Courtney Waller in the arm, police said.

The Harris County District Attorney’s Office has filed a motion to deny bail on all of the offenses. In a proposed order to be signed by a judge, prosecutors mentioned a likelihood that Manzano would face the death penalty “if the law was administered.” He is also a flight risk, given that he is not a U.S. citizen, they said.

The shooting closely followed four domestic violence complaints involving Manzano, on Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, and officers interacted with the couple

on those occasions. The investigation is revealing that the family was “held hostage” by Manzano, partly because he threatened to have her deported, Houston police Chief Art Acevedo said during an afternoon news conference on Wednesday.

“We’re just grateful that (Preston’s) sacrifice was not in vain,” Acevedo said. “Her nightmare is over.”

Ogg said she has spoken with Acevedo several times since the shooting to discuss the capital charges that would be accepted and the evidence in the case, which includes police body-worn camera footage.

In a phone call with the Chronicle, Ogg outlined the four complaints the wife lodged, starting with her decision on Saturday to report her husband at a southwest Houston police station. She did not yet know the details surrounding that complaint or the incident on Monday when Waller encountered the couple, a meeting that was not disclosed until Tuesday morning in a phone call with prosecutors.

She said she did not think a fail-

ure to communicate was to blame for the lack of information surrounding those incidents. Acevedo, during the news briefing, said the Monday incident had nothing to do with the shooting.

Waller on Sunday and again on Tuesday morning, moments before he was shot, told prosecutors that he did not believe a crime had been committed. The officer ran Manzano’s name for open warrants but did not find any, police records show.

A background check, if Waller had requested it, would have shown any arrests in Texas or federal records.

Ogg pointed to the quickly changing nature of the investigation and how it could be prosecuted.

Acevedo said he believed the district attorney’s office acted in good faith, especially since the police department did not give them enough cause to pursue charges earlier.

What’s important, he said, is that Manzano is now in custody and his family is safe. The investigation currently is focused on

Tuesday’s events, and the department later will review those previous encounters, Acevedo said.

Both Waller and the son remain in the hospital in stable condition. Manzano is also in stable condition.

Manzano’s criminal record includes three prior assaults in Dallas County, some of which he was on probation for when he was arrested in Harris County in 2002 for evading in a motor vehicle. The probation was then revoked. He was sentenced to 180 days in the county jail, court records show.

An unlawful carry of a weapon charge from 1994 was dismissed. Where Manzano resided in the years after his release was not immediately known.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has also placed an immigration hold on Manzano, an El Salvadoran “convicted criminal alien who is unlawfully present in the U.S.,” agency officials said in a statement.

Manzano was not known to be an immigrant in the country illegally ahead of the incident, they confirmed. Local officials added

that his immigration status likely wouldn’t come into play until he is released from jail, if at all, pending the outcome of the cases.

Since the implementation of Senate Bill 4 later in 2017, the sheriff’s office has given ICE space in the jail for their own agents to work. SB4 outlawed “sanctuary cities” by mandating that local police work with federal immigration authorities and allowing them to ask about detainees’ immigration statuses.

Houston is not a sanctuary city, and Acevedo has criticized SB4 in the past. On Wednesday, Acevedo said Houston is not a sanctuary “for anyone hurting anyone.”

The sheriff’s office, which manages the jail, cooperates with ICE in that it allows them to screen people after they are booked in the lockup, spokesman Jason Spencer said. When that person is set to be released, the sheriff’s office then notifies the agency.

Julian Gill contributed to this report.

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