



Central Houston

Texas Metro Downtowns Coalition's 87th Legislative Session Policy Priorities

Downtowns are vital economic engines of the great State of Texas.

The Texas Metro Downtowns Coalition represents over **5,000 Texas property owners** and **13,000 downtown Texas businesses** in seven of the largest cities in Texas: Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio.

Texas' metropolitan downtowns are not only engines of prosperity for the State, typically contributing 20 times the tax revenue per acre than a citywide average, they are the civic and cultural epicenters of the State of Texas and embody the Texas brand.

From the Alamo and Riverwalk in San Antonio to the Capitol Complex and live music industry in Austin, downtowns preserve and promote that intangible quality that attracts talent from across the country to live and work in Texas.

When downtown Texas thrives, Texas thrives.

With the pandemic-induced recession hitting Texas's downtowns the hardest, seven of the State's largest downtowns came together to form the Texas Metro Downtowns Coalition, which has adopted this legislative agenda to ensure that downtowns continue to create economic success for Texas. Our legislative priorities include:

1. Keeping downtown **safe and ensuring equitable access** for all its visitors, residents and employees.
2. Investing in **infrastructure** to make downtown accessible, walkable and wireless.
3. Growing downtown's residential **neighborhoods and innovation districts**.
4. Ensuring downtown is beloved for its **history, culture, architecture, parks and experiences**.

1. **Keeping downtown safe and ensuring equitable access for all its visitors, residents and employees.** We support legislation that:

- Regulates the use of downtown streets, sidewalks and other public facilities in ways that improve the safety of downtown visitors, residents and employees across Texas, including: regulating sidewalk camping, obstructing sidewalks, or aggressive/threatening solicitation in Texas central business districts in metropolitan areas with populations over 300,000.
- Increases or maintains existing funding for or access to behavioral and mental health services and substance abuse treatment for individuals experiencing homelessness or who are otherwise unsheltered.
- Increases or maintains existing funding for or access to:
 - i. Beds and housing (immediate shelter and permanent supportive housing);
 - ii. Social services for individuals experiencing homelessness or who are otherwise unsheltered; and
 - iii. Homeless prevention tools such as affordable housing, rental assistance, tax abatement tools for low-income workers, home repair programs, and criminal justice reform.
 - iv. Diversion programs for low-level, non-violent offenses that offer wrap-around services, such as recovery, job placement and mental health programs.

2. **Investing in infrastructure to make downtown accessible, walkable and wireless, and ensuring inclusive practices that provide equitable access.** We support legislation that results in the planning, construction, operating and maintenance of mobility infrastructure, including:

- Fully funding voter-authorized Proposition 1 and Proposition 7 transportation funds.
- Legislation to allow for the utilization of private capital and other funding mechanisms to build infrastructure through comprehensive development agreements (CDAs).
- Legislation that provides local options for transportation-related revenue expansion and diversification.
- Flexible funding options for capping urban highways under reconstruction to advance the design, construction, operation and maintenance of such capping projects.
- Particular priority should be placed on those projects that mend and connect neighborhoods, enhancing access to the job centers, housing and public spaces that exist in Texas Downtowns.

And that expands of digital infrastructure, including:

- Improving to the State’s digital infrastructure to close the accessibility gap for online learning and telehealth.
- Enabling municipalities to improve residents’ access to broadband service.

3. Growing downtown's residential neighborhoods and innovation districts. We support legislation that:

- Will preserve and expand the supply of and access to affordable and market-rate housing.
- Leverages Texas universities as community hubs and accelerators for talent and innovation, as well as incentives to keep move leading-edge technologies from the research lab to local companies, including, for example, the Governor's University Research Initiative.

4. Ensuring downtown is beloved for its history, culture, architecture, parks and experiences.

- Support legislation that improves the visitor, resident and employee experience downtown and improves equitable access by improving sidewalks, shading and tree canopy, parks, recreation, open space and trails.
- Oppose the expansion of permissible uses of the Hotel Occupancy Tax beyond support of the tourism industry.
- Support funding for arts and cultural institutions, organizations and assets downtown, including live music venues, publicly-visible art, theaters, museums and other institutions, as well as for the artists, musicians, makers and other individuals, entrepreneurs and small businesses who create art, entertainment and cultural products, services and experiences.
- Preserve and expand historic preservation tax credit programs.
- Support incentives to encourage the highest and best use of downtown property (e.g., to decrease first floor vacancies; improve buildings in disrepair; and convert properties such as surface parking lots and vacant land).
- Oppose legislation that limits the rights of downtown districts to continue to operate the most effective manner to enhance, create and maintain the value and vitality of Texas Downtowns.