

# *Baton Rouge Area Foundation*



## Summary of Master Plan for the Baton Rouge Health District

FuturEBR, the parish's comprehensive plan for growth, prioritized the need for improved mobility in the corridor that includes Essen Lane, Perkins Road, and Bluebonnet Boulevard. This area encompasses a high density of hospitals and health services providers, and traffic congestion has become a serious problem. At the request of the FuturEBR Implementation Team, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation collaborated with health care leaders and consultants to create a master plan for this part of the city.

In the course of crafting it, however, we required our planners to create a plan for the future, keeping in mind expected growth in the area. We aimed to address transportation and land planning issues beyond current limitations. And, more importantly, the master plan recommends new partnerships and innovative projects to create a destination for healthcare in our community and region. All of these new projects will be overseen by a new nonprofit created earlier this year: the Baton Rouge Health District.

The Foundation paid for the \$700,000 plan.

Below are four key recommendations contained in the plan. We encourage residents to review the entire plan online at [BRAAF.org](http://BRAAF.org). and [BRHealthDistrict.org](http://BRHealthDistrict.org).

### **1. Form a Health District**

Already established as a nonprofit, the Baton Rouge Health District will coordinate among health care providers and collaborate with government officials, higher education institutions, and others to implement the master plan. Representatives from the health care sector govern the Health District, and they are seeking to hire its first executive director to coordinate and manage additional planning and implementation of key projects and initiatives identified in the master plan.

### **2. Implement the Transportation and Land Use Plan**

The plan recommends immediately improving the infrastructure to reduce traffic congestions. This includes the need to balance driving with other options – walking, biking and taking mass transit—and for better land use, such as providing access to existing parks and greenspaces.

#### **2a. Build the District's Street Network**

A chief cause of traffic congestion in the area today is a broken street grid. With no alternate routes, disconnected streets force motorists to all use the main thoroughfares, such as Essen

Lane and Bluebonnet Boulevard. Each day, more than 42,000 cars are channeled through each of these two streets.

The plan recommends several new roads or extensions of and improvements to existing ones that would work together to improve circulation throughout the Health District. The recommendations are:

- **Building Midway Boulevard.** Right now, two main streets link Perkins with I-10: Bluebonnet and Essen. The plan recommends building Midway Boulevard roughly halfway between the two, providing motorists a third option. Midway is already included in the East Baton Rouge Major Road Plan. Planners are proposing a rail underpass for Midway and ultimately connecting it to I-10.
- **Extending Dijon Drive** The plan recommends continuing Dijon behind Our Lady of the Lake Hospital – on an updated service road – and along the interstate until it connects with Bluebonnet. An extension of Kenilworth Boulevard recommended in the plan would let motorists bypass Essen if they chose to drive to Bluebonnet or I-10. Dijon would provide an alternative route to OLOL Children’s Hospital and disperse traffic away from Baton Rouge General’s main campus.
- **Rerouting Picardy Drive.** A rerouted Picardy Drive would connect with Mall of Louisiana Boulevard, giving drivers direct access to I-10.
- Other recommendations include frontage roads on both sides of I-10, extending Summa Avenue to connect with a rerouted Picardy, and rail underpasses at Brittany Drive, O’Donovan Drive, and the future Midway Boulevard.

## **2b. Enable People to Walk, Bike, and Use Mass Transit**

To further ease congestion, the plan recommends enabling people to walk, bike, and take advantage of transit resources. This calls for adopting street design guidelines that include, where appropriate, sidewalks, bike lanes, medians, plazas, and bus stops. It also means implementing bicycle and car share programs, enhancing transit options within the district through, for example, an intra-district shuttle, and building a multi-modal transit center.

## **2c. Connect to Parks and Open Spaces**

To foster better health, the Health District should provide greater access to the natural environment. The plan calls for the District to adopt a landscape framework plan, connecting it with the Burden Museum and Gardens and with other existing green spaces, such as Perkins Road Community Park. The Health District should also create signature parks of its own.

## **2d. Promote Balanced, Diverse and Orderly Development**

Each building in the District should contribute to the public domain– the streets, sidewalks, courtyards, and parks– so as to create a unified sense of place. To do this, the master plan recommends mixed-use institutional zoning policies in the Health District. This would allow the

consolidation of irregular land parcels to accommodate mixed-use developments.

### **3. Create a Diabetes and Obesity Center (DOC)**

The Health District should aim to alleviate one of our chief public health problems by creating a Diabetes and Obesity Center for managing health outside the doctor's office. The center could provide centralized services, such as nutrition and exercise advice, clinical services, healthy meals available for purchase, a demonstration kitchen to teach healthy cooking, and instructions for using of the most recent medical technology. Research will be among the overarching goals of the center. A full business plan for the DOC is expected to begin soon.

### **4. Start a Four-Year Medical School in Baton Rouge**

The United States faces a shortage of up to 90,000 physicians by 2025, including a critical need for specialists to treat an aging population that will increasingly live with chronic disease, according to the Association of Medical Colleges. What's more, The Louisiana Workforce Commission predicts the state will need 28% more physicians in the next decade. In response, the report recommends expanding the Baton Rouge branch of LSU's School of Medicine in New Orleans in the Health District to provide capacity for graduating more doctors ready for the remarkable changes underway in health care. The four-year institution would use experimental new curricula that are not offered at the New Orleans or Shreveport locations of the LSU School of Medicine. One exciting possibility discussed in planning meetings is the establishment of an engineering-based medical program, offering masters and doctoral degrees in bio-innovation, for instance. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is underwriting a feasibility and economic impact study for the proposed medical school. It has hired Tripp-Umbach to produce the report by the summer of 2016. Tripp-Umbach will identify new sources of funding for the medical school.