



Reconnecting by Way of What Divides Us



THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMUNITY DESIGN Resource Center (CDRC) recently put on *Thick Infrastrure*, an exhibition of bold visions for Houston's transit centers, park-and-ride lots, drainage ditches, and utility easements.

Team members included Ruqiya Imtiaz-uddin, Alex Lara, Rose Lee, Xavier Vargas, and Susan Rogers. Rice Design Alliance provided \$5,000 in funding through the Initiatives for Houston grant program.

"We're looking at how to make better use of existing spaces, how to give things more than one purpose, and how to use resources in an efficient way that adds value to our community," says Rogers, who directs the CDRC and serves as chair of the *Cite* editorial committee.

During the run of the exhibition, Houston voters approved \$100 million in bond funding for Bayou Greenways, a 150-mile system of contiguous bicycle trails along the bayous. *Thick Infrastructure* could be seen as an extension or expansion of that grand project, a Bayou Greenways 2.0.

Visitors were invited to write their own visions on postcards that were posted on walls and then sent to the Houston city council. Many cards took the logic of *Thick Infrastructure* further. For example, one card described a woman fainting while waiting in the sun for a bus and demanded better bus shelters. Another card suggested better sidewalks connecting the envisioned networks to "schools, churches, & homes."

a DITCH THE DITCH In Houston, houses and neighborhoods mostly turn their backs on the 2.500 miles of waterways. bayous, and ditches that wind through the city. The system is not considered an amenity, but instead a nuisance. Thickening our drainage easements by adding amenities like trails, paths, seating, shade, and lighting has the potential to create an alternative pedestrian network that winds through our neighborhoods connecting parks, schools,

and housing. Courtesy UH Community Design

Resource Center. Montage image by Alex Lara.

h MILES OF POSSIBILITY If drainage systems were proactively planned and designed as an integral element that added value to our communities, instead of turning our backs on these systems, we could embrace them. Houses could face two ways, to the front yard and the street and to the drainage easement. Courtesy **UH Community Design** Resource Center. Section by Rose Lee.