

DEBUNKING THE “HOUSTON DRIVES MOST” MYTH **Driving in Houston: No More than Average**

The Myth:

It is claimed that per capita driving in the Houston area is greater than in any other major urban area in the nation. This is claimed to be so because of Houston’s “sprawl” (suburbanization). It is also claimed that city’s lack of zoning is a factor, because jobs and housing are allegedly far apart.

The Reality:

The data indicating a high rate of driving in Houston is incorrect: The claim is based upon data in *Highway Statistics*, which is published by the United States Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This data indicates that Houston has daily driving of 36.0 miles per capita. This would place Houston with the highest driving per capita among the nation’s 38 urban areas with more than 1,000,000 population and 50 percent above the 24.2 mile average (Table 1).

In fact, this data is incorrect. The FHWA 2006 data¹ indicates that the Houston urban area has a population of 2,801,000. According to the United States Bureau of the Census, the population of the Houston urban area was 4,353,000 in 2006.² It is true that the FHWA and Census geographical definitions vary, however, the land area of the FHWA urban area (1,476 square miles) is *greater* than the land area of the Census urban area (1,296 square miles). It is statistically impossible for a Houston urban area with a *larger* land area to have *less* population than a Houston urban area with a *smaller* land area.

Actually Houston’s driving is about average: If the urban area population is corrected to agree with the Bureau of the Census data, per capita driving in the Houston area is slightly below the national average for large urban areas. Houston would rank 19th out of 38 urban areas, with daily per capita driving of 23.2 miles, compared to the national average of 23.9 miles. Houston’s daily driving is only slightly more than urban areas with large rail systems, such as Boston, Washington and San Francisco (Table 2 and Slide 1).

TX-DOT Data Confirms Houston’s Modest Rate of Driving: According to Texas Department of Transportation data, daily driving in the Houston metropolitan area ranks last among the four metropolitan areas with more than 1,000,000 population (Table 3 and Slide 2). Despite the much more extensive urban rail system in Dallas-Fort Worth, per capita driving on state highways is 15 percent more than in Houston.

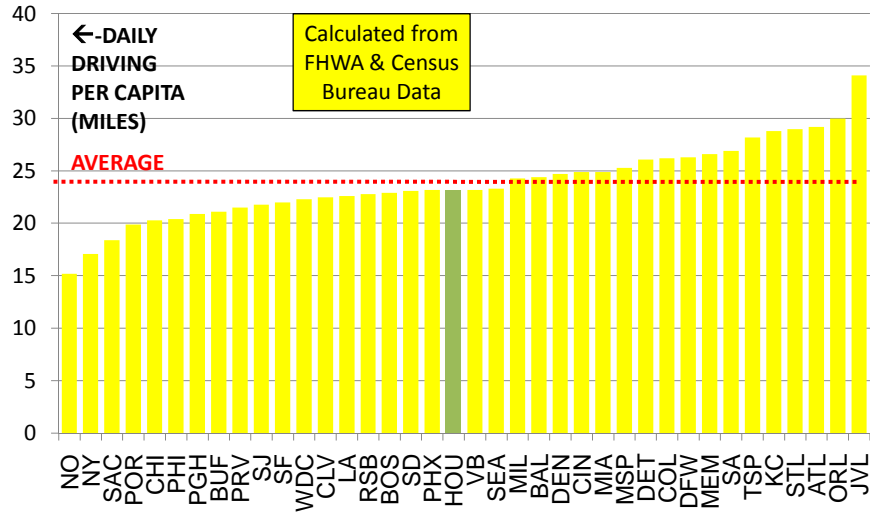
Houston’s Modest Driving is Consistent with its Urban Form: In contrast to perceptions, Houston is approximately average in population density (“sprawl”), as is indicated in *Land Use*

¹ *Highway Statistics: 1996*, Table HM-72.

² United States Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2006. Population of the Houston urbanized area (2000 geographical definition).

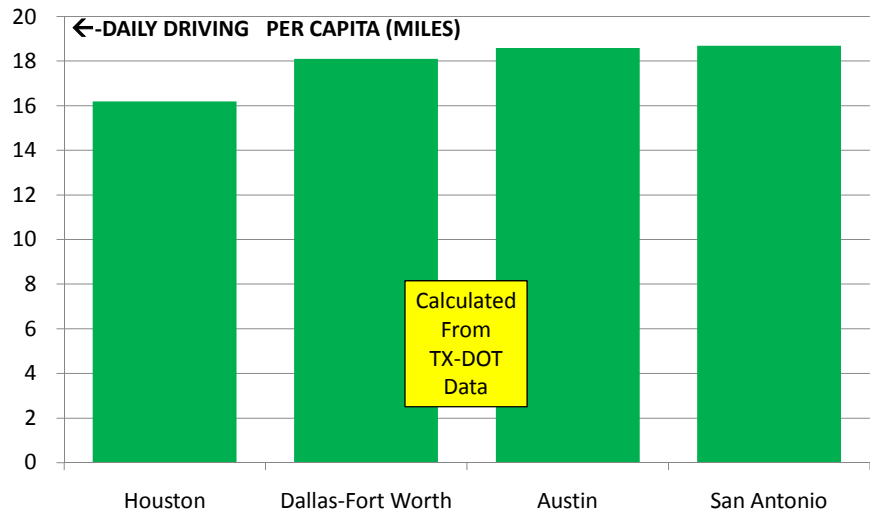
Myths about Houston: Sprawling Houston. Moreover, it would be expected that Houston's more market oriented land use system would provide a better transportation match between homes and destinations. Houston's driving data is consistent with this interpretation. Without zoning in the city and the unincorporated suburban areas, Houston does not have the planning barriers that so often lengthen travel times from homes to work and other destinations.

Per Capita Driving: National URBAN AREAS OVER 1,000,000 POPULATION: 2006



Slide 1

Per Capita Driving: State Highways LARGEST METROPOLITAN AREAS IN TEXAS



Slide 2

Table 1:
 Urbanized Areas over 1,000,000: Data as Presented in FHWA "Highway Statistics: 2006"
 Showing Incorrect Houston Urban Area Population

Rank	Urbanized Area	Daily Vehicle Miles (1,000)	Estimated Population	Land Area	Population Density	Vehicle Miles per Capita
1	Houston	101,170	2,801,000	1,476	1,898	36.0
2	Jacksonville	34,672	1,016,000	696	1,460	34.1
3	Orlando	41,316	1,376,000	716	1,922	30.0
4	Atlanta	127,224	4,361,000	3,027	1,441	29.2
5	St. Louis	64,133	2,212,000	1,359	1,628	29.0
6	Kansas City	43,716	1,520,000	1,049	1,449	28.8
7	Tampa-St. Petersburg	64,632	2,293,000	1,072	2,139	28.0
8	San Antonio	37,845	1,407,000	481	2,925	27.0
9	Memphis	27,111	1,021,000	555	1,840	26.6
10	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington	114,985	4,377,000	1,727	2,535	26.0
10	Detroit	102,220	3,918,000	1,439	2,723	26.0
10	Columbus	31,528	1,203,000	609	1,975	26.0
13	Minneapolis-St. Paul	63,679	2,519,000	1,192	2,113	25.0
13	Denver-Aurora	52,777	2,133,000	814	2,620	25.0
15	Miami	133,962	5,379,000	1,499	3,588	24.9
15	Cincinnati	41,010	1,647,000	887	1,857	24.9
17	Milwaukee	33,981	1,399,000	518	2,701	24.0
17	Baltimore	52,495	2,149,000	683	3,146	24.0
19	Seattle	71,115	3,056,000	1,185	2,579	23.0
19	San Diego	68,220	2,951,000	984	2,999	23.0
19	Phoenix	77,562	3,350,000	1,151	2,911	23.0
19	Cleveland	39,233	1,745,000	897	1,945	23.0
19	Boston	93,725	4,101,000	2,241	1,830	23.0
19	Riverside-San Bernardino	43,645	1,917,000	747	2,566	23.0
19	Virginia Beach	35,466	1,528,000	1,812	843	23.0
19	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana	278,547	12,345,000	1,971	6,263	23.0
27	Washington	96,013	4,308,000	1,305	3,301	22.3
28	San Jose	37,123	1,703,000	353	4,824	22.0
28	San Francisco-Oakland	69,531	3,162,000	1,054	3,000	22.0
30	Providence	26,663	1,238,000	799	1,549	21.5
31	Buffalo	22,623	1,071,000	608	1,762	21.0
32	Pittsburgh	38,045	1,816,000	1,215	1,495	20.9
33	Philadelphia	107,543	5,275,000	2,257	2,337	20.4
34	Chicago	171,609	8,453,000	3,502	2,414	20.3
35	Portland	35,389	1,774,000	538	3,297	19.9
36	Sacramento	34,175	1,858,000	446	4,166	18.0
37	New York-Newark	310,914	18,224,000	4,485	4,063	17.1
38	New Orleans	15,326	1,009,000	321	3,143	15.2
	Average					24.2

From Table HM-72

Table 2:
 Urbanized Areas over 1,000,000: with Alternative Houston Data: FHWA "Highway Statistics: 2006"
 Showing Correct Houston Urban Area Population

Rank	Urbanized Area	Daily Vehicle Miles (1,000)	Estimated Population	Land Area	Population Density	Vehicle Miles per Capita
1	Jacksonville	34,672	1,016,000	696	1,460	34.1
2	Orlando	41,316	1,376,000	716	1,922	30.0
3	Atlanta	127,224	4,361,000	3,027	1,441	29.2
4	St. Louis	64,133	2,212,000	1,359	1,628	29.0
5	Kansas City	43,716	1,520,000	1,049	1,449	28.8
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7	San Antonio	37,845	1,407,000	481	2,925	26.9
8	Memphis	27,111	1,021,000	555	1,840	26.6
9	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington	114,985	4,377,000	1,727	2,535	26.3
10	Columbus	31,528	1,203,000	609	1,975	26.2
11	Detroit	102,220	3,918,000	1,439	2,723	26.1
12	Minneapolis-St. Paul	63,679	2,519,000	1,192	2,113	25.3
13	Miami	133,962	5,379,000	1,499	3,588	24.9
13	Cincinnati	41,010	1,647,000	887	1,857	24.9
15	Denver-Aurora	52,777	2,133,000	814	2,620	24.7
16	Baltimore	52,495	2,149,000	683	3,146	24.4
17	Milwaukee	33,981	1,399,000	518	2,701	24.3
18	Seattle	71,115	3,056,000	1,185	2,579	23.3
19	Houston	101,170	4,353,000	1,294	3,364	23.2
19	Virginia Beach	35,466	1,528,000	1,812	843	23.2
19	Phoenix	77,562	3,350,000	1,151	2,911	23.2
22	San Diego	68,220	2,951,000	984	2,999	23.1
23	Boston	93,725	4,101,000	2,241	1,830	22.9
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37	New York-Newark	310,914	18,224,000	4,485	4,063	17.1
38	New Orleans	15,326	1,009,000	321	3,143	15.2
	Average					23.9

Table HM-72
 Population from FHWA except Houston, which is from the Census American Community Survey: 2006
 Urbanized area: 2000 definition (land area of 2006 American Community Survey urbanized area population estimate).

Table 3
 Driving on State Highways in Texas:
 Largest Metropolitan Areas:2006

Metropolitan Area	Population	Vehicle Miles on State Highways	Per Capita Driving on State Highways
San Antonio	1,942,000	36,349,000	18.7
Austin	1,514,000	28,099,000	18.6
Dallas-Fort Worth	6,004,000	108,412,000	18.1
Houston	5,540,000	89,510,000	16.2

Vehicle Miles calculated from TX-DOT District and County Statistics (DISCOS), 2006.
 Population from US Bureau of the Census