

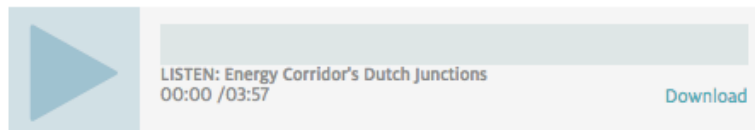
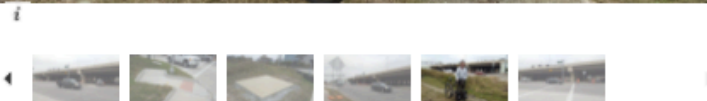
TRANSPORTATION

West Houston Cyclists Are Getting Some 'Dutch Junctions'

With its busy feeder roads and crowded thoroughfares, Houston's Energy Corridor doesn't seem like the place where you'd ride a bike to work. But a lot of people do, and officials hope a new design project will make the experience safer.

GAIL DELAUGHTER | DECEMBER 21, 2016, 6:28 AM

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More than 90,000 people work in west Houston's [Energy Corridor](#). According to a 2014 survey, about 1,000 of those employees [ride a bike to work](#) at least once a week.

One of those cyclists is Clarence Holmstrom. He's an oil and gas engineer who occasionally rides from Interstate-10 and Silber.

Holmstrom says he likes getting some exercise at the start of the workday. But then comes the part when he crosses under the Katy Freeway. He says his head is on a swivel, constantly looking in every direction to make sure drivers know he's there.

"And just generally understanding that you're the only person looking out for you," adds Holmstrom.

There was one instance where Holmstrom really had to look out for himself. He was trying to get through the intersection at I-10 and Kirkwood when his bike chain broke.

"And so now all of a sudden I'm sitting in the middle of the lane with my crank spinning and the bike's not going anywhere and the cars are coming," says Holmstrom. "And fortunately people were paying attention and I was able to grab my chain off the road and run to get out of the way."

But Holmstrom says drivers aren't always so considerate. He says he's seen some behavior that's downright aggressive, with drivers coming way too close.

Now officials with the Energy Corridor are hoping a new infrastructure project will help everyone get along better.

At a construction site at I-10 and Dairy Ashford we meet [Clark Martinson](#), the Energy Corridor's Executive Director. Martinson is also an experienced cyclist and we watched as he zipped through the busy lanes of traffic.

"For someone who is out here every day, is this intersection ever quiet?" I ask. "Quiet? Not when I'm here," laughs Martinson.

To make crossing those intersections safer, the Energy Corridor is [building something new for Texas](#). It's a Dutch Junction, based on a model from The Netherlands.

So how does it work?

Take an intersection like Dairy Ashford, where you have multiple lanes of traffic. You add in pedestrian crosswalks with their own signal so walkers can get across the feeder road. Then add bike lanes that ring the intersection so riders won't have to mingle with cars. There are also buffers that protect cyclists from vehicles making right turns.

Martinson explains the benefits:

"You do have that signal delay so that the pedestrian and the bicyclist can get out into the street before a car has a green light to turn right or go through the intersection," says Martinson. "Gives you that extra second so you're visible and out in front of the car. You're more predictable as you cross the street."

The Energy Corridor's Dutch Junction project will cost about \$3 million. Most of the money comes from a federal program. TxDOT is managing construction. The first ones will be built along I-10 at Highway 6, Eldridge Parkway, and Dairy Ashford.

"And so the Energy Corridor, being the highest density of development along I-10, has the potential to have safe crossings from hotels, or from apartments, living quarters, on one side of I-10 to the workplace or the shops on the other side," explains Martinson.

But what does this mean for similar bike projects in the future?

We got some perspective from Shawn Turner, a research engineer with the Texas A&M Transportation Institute. Turner points to studies showing that people want to ride on the streets, but they [just don't feel safe](#).

"And so that's what we're seeing here in Texas and particularly outside of Texas, is this move toward providing a little bit more separation between busy traffic and people who want to bike and walk," says Turner.

And there's another component. Turner says to make bike infrastructure work for everyone, you also have to teach drivers how to use it.

Back out on the I-10 feeder road, cyclist Clarence Holmstrom agrees that driver behavior is the key to making the Dutch Junction work. He says he's waiting to see what happens.

"I'm not even sure that adding a few extra lines and maybe changing the light timing a bit is really going to change people's behavior when their driving to the point where it will make it much safer."

The Energy Corridor's Dutch Junctions should be completed this spring.