



Citizens' Advisory Committee Meeting

Harbor Bridge Project Improvements to US 181 at the Harbor Bridge over the Corpus Christi Ship Channel

**January 11, 2012 – 6:00 – 8:30 pm
Oveal Williams Activity Center, 1414 Martin Luther King Drive, Corpus Christi, TX**

Meeting Summary

Introductions

John Casey, TxDOT Corpus Christi District Engineer welcomed the members of the CAC to the meeting. He introduced himself and invited all committee members to introduce themselves and explain what they hoped to get out of CAC membership. As they introduced themselves, CAC members voiced support for a new bridge; expressed concerns about the tunnel alternative; expressed a desire for all communities to be protected and included in the project; explained that a new bridge would be beneficial to the community; and indicated that they were ready for the project to move forward as quickly as possible.

Mission of the Citizens' Advisory Committee

Nancy Gates, meeting facilitator, reviewed the proposed mission of the CAC:

- To receive project team reports on the progress of the project in relationship to established schedules and project milestones.
- To promote public awareness and understanding of the project
- To advise TxDOT on the community's preferences regarding the project as well as the best approach for communicating with the public.

CAC members agreed with this mission.

Harbor Bridge Project History and Current Status

Victor Vourcos, with the TxDOT Corpus Christi District and project manager for the Harbor Bridge Project gave a quick review of the project, which consists of proposed improvements to US 181 at the Harbor Bridge over the Corpus Christi Ship Channel. The project would extend from Beach Ave (at US 181) on the north to Morgan Ave. on SH 286 on the south, so it would include both the bridge itself as well as the associated approaches. The lead federal agency for the project is the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and TxDOT is co-lead. These two agencies will be working together throughout the project.



Mr. Vourcos explained that TxDOT began the Harbor Bridge Project in 2001 and completed the Feasibility Study in 2003. In 2004, they began their initial environmental process and schematic development (conceptual designs for a bridge replacement), which included CAC meetings. In 2007, FHWA and TxDOT decided to extend the project limits to allow for the future addition of what are called managed (toll) lanes across the bridge and continuing on SH 286. Because of this change in project limits, TxDOT held a new round of scoping meetings that year. In 2007, TxDOT unfortunately had to put the Harbor Bridge on hold because of a lack of funding. Two years later, in 2009, they were able to reinitiate the project. At that time, TxDOT's administration decided that the managed lanes would no longer be included and therefore the project limits could go back to the original project limits as proposed in 2005. In 2010, FHWA determined that the project should be developed using new regulatory procedures that have come into effect since the project first began.

In June and July of 2011, TxDOT published a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This was the first legal step in beginning the EIS process. Public and agency scoping meetings were held to gather input on the possible project alternatives in August and October 2011.

During this portion of the meeting, CAC members asked about project progress and whether TxDOT was starting all over again with the EIS. TxDOT indicated that a new Notice of Intent for the Harbor Bridge Project was filed last summer, which signifies the beginning of the environmental study process. During the time that the project was temporarily stopped due to funding shortages, federal regulations regarding the NEPA process changed. Therefore, TxDOT took another look at the alternatives as it restarted the NEPA process for Harbor Bridge. FHWA and TxDOT concluded that four alternatives would be considered during the scoping process: the red, orange, blue, and green alternatives. Some of the previous work completed for the EIS before the project was put on hold will be used where appropriate. One CAC member asked about acquisition of right-of-way for a bridge replacement. TxDOT responded that anyone who might be impacted by the project would be notified well in advance; however, it is too early in the process to make any decisions about possible right-of-way acquisition since TxDOT is currently undertaking the alternatives analysis process.

Review/Group Discussion of Project Need and Purpose

Mr. Vourcos then reviewed the need for the project, which includes safety (e.g., the existing bridge's lack of shoulders, steep vertical slope, challenging roadway approaches); enhanced navigation and economic development of the Port of Corpus Christi (current vertical clearance is a deterrent to larger vessels); increased difficulty in maintaining the structure over the long-term (rising maintenance costs); limited connection to local roadways; and the existing bridge's limited ability to meet future traffic demands. The purpose of the project corresponds to these needs: correcting the sharp curves and steep grades to improve safety, raising the bridge height to improve ship access to the Port of Corpus Christi, maximizing the long-term operation of the



Harbor Bridge structure, improving connectivity between the bridge/US 181 and the local roads, and providing adequate capacity on US 181 to meet projected future traffic.

The general public and the cooperating and participating agencies have had an opportunity to comment on this project Need and Purpose, as has the CAC.

Review/Group Discussion of Project Alternatives

Mr. Vourcos explained that there are currently six build alternatives plus the no build (leaving the existing bridge in place) under consideration, as shown on the Harbor Bridge location map that was distributed to each CAC member. These alternatives are the red, orange, green, blue, tunnel, and west alternatives. The tunnel and west alternatives were proposed during the public and agency scoping process in 2011.

Discussion of Alternatives Analysis Process

Matt Thompson gave the group an overview of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that governs the way agencies such as TxDOT perform environmental impact studies. These studies are required for any major project that uses federal money and could significantly affect the quality of the human environment. NEPA requires agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions before they make any decisions. The environmental review process includes extensive public involvement.

As Mr. Thompson explained, the EIS process begins with publication of a Notice of Intent, stating the agency's intent to prepare an EIS for a particular project. TxDOT published this Notice of Intent in the summer of 2011 in the *Federal Register* and in the *Corpus-Christi Caller Times*. When the Notice of Intent was published, it provided information on the first public and agency scoping meeting, which took place in August. The scoping process is used to gather input on possible project alternatives, issues, and alternatives, as well as to get feedback on the project Need and Purpose and the project Coordination Plan. A second set of public and agency scoping meetings were held in October 2011 and two new alternatives suggested during the scoping process were identified (the west and tunnel alternatives).

Mr. Thompson explained that TxDOT's analysis of project alternatives will begin with evaluating each alternative to determine whether it meets the project Need and Purpose. To perform this analysis, TxDOT and FHWA have worked together to develop criteria by which each alternative can be measured to determine if it meets each of the elements of the Need and Purpose. These criteria are called the Measures of Effectiveness (MOEs). If an alternative does not meet the Need and Purpose, it will be eliminated from further evaluation. Alternatives that meet the Need and Purpose will be evaluated further during the EIS process. According to NEPA, the EIS must "objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives, and for alternatives which were eliminated from detailed study, briefly discuss the reasons for their having been eliminated."



One CAC member noted that the overall impact to the community is critical and wondered if the cost of an alternative was a consideration. TxDOT responded that they are working on a cost comparison of all options. Another member asked about the total cost of the entire constructed project. TxDOT indicated that they have not yet defined the cost of each alternative but currently estimate the final cost of the project to be between \$600 million and \$1 billion.

A CAC member noted that it will be important during decision making to determine the effects, both positive and negative, of an alternative on nearby neighborhoods and that 3-D modeling would be very helpful in helping people visualize the impact the project will have on their community.

Group Discussion of Public Involvement Activities

Nancy Gates reviewed the planned public involvement activities for the Harbor Bridge Project and explained that public involvement is a key component of the project because public input is needed throughout the environmental documentation and schematic development process.

She noted that TxDOT has already held two public (and agency) scoping meetings (2011), and has considered all input received during those meetings including suggestions for two additional alternatives to be studied. The project Coordination Plan has also been revised based on comments from agencies and the public.

The CAC and Technical Advisory Groups have been formed and are holding their first meetings today (January 11, 2012). TxDOT also is available to meet with small neighborhood groups or organizations as requested. The project website (ccharborbridgeproject.com) is active and being updated as new information becomes available. A project newsletter will be mailed quarterly and also will be available on line.

Ms. Gates then posed the following questions to the CAC:

- How can we do a better job of reaching out to the community?
- Where should we meet with people?
- Are there people that we should contact or events in which we should participate?

CAC members had various suggestions for reaching out to the community during the EIS process. These suggestions included conducting a door-to-door survey, distributing meeting minutes, making maps available at Miller High School, distributing information on the project as an insert to a utility bill, running public service announcements on radio or TV, and running information in the Thrifty Nickel or the Ad Sack. Other suggestions included using social media to reach the younger generation and creating a visualization to allow the public to visualize the proposed project conceptually. One individual suggested putting project maps at the Oveal Williams Center.



Followup to the CAC Meeting

Future CAC Meeting Times/Locations

Most CAC members seemed to think that meeting at the Oveal Williams Center was appropriate. Other possible meeting locations could be somewhere in Dona Park, St. Theresa's, or at another location where people might be most impacted by the project. John Casey indicated that the meeting could remain at Oveal Williams or could be rotated to various locations in the project area.

A CAC member noted that Wednesday evening is not a good time if clergy members are expected to attend. Monday evening is probably not a good night as well. The current meeting time, however, is fine with the CAC.

Other Requests

One CAC member requested that copies of letters and communication with the EJ community be sent to the entire CAC. Several other members asked that they receive regular updates on the progress of the project.

In response to a CAC member's request, TxDOT will send a link to the Feasibility Study on the Harbor Bridge website. If a member does not wish to or cannot access the website, TxDOT will send an electronic or hardcopy version of the study.

Public comments

No public comments were received.