



Citizens' Advisory Committee Meeting

Harbor Bridge Replacement Project US 181 at the Harbor Bridge Replacement Project Over the Corpus Christi Ship Channel

June 21, 2012 – 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Oveal Williams Activity Center, 1414 Martin Luther King Drive, Corpus Christi, TX

Meeting Summary

Display Items

1. Land Use Maps on an aerial photo background showing land use information and preliminary right of way lines for four reasonable alternatives.
2. The Project Location Map showing each of the four reasonable alternatives.

Welcome and introductions

Victor Vourcos, TxDOT project manager for the Harbor Bridge Project, opened the Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting and welcomed participants and asked each member to introduce themselves. He introduced the project team and then introduced the meeting facilitator, Susan Springer.

Ms. Springer reviewed the CAC mission (accepted by the CAC at the January 2012 meeting) and meeting ground rules. She reiterated that the meeting was intended to be a conversation rather than a presentation, and that TxDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) consider the CAC to be an important link with the community and conduit for information exchange. CAC members voiced no objections to the mission and ground rules of the committee. Susan then turned the meeting over to Mr. Vourcos, who began the technical presentation.

Review/group Discussion of Project Need and Purpose

Mr. Vourcos briefly reviewed the project background especially for new CAC members. He explained the project history and quick overview of the current status of the project.

Mr. Vourcos then explained to the group that the project Purpose and Need has been refined since the last meeting to reflect input from the public as well as FHWA and TxDOT. Mr. Vourcos explained that the project Purpose and Need explains why expenditure of funds is necessary and why impacts are acceptable based on the project's importance. The Purpose and Need is used to evaluate possible alternatives and ultimately make a selection of a preferred alternative.

The two needs for the project are:

- To maintain long-term operation of the Harbor Bridge
- To minimize safety risks caused by design deficiencies.

The first need is related to the fact that the Harbor Bridge is prone to corrosion (as a steel bridge over salt water) and is experiencing continued deterioration. The bridge is fracture critical, which means that the key structural elements supporting the bridge are not themselves supported by additional and redundant elements. Although this does not mean that the bridge is inherently unsafe, there is no second line of protection should one of these elements fail. Maintaining the Harbor Bridge over the next 30-45 years will require not only millions of dollars but also periods of time when the bridge would have to be closed to traffic.

The other need addresses the safety risks caused by design deficiencies on the bridge and its approaches. The current bridge does not meet current FHWA and TxDOT roadway and bridge design standards because of its lack of shoulders, steep grades on the bridge and sharp "s" curves on the north and south ends of the bridge, inadequate ramp lengths for acceleration/deceleration, all of which serve to reduce capacity and efficiency during a hurricane evacuation.

In addition to these project needs, Mr. Vourcos explained that there are three project objectives that will be used to evaluate project alternatives. These objectives have a lower level of importance during the evaluation process:

- Provide transportation infrastructure to expand economic opportunity
- Consider connection between the bridge/US 181 and local roadways
- Consider ability to meet future traffic demands on US 181.

CAC Member Comments and Questions:

- Question: Is this process always followed for projects or is this process only for Harbor Bridge?

Response: TxDOT must follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In this case, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared since the Harbor Bridge project is complex. There is much less documentation required for smaller projects.

- Question: What is the purpose?

Response: The purpose is how the project will resolve each of the two needs that were discussed above.

- Question: What happened to the bridge height need?

Response: It is now an objective (See the first bullet under the objectives above).

- Question: Why did the needs for the project change?

Response: TxDOT and FHWA wanted to focus on the two most critical needs.

The three objectives are also important but not the reason for the improvements.

- Comment: Billy Packer (contractor, Dona Park). I don't think they would have built the Water Park right there if the Green Alternative was a real choice. I don't think we want a bridge/highway that turns sharply. The West Alternative has a big swinging curve that was just pointed out as a safety issue. The Red Alternative is it and that's wonderful.

- Question: Can we still add an objective? I suggest that we add as an objective that the project be [as neighborhood friendly] as possible. Sensitivity to neighborhoods should be a priority; make quality a priority.

Response: Process is always subject to change and we will consider it.

Review/group discussion of project alternatives analysis

Mr. Vourcos next summarized the process of how TxDOT has analyzed the six possible alternatives for the bridge (in addition to the no-build alternative). As of the January, 2012 CAC meeting, six alternatives were being considered: the red, orange, green, blue, west, and tunnel. Two of these alternatives (west and tunnel) had been suggested during the public scoping process that took place last summer and fall.

During the alternatives screening process, TxDOT compared each of these alternatives to the two project needs, which resulted in two of the alternatives being dropped from further consideration. The Blue and Tunnel alternatives were both eliminated because they do not meet the safety need for the project. In both cases, they do not meet TxDOT's standard for appropriate hurricane evacuation routes for the Corpus Christi area. In the case of the Tunnel Alternative, redundant pumping systems would be needed in the event of flooding during a storm surge. The blue Alternative would result in another causeway that could become impassable in the event of a storm surge.

CAC members had the following questions/comments:

- Question: Is the Red Alternative already the chosen one?
Response: No, TxDOT is required to follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and evaluate all alternatives equally in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.
- Question: What is the "no-build" alternative?
Response: The "no-build" is the baseline against which all the build alternatives will be compared. It is the existing condition which does include maintenance but no improvements. It is also required by NEPA.
- Question: Does no-build alternative include addressing the "fracture critical" issue?
Response: No, it does not address those types of issues since that would require improvements beyond maintenance.
- Question: When will the draft EIS be completed?
Response: At this time, we anticipate that it will be completed in 2013

- Question: Was TC Ayers Park closed because of this project?
Response: No, the City's decision was based on funding of under-utilized parks. The Director of Parks and Recreation stated that it has been closed for about three years due to lack of use. The City Council will make the final determination on the parks selected for closing in August. TC Ayers Park could remain a recreational facility if the City can find someone to pay for maintenance and upkeep.
- Question: What opportunities are there for the public to comment?
Response: There will be a public comment period at the end of the CAC and TAC meetings, also during the public meetings as well as during the public hearing. Following the public meetings and the public hearing, written comments can be submitted as part of the project record.

Review/group discussion of Harbor Bridge Project status

Mr. Eddie Sutherland told the group that the scoping process for the Harbor Bridge project is now complete. The environmental analysis portion of the project is underway. Data is now being collected for potential impacts to land use, socioeconomics of the project area, neighborhoods, air quality, hazardous materials, historic resources, parks and recreational areas, and major existing or planned developments.

Review/group discussion of community impact analysis activities

Mr. Sutherland reviewed the community impact assessment that will be taking place beginning later this summer. This assessment looks at the effect of the proposed project on local communities and is part of the EIS analysis process. Planned activities for this assessment include an outreach plan for reaching as many community groups and individuals as possible, evaluation of census and other socioeconomic data, questionnaires, and small group "listening sessions" in various neighborhood locations.

Group discussion of public outreach activities

Ms. Nancy Gates reviewed public involvement activities taking place on the Harbor Bridge project and urged the CAC members to share information with the community

and encourage them to get involved in the project. The next public meeting is anticipated to be held in the late fall of 2012 or early winter of 2013. The Harbor Bridge website will be updated continuously and a newsletter will be coming out this summer. Any ideas about reaching out to the public are welcomed.

Discussion by CAC members of the best way to collect data from the neighborhoods (Bulleted items were questions/comments from the CAC members):

- Question: How will data be collected, especially for community impacts?
Response: During the development of the Community Impact Assessment that is part of EIS. Will include neighborhood outreach plan, census data, questionnaire.
- Question: How will this data collection be done? Door to door? A lot of people can't come out to meetings. The Local Emergency Planning Committee (City of Corpus Christi) held meetings and turnout was not what they wanted.
- Comment: Need to educate people about the project or they won't see how it affects them. Public Service Announcements on radio and TV.
- Comment: Consider allocation of resources relative to different areas [equity], some people are more vocal populations, others can end up being underrepresented.

Question for CAC members from the facilitator: What is the best way to reach people?

Responses:

Postings at laundry mats,
Meals on wheels packets,
Flyers at Food pantries,
Radio spots,
HEB bulletin boards,
RTA Buses,
Flyers in utility bills,
Penny Saver,

Thrifty Nickel,
Sr. Citizens Paper,
El Tejano,
Catholic Diocese Paper,
English and Spanish, billboards.

Public comments and questions:

- Comment: All this was discussed last time. Let's move forward. What have you been doing since January?
Response: TxDOT noted the revisions to Purpose and Need and confirmed the four reasonable alternatives and prepared an EJ work plan.
- Question: Can we review the EJ work plan?
Response: The EJ work plan is an internal document still under review by agencies.
- Comment: If people are walking out without [new] info they won't come back. Tell us what you're going to do, don't just hold meetings. We know we need a new bridge, but what are the effects?
- Question: What are the anticipated effects on the North Beach residents, what is the access going to be coming off the bridge?
Response: When the preliminary schematics are finished they will show access, traffic movements. That information will be available at the next meeting.
- Comment: Visualizations would be good. Now it's too abstract. Share more info on design process. Provide pros and cons of alternatives – bullets.
- Question: What is the schedule for design work on the build alternatives?
Response: TxDOT will have preliminary schematics by this fall. At next CAC meeting and the public meeting, the schematics for all four build alternatives will be laid out, showing the proposed right-of-way.
- Comment: Need to share costs as well. For example, the Blue Alternative would be very costly. Is one of the alternatives two or three times more expensive than any other alternative? The members are looking for a snapshot of the impacts.
Response: Reminder that the Blue Alternative has been eliminated.

- Comment: The bridge should be beautiful; need to consider tourist traffic during construction.
- Question: Why is West so close to refineries?
Response: The West Alternative was suggested by the public during the formal scoping process in 2011.
- Comment: Some members may be willing to meet more often if meetings could be shorter.
- Comment: From the Citizens for Environmental Justice perspective, all alternatives are equally negative and affect communities along refinery row. The people who already bear more of the environmental burden will be affected.

Meeting summary and plans for next meeting

The next CAC meeting will be held in the fall of 2012. CAC members requested additional information on the alternatives (along with ROW) and that information will be shared at this meeting.