



## **Technical Advisory Committee Meeting**

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

**October 18, 2012 – 2:30 – 4:30 pm  
Oveal Williams Activity Center, 1414 Martin Luther King Drive, Corpus Christi, TX**

#### **Meeting Summary**

##### **Display Items**

1. Preliminary design drawings (schematics) on an aerial photo background
2. Preliminary right-of-way lines for the four reasonable alternatives

##### **Welcome and introductions**

Victor Vourcos, TxDOT project manager for the Harbor Bridge Project, opened the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting, welcomed participants, and asked each member to introduce themselves. He introduced the project team and then introduced the meeting facilitator, Susan Springer. Fifteen TAC members signed in at the meeting and were introduced. There were two members of the public in attendance.

Ms. Springer reviewed the TAC meeting agenda and meeting ground rules. She explained the format of the meeting—group discussions of each of the four alternatives based on a review of the design drawings.

##### **Hands-on group review of preliminary schematics (design) for the four project alternatives**

TAC members were divided into four separate groups to review and discuss the four alternatives, one at a time. Two project team members sat at each table to facilitate and take notes on the table discussions. To initiate the table conversation, the table facilitator asked TAC members the following questions:

1. What effect (positive and/or negative) would this alternative have on your neighborhood:
  - a. How you get into and out of the neighborhood (going to schools, shopping, downtown Corpus Christi)?
  - b. The residences in the area?

- c. The local recreational facilities?
  - d. The churches in the area?
  - e. The schools in the area?
  - f. The environment in the area (e.g., air, water, green spaces)?
  - g. The overall character of the area?
2. Can you think of anything or anyone else that this alternative might affect?
  3. Are there any other issues associated with this alternative that TxDOT should consider?
  4. Based on what you're learned today, which alternative would you prefer and why?

## **Results of table discussions**

### ***Red Alternative:***

In general, the red alternative was viewed in a positive light. TAC members noted that this alternative would provide better access to the Ortiz Center and would offer new opportunities for economic development and different land uses in the entertainment district. Possible creation of a boulevard in this area would eliminate existing barriers to the American Bank Center, Whataburger Field, and other bayfront entertainment destinations. This alternative might enable the North Beach area to become a tax reinvestment zone.

In the opinion of TAC members, the red alternative would keep the Washington Coles neighborhood intact, would minimize the taking of private property, and might allow for buildings to be located beneath the elevated bridge structure. This alternative also would allow for the possibility of cruise ships calling on the Port of Corpus Christi. TAC members expressed the belief that this alternative would provide a better transition between a new bridge and the Crosstown Expressway.

TAC members also noted that this alternative would keep traffic away from the wastewater treatment plant and appears to be safer because it eliminates curves. They also noted that the red alternative would eliminate the need to close the aquarium parking lot.

Many of the negatives associated with this alternative have to do with the northern limit of the project (which actually applies to all four alternatives). TAC members stressed that TxDOT should not make the Beach St. exit an afterthought and indicated that there is a need to separate truck and tourist traffic in this location to avoid congestion. Several TAC members also indicated that this alternative would require drivers to have to travel farther to get to the entertainment district (when headed southbound over the bridge). One individual suggested that the red alternative would reduce tourists' ability to see the

bay from the bridge and others questioned why a new bridge structure would have to be so high.

Some TAC members questioned the noise and smell that would be associated with the red alternative, as well as the air quality effects. They also noted that they believed this alternative might divide neighborhoods.

Other issues that were discussed was how mitigation would be handled, the morning lineup of trucks coming from the Joe C. Fulton Trade Corridor onto US 181 N, and the new refinery tanks that are located near the red alternative. One TAC member raised the issue of how using property for non-monetized use would affect the area around the red alternative.

### ***Orange Alternative***

TAC members raised both positive and negative issues associated with the orange alternative, which generally was considered to be slightly less favorable than the red alternative.

Positive effects of the orange alternative included the fact that it would open the downtown with a boulevard and has the potential to provide a gateway to downtown Corpus Christi. It would provide good connectivity with other roads and would be consistent with the current location of the bridge. The orange alternative would provide a view of the aquarium from the bridge (important to tourism) and offer a connection to Bayview Cemetery as a tourist attraction, as well as to Artesian Park, according to TAC members.

TAC members noted that this alternative is beyond the acceptable separation distance from an explosive and flammable hazard as defined in the U.S. Housing and Urban Development guidebook. It would also leave Hillcrest intact, and would have fewer impacts on the Sports, Entertainment, and Arts District.

The negative effects, according to TAC members are the orange alternative's proximity to Whataburger Field, potential shading of the water park, and impacts on the Washington Coles neighborhood and EJ communities, including the continued separation of Washington Coles from downtown amenities. Some TAC members believe that this alternative would potentially displace more people, impact St Paul's United Methodist Church and TC Ayers pool, and create a barrier between Whataburger Field and the convention center. They noted that this alternative would create an incentive to people to leave Northside neighborhoods.

Other issues raised in association with this alternative are the height of the bridge (why so high?) and the absence of some access ramps because of the height of the structure. TAC members also noted that bays and estuaries might be affected by the orange alternative, along with the Resaca lift station (Broadway wastewater treatment plant).

### **Green Alternative**

In general, the green alternative was viewed in a more negative than positive light by TAC members.

The positive effects of the green alternative according to TAC members would be that this alternative would be less expensive, would require less construction, and would cause less displacement and disruption than the other alternatives. This might make it easier to sell to the community. It represents the status quo because it would have minimal impact on the Washington Coles neighborhood, would avoid churches and schools, and generally would have less impact on the local area (including residents and neighborhoods along the Crosstown Expressway).

However, TAC members noted that this alternative has numerous negative effects. These include the current lack of continuity with other roadways and reduced access to downtown Corpus Christi (especially from Portland), as well as continued isolation of the Northside neighborhoods. In general, TAC members expressed their opinion that this alternative would not address safety issues, would make it more difficult to get into the entertainment district, and would not allow the widening of the ship channel to allow larger ships to enter the Port of Corpus Christi.

TAC members also indicated that this alternative would have a negative effect on the business district in North Beach and more impacts on the local businesses than the red alternative.

### **West Alternative**

In general, TAC members considered the west alternative to have the most negative effects and to be the least desirable of the four alternatives.

The positive effects of this alternative would be that it would open up Port property and would have fewer impacts on residents. It would remove some barriers between neighborhoods and would open up the Northside neighborhood for development. It would provide cruise ship access to the Port of Corpus Christi, would form a buffer between the refineries and neighborhoods, and would help reestablish Hillcrest.

TAC members identified a number of negative effects including their belief that this alternative would make it more difficult to access downtown Corpus Christi or North Beach, would reduce the view of the bay from the bridge, and would have sharp curves moving north to south. They also indicated that they thought this alternative would be more costly, would impact wetlands in North Beach, and would present safety and security issues because of its proximity to the refineries.

TAC members noted that the west alternative could have a negative effect on tourism, generally is disconnected from the city, and could create construction issues over the disposal area. A number of TAC members indicated that the west was their least preferred alternative.

### **Update on neighborhood meetings taking place this fall**

Nancy Gates reviewed the neighborhood meetings currently taking place. The objective of these meetings, held throughout the project area, is to listen to community members, show design drawings and latest project information, and have people complete a community survey.

Seven of these meetings are planned and two have been completed:

- CC Beach Association: 9/20
- St. Paul's: 10/15
- Kelsey Memorial: 10/23
- Garcia Arts Center: 11/5
- Oak Park Elementary: 11/8
- Portland Community Center: 11/12
- Refinery Row: to be scheduled.

Meetings have been well publicized through direct mailers (postcards), posters and flyers displayed in various community buildings and meeting places, church bulletins, and posters on local buses. The pastor of St. Paul's church organized a group that distributed meeting flyers throughout the Northside community.

TAC members were encouraged to invite community members to participate in these meetings and were given posters to place in appropriate locations.

### **Community Survey**

The project team has developed a community survey designed to give local residents an opportunity for meaningful input on the Harbor Bridge project. The information gathered by the survey will be used in completing the community impact assessment for the Harbor Bridge Environmental Impact Statement.

The survey may be completed on paper or online at the project website ([ccharborbridgeproject.com](http://ccharborbridgeproject.com))

### **Public meeting planned for December 4, 2012**

A public meeting for the Harbor Bridge Project will be held on December 4, 2012 at a location to be determined. The Solomon Ortiz Center is a potential meeting location

because it was used previously for the public and agency scoping meetings. This meeting will be used to gather additional public input on the preliminary design drawings that were reviewed by the TAC and CAC.

**Meeting summary and plans for next meeting**

The next TAC meeting will be held in the first quarter of 2013.