



Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

US 181 Harbor Bridge Project

July 11, 2013 – 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm

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

Meeting Summary

Display Items

1. Dec 2012 preliminary designs for four proposed project alternatives
2. July 2013 revised preliminary designs for four proposed project alternatives

Welcome and introductions

Victor Vourcos and Chris Amy, TxDOT project managers for the Harbor Bridge Project, opened the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting, welcomed participants, and had everyone introduce themselves. Eighteen TAC members signed in (four substitution).

Mr. Vourcos and Mr. Amy gave an update on the Harbor Bridge Project. They explained that there have been changes in the preliminary designs for the four proposed build alternatives in response to input from the public. These changes include a smaller right-of-way footprint and improved access to areas of the city. They also gave an overview of changes in the project schedule, explaining that the pace of the project has been accelerated with expected completion of the environmental documentation this fall and a Public Hearing in early 2014. In addition, they noted some recent developments in funding for the project.

Table Group Discussion of Revised Preliminary Designs

Mr. Vourcos then introduced the meeting facilitator, Susan Howard. Ms. Howard reviewed the meeting agenda and reminded the TAC members of the general meeting guidelines. She described the meeting format: round table discussions with TAC members rotating from table to table (15-minute rotations) to review all four proposed alternatives and provide feedback on revised preliminary designs. TAC members were able to compare the preliminary designs for the four alternatives from the December 4, 2012 public meeting to the current designs, with additional information provided in a handout describing the changes in all the alternatives.

To begin the table discussion, a facilitator seated at each table asked TAC members the following questions:

1. What do you notice about the new design? What do you see?
2. What concerns or confuses you? What excites you?
3. What does this mean for you?
4. How do these design changes affect you/Corpus Christ?

Facilitators recorded the responses on easel pads at each table. Once the rotations were completed, Ms. Howard called upon each table facilitator to present the comments collected from his/her table. The comments on each proposed alternative are captured below.

TAC Member Comments – Red Alternative:

Benefits:

- Reduced impacts to cultural/historical resources
- Like connection to SH 286.
- Freeway/Blvd section to downtown
- People attending special events at Whataburger Field have various ways to leave facility.
- Access to south side of Port; entertainment district (e.g., restaurants)
- Connects downtown completely

Drawbacks:

- Leaving the Whataburger Field; potential congestion
- North-bound exit ramp at Beach Street- only way to get to tourist sites.
- No direct exit from Southbound US 181 to Laredo St.
- Added travel time from Portland to downtown Corpus Christi.
- Increased traffic on local streets - not enough capacity.
- Special events – create gridlock.
- North-bound truck traffic coming from port → No direct access to bridge
- Truck traffic from Port Ave. to north-bound I-37 → Need entrance ramp

Suggestions:

- Would like direct connectors back in from south-bound US 181 to east-bound I-37
- Would like the four direct connectors shown in 2012 layout restored
- Would like to see Staples St. as an at-grade intersection
- Need more direct access to bridge
- Between US 181 and Bay front would like no bridges and more of a city street design

TAC Member Comments – Orange Alternative:

Benefits:

- Aerial tram for people over Ship Channel
- Second favorite option
- Maintain a structure near the Bay front to promote tourism

Drawbacks:

- People are impatient.
- Limited access and flow into downtown
- Circulation in circle from Port to old Highway 181 to frontage road and through box interchange
- No direct connectors for Port traffic to north-bound US 181
- Reducing access to North Beach to one exit at Beach Ave.
- Alignment will form barrier between ball park and SEA district

Suggestions:

- Pedestrian tram across the Ship Channel
- There needs to be an access ramp from east-bound frontage road to I-37- east of US 181.
- There needs to be a cross streets under Highway 181 north of I-37 connecting Washington Coles and Hillcrest neighborhoods
- Braided ramps needed to/from I-37 west of Port Ave.

TAC Member Comments – West Alternative:

Benefits:

- Reduces downtown bridge and US 181 maintenance
- County prefers more access to downtown.
- Connectivity in downtown area
- Pulls entire Northside neighborhoods together, potential to renew activity.
- Direct connects to Portland from downtown Corpus Christi.

Drawbacks:

- Reduced access to North Beach development and tourist attractions
- North Beach single exit
- Ramp capacity major concern
- Downtown too far away from bridge
- Security is a concern through the port area and tank farm.
- Loss of bridge as downtown icon
- Access from local neighborhoods is limited.
- Accidents at tank farm will shut down freeway.
- Access to new bridge will be restricted- no photos.
- Encroaches into designated wetlands, Rincon Channel, flight paths.

- Dredge spoil placement – conflict with long-term placement
- Increased Eagle Ford Shale activity could conflict.
- New oil dock in Portland area conflicts with crossing.

Suggestions:

- Reported that Corpus Christi City Manager suggested pedestrian access across the Ship Channel

TAC Member Comments – Green Alternative:

Benefits:

- View from Whataburger Field
- Least expensive alternative
- Eliminates some old infrastructure; opens up for redevelopment
- Improved access to downtown at Staples
- Acquisition of Port building on north side (very important building to Port).
- Port connections/ramps satisfactory
- Morgan St. connection to downtown is straight; similar to existing.

Drawbacks:

- Green is a bad idea- doesn't provide continuity between SEA district and waterfront.
- Limits development
- Can't get on bridge from downtown to go to Staples- no exits to Whataburger Field- all have to go to Crosstown- prefer Red or Orange.
- Increased travel time to downtown Ortiz Center - opposite cruise terminal.
- Limits real estate development.
- Difficult access from San Patricio County
- Separates Washington Coles from downtown
- Portland access to downtown limits are shorter.
- Curve is an issue and with grade is complicated with weave to ramps.
- Not as good for community cohesion
- Redevelopment and cohesion is not as good. Limits pedestrian, cohesive walkable downtown. Roadway creates a physical barrier.
- Braided interchange to get trucks from Port to interstate without going through multiple intersections. Same concern for special event traffic to Whataburger Field, etc.
- Similar to existing/maintaining what we have
- Still have curve and grade problem.
- Other alternatives restore connectivity in downtown- does not allow for enough redevelopment.
- Leaving downtown doesn't have direct connection.
- Still hard to exit in Beach St. (for all alternatives)

- Leaving downtown/Shoreline going to North Beach very hard
- Decreasing connections between North Beach and downtown
- Neighborhood access limited to bridge
- Bus acquisitions in downtown
- Acquisition of Brewster St. venue, water park would also be impacted.

Suggestions:

- Needs access road over to SEA district.

Group discussion of public involvement activities

Ms. Howard then informed TAC members about other upcoming opportunities for public involvement. She mentioned the possibility of additional small neighborhood meetings like the ones held in fall of 2012 and asked for ideas to assist in planning those meetings. She prompted the group by asking for suggestions about possible meeting locations, existing meetings for presentations, locations for displays, etc.

Suggestions by TAC members:

- “City Hall in the Mall”
- Downtown Management District/Artwalk Board presentation
- Specific request made by Wes Pierson – To make more financial/funding information available to public.

Meeting summary and plans for next meeting

The next TAC meeting will be held sometime before the Public Hearing planned for early 2014.