



NEPA TECHNICAL WORK GROUP - MEETING #1

MOPAC SOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY
 CESAR CHAVEZ STREET TO SLAUGHTER LANE
 April 16, 2014, 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM
 Mobility Authority Board Room

MEETING SUMMARY

<u>Agency Representatives Present</u>	
Name	Organization
Brian Smith	Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Conservation District
Dan Dargevics	CAMPO
Todd Hemingson	Capital Metro
David Johns	City of Austin
Ed Peacock	City of Austin
Mike Personett	City of Austin
Robert Brennes	City of Austin – PARD
Willy Conrad	City of Austin – BCCP
Justin Ham	Federal Highway Administration
Jessica Schmerler	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Heather Ashley-Nguyen	TxDOT – Austin
Sandra Chipley	TxDOT – ENV
<u>Agencies/Organizations Invited but not Present</u>	
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—Regulatory Branch Fort Worth District	
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency—Region 6	
U.S. Department of the Interior—Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance	
U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service	
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality	
Texas Historical Commission	
Lower Colorado River Authority	
City of Rollingwood	
City of Sunset Valley	
City of Westlake Hills	
Travis County	
LBJ Wildflower Center	

<u>Project Sponsors and Staff in Attendance</u>	
Name	Organization
Sean Beal	Mobility Authority
Melissa Hurst	Mobility Authority
Loretta Schietinger	HNTB
Eric Holsten	HNTB
Summer Lawton	HNTB
Jimmy Robertson	Jacobs
Tricia Bruck	Jacobs
Stephanie Messerli	Jacobs
Pat Owens	Jacobs
Peter Sprouse	Zara Environmental, LLC
Joseph D. Skidmore	K Friese & Associates
Michael Barrett	University of Texas
John Kuhl	Hicks & Company

Attendees were greeted, asked to sign-in and provided the following handouts:

- Agenda with topics and statement of meeting purpose (including a list of invited agencies)
- Draft Purpose and Need
- Draft Goals and Objectives
- Draft Preliminary Alternatives
- Alternatives Screening Process
- Draft Criteria for Detailed Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives
- MoPac South Project Timeline
- Flyer for April 29th, 2014 MoPac South Open House at Barton Creek Mall

All handouts and sign-in sheets are attached to this summary.

Welcome and Introductions (*Sean Beal, Mobility Authority*)

Mr. Beal welcomed everyone to the National Environmental Policy Act Technical Work Group (NEPA-TWG) Meeting for the MoPac South Environmental Study on behalf of the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (Mobility Authority). Attendees introduced themselves.

Purpose of the NEPA TWG (*Jimmy Robertson, Jacobs*)

Mr. Robertson explained that the MoPac South NEPA-TWG provides a forum for the project team to engage resource and regulatory agencies in a collaborative, interactive and constructive manner.

Project Overview (*Jimmy Robertson, Jacobs*)

Mr. Robertson presented a project overview that included information about the Environmental Assessment (EA) under preparation for the proposed MoPac corridor improvements between Cesar Chavez Street and Slaughter Lane and the Categorical Exclusion (CE) for the intersections of MoPac with Slaughter Lane and La Crosse Avenue.

Mr. Robertson asked the group if they had any questions or comments. Below are the comments and questions from the agency representatives and the responses provided by the MoPac South Team:

- Will there be a meeting with the City of Austin focused on the CE of the MoPac intersections with Slaughter Lane and La Crosse Avenue? (*City of Austin*)
Response: *Yes, the Mobility Authority, TxDOT and the study team will reach out to the City of Austin to discuss the CE in detail in the future.*
- What is the determination of an EA versus an EIS? (*City of Austin*)
Response: *An Environmental Assessment determines if there are significant impacts and ends with either a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or the need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).*
- Does MoPac South assume SH 45 SW is built? (*City of Austin*)
Response: *The MoPac South project assumes all projects in CAMPO's 2035 Plan are built. SH 45 SW is included in the 2035 Plan.*

Draft Purpose, Need, Goals and Objectives (*Pat Owens, Jacobs*)

Mr. Owens described the Purpose and Need for improvements to the MoPac corridor from Cesar Chavez Street to Slaughter Lane (see attached handouts). Comments/Questions/Responses:

- Is there a future Level of Service standard you are trying to meet? (*City of Austin - BCCP*)
Response: *No. The traditional standard of aiming for Level of Service D (for example) in the design year would not be appropriate for this project given the corridor's right-of-way constraints and environmental sensitivities. That's why the Purpose and Need focuses on reliable travel times, operational efficiency and transit dependability.*
- There is a concern that any alternative may not be able to improve reliability. Should the word "opportunity" be added, as in "Provide an opportunity for reliable travel times?" (*Capital Metro*)
Response: *Adding opportunity to the Purpose will be considered.*
- Somewhere we need to include "manage demand." (*Capital Metro*)
Response: *Transportation Systems Management (TSM)/Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies are being considered. TSM is a collection of low-cost strategies that enhance safety, reduce congestion and improve traffic flow. TDM manages or decreases the demand for auto-related travel through measures that increase the efficiency of transportation systems.*
- Is TSM/TDM a stand-alone alternative? (*City of Austin*)
Response: *It is included among the preliminary alternatives as a stand-alone alternative. Strategies from this alternative could also be used to complement the other alternatives.*
- TSM/TDM should be a goal. (*Capital Metro*)
Response: *One of the draft goals – "facilitate congestion management" – represents including TSM/TDM strategies throughout the project where reasonable and feasible. An example of this would be including opportunities for transit and ridesharing as well as opportunities for pedestrians and bicyclists throughout the corridor.*
- Can we improve conditions over what they are today, such as water quality? (*City of Austin*)
Response: *The Mobility Authority is committed to environmentally sensitive and sustainable transportation improvements and to meeting (and if possible, exceeding)*

regulatory requirements. At a minimum, the MoPac South project will comply with TCEQ's Edwards Aquifer Rules. In addition, pervious friction course (PFC) pavement is under consideration but no decision has been made yet.

- Existing Hazardous Material Traps (HMTs) are outdated and do not currently function. *(City of Austin)*

Response: *Any HMTs that would be displaced by the proposed improvements would be replaced with designs and approaches that reflect the current state of the practice.*

Draft Preliminary Alternatives *(Pat Owens, Jacobs)*

Mr. Owens described the Preliminary Alternatives. They include adding one or more general purpose lanes, high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, transit only lanes, express lanes, transportation system management (TSM)/transportation demand management (TDM), and a no build option. More information can be found in the attached handouts. Comments/Questions/Responses:

- How many lanes will there be at the bridge crossing over Lady Bird Lake and Barton Creek? *(City of Austin)*

Response: *These bridges would need to be widened to accommodate adding one or more lane(s) in each direction. It's too early in the study to know how many lanes are needed or what bridge improvements may be required, but any improvements would stay within existing right-of-way.*

Draft Evaluation Criteria *(Pat Owens, Jacobs)*

Mr. Owens described the alternatives screening process and draft evaluation criteria. More information can be found in the attached handouts. Comments/Questions/Responses:

- Can you elaborate on an unnecessary versus necessary impact to the natural environment? *(City of Austin)*

Response: *An example of an unnecessary impact would be taking park land if there was a feasible and prudent alternative that avoided the take. An example of a necessary impact might be the removal of vegetation within the existing right-of-way.*

- There is concern regarding the lack of specific standards. *(City of Austin-BCCP)*

Response: *The first stage of alternatives analysis is somewhat qualitative and advances alternatives based on their ability to meet the project's Purpose and Need. As alternatives advance further, more quantitative analysis is conducted and specific performance measures or standards required by regulation (e.g., Edwards Aquifer Rules for TSS removal) are addressed.*

- What is TxDOT required to do in regards to water quality? *(FHWA)*

Response: *The project must meet the TCEQ's Edwards Aquifer Rules.*

- There is a desire to see environmental concerns and water quality as a priority for the project. *(City of Austin)*

Response: *TxDOT and the Mobility Authority agree that addressing environmental concerns and water quality is a priority for the project.*

- Four major projects are occurring over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone: Oak Hill Parkway, SH 45SW, MoPac South, and MoPac Intersections. There is an opportunity to offset impacts on one project with another. *(City of Austin)*
Response: *TxDOT and the Mobility Authority are collaborating closely on these projects and striving for consistency in how potential impacts to the aquifer are addressed.*
- Is there an opportunity to unplug the karst feature near Dick Nichols Park? Are federal funds available for mitigation outside the MoPac South right-of-way? *(City of Austin)*
Response: *Possibly. Project impacts have not yet been identified and mitigation measures, if needed, have not yet been determined.*
- In regards to evaluation criteria is air quality included? *(Capital Metro)*
Response: *Yes, the reasonable alternatives will be evaluated for air quality impacts (MSAT and CO analysis) in the EA.*
- Can transit accommodation be quantifiably evaluated by using the CAMPO travel demand model? *(Capital Metro)*
Response: *Yes.*
- Will there be a matrix next time we meet? *(Capital Metro)*
Response: *Yes, the evaluation of preliminary alternatives will be reviewed at TWG Meeting #2.*
- What are some innovative ideas that have been used in other parts of the county or world? *(City of Austin)*
Response: *The Mobility Authority engages with a variety of local, state, national and international organizations and is open to innovation and the pursuit of best practices. The proposed solution for improvements to MoPac South at Slaughter Lane for example includes an innovative intersection design known as a diverging diamond interchange or DDI.*

Proposed Project Schedule *(Tricia Bruck, Jacobs)*

Ms. Bruck described the proposed schedule. The project began in April 2013, the Draft EA is planned for public circulation along with a public hearing in Fall 2015, and an environmental decision is anticipated in Spring 2016. More information is available in the attached handouts.

Public and Agency Involvement *(Tricia Bruck, Jacobs)*

Ms. Bruck described the two open houses planned for this year and invited everyone to the April 29, 2014 Open House at Barton Creek Mall. TWG meetings will generally occur prior to the open houses and the public hearing. Coordination points include development of the Purpose and Need for the project; screening and development of alternatives; collaboration on methodologies to define impacts; identification of the preferred alternative; and completion of the EA. The next TWG meeting will likely occur this summer to discuss the screening, evaluation and development of alternatives.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Members were encouraged to attend the April 29th open house; the next TWG will occur this summer.

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MOPAC SOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY

Meeting Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:30 p.m.

National Environmental Policy Act Technical Work Group (NEPA TWG)

Meeting #1

Wednesday, April 16, 2014

2:00 – 4:00 PM, Mobility Authority Board Room

Agenda Topics

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Purpose of the NEPA TWG
3. Project Overview
4. Draft Purpose, Need, Goals and Objectives
5. Draft Preliminary Alternatives
6. Draft Evaluation Criteria
7. Proposed Project Schedule
8. Public and Agency Involvement
9. Questions, Answers and Discussion
10. Wrap up and Next Steps

NEPA TWG Purpose

The MoPac South NEPA TWG provides a forum for the project team to engage resource and regulatory agencies in a collaborative, interactive and constructive manner. Coordination points include development of the purpose and need for the project; screening and development of alternatives; collaboration on methodologies to define impacts; identification of the preferred alternative; and completion of the Environmental Assessment.

NEPA TWG Invited Participants

- City of Austin
- City of Rollingwood
- City of Sunset Valley
- City of Westlake Hills
- Capital Metro
- CAMPO
- Travis County
- Lower Colorado River Authority
- Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- TCEQ
- Texas Historical Commission
- Federal Highway Administration
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Department of the Interior
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Department of Agriculture

NEPA TECHNICAL WORK GROUP

Meeting #1, April 16, 2014



Draft Purpose & Need

Purpose	Need	Data Supporting the Need	Data Sources
1) Provide reliable travel times	A) Current congestion levels are creating unreliable travel times	2013 peak hour travel times	October 2013 traffic counts
	B) Forecasted population, traffic and employment growth resulting in congestion and delay	Historic and projected population, household and employment (tables, maps)	U.S. Census Bureau and CAMPO 2035 Forecast
		2035 projected peak hour travel times	CAMPO travel demand model
2) Improve operational efficiency	C) Existing facilities do not meet current traffic demand	2013 peak hour travel time increases caused by congestion	October 2013 traffic counts
	D) Forecasted population, traffic and employment growth resulting in congestion and delay	2035 projected peak hour travel time increases caused by congestion	CAMPO travel demand model
3) Create a dependable and consistent route for transit	See A, B, C, and D above	Current peak hour ridership and transit travel times	Capital Metro
		2035 projected peak hour ridership and travel times	CAMPO travel demand model
4) Facilitate reliable emergency response	See A, B, C, and D above	Emergency facilities along MoPac South corridor	CAMPO
		Current peak hour emergency vehicle travel times	October 2013 traffic counts
		2035 projected peak hour emergency vehicle travel times	CAMPO travel demand model
		Personal communications from emergency responders	APD, AFD, EMS

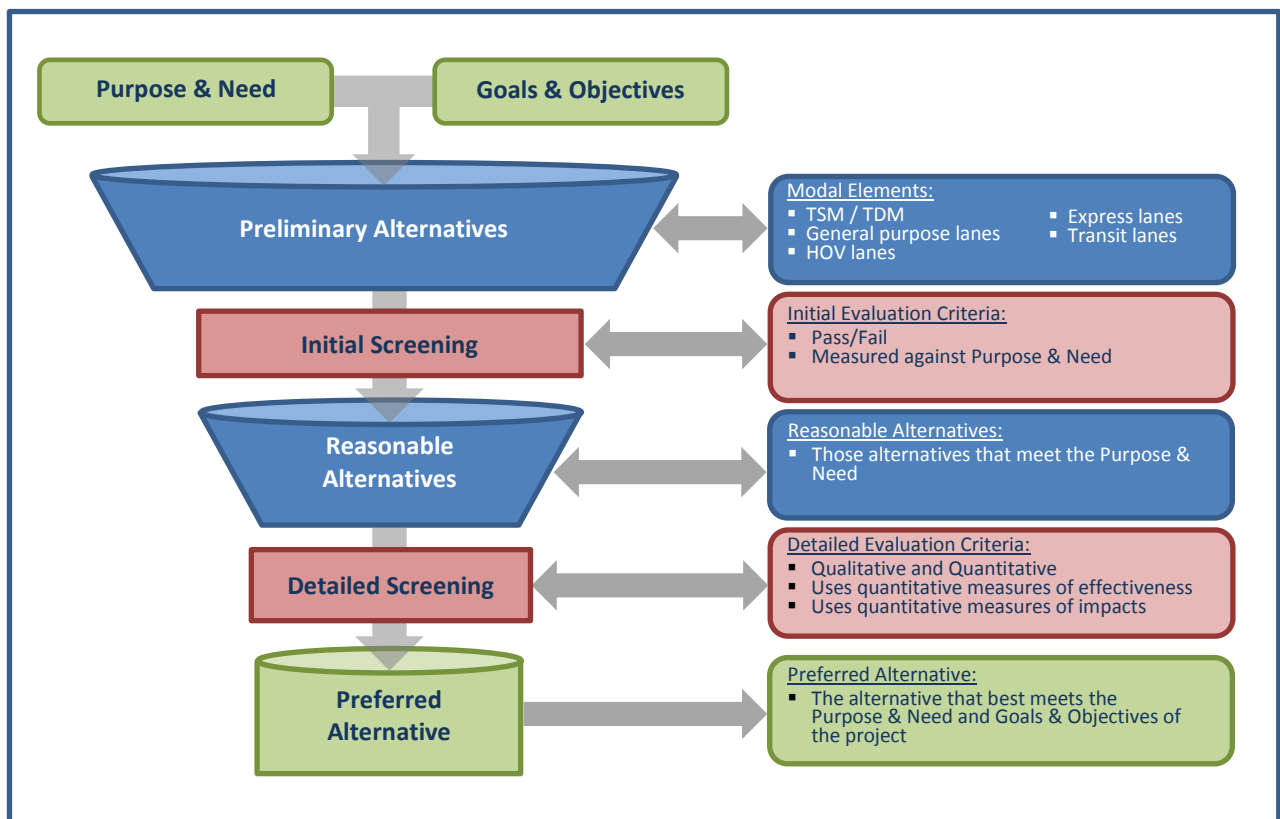
Draft Goals and Objectives

- Avoid and minimize impacts to water quality
- Deliver relief in a timely manner
- Facilitate congestion management
 - Increase opportunities for transit and ridesharing
 - Increase opportunities for pedestrians and bicyclists

Draft Preliminary Alternatives

- In each direction, add one or more:
 - General Purpose Lane(s)
 - HOV Lane(s)
 - Transit Only Lane(s)
 - Express Lane(s)
- Transportation Systems/Demand Management (TSM/TDM)
- No Build

Alternatives Screening Process



Draft Criteria for Detailed Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives

- Provide consistency with local/regional transportation and land use plans
- Provide reliable travel times
- Improve operational efficiency
- Reduce congestion delay
- Provide annual user cost savings
- Provide transit accommodation
- Provide bicycle accommodation
- Provide pedestrian accommodation
- Be reasonably constructed
- Avoid unnecessary impacts to the natural environment
- Avoid unnecessary impacts to the human environment