NEPA Technical Work Group - Meeting #3

MoPac South Environmental Study
Cesar Chavez Street To Slaughter Lane
October 16, 2015, 1:30 PM – 4:00 PM
Mobility Authority Board Room

DRAFT Meeting Summary

Agency Representatives Present	
Name	**Organization**
Ashby Johnson	CAMPO
Dan Dargevics	CAMPO
Todd Hemingson	Capital Metro
Anna Martin	City of Austin
Ed Peacock	City of Austin
Gordon Derr	City of Austin
Kim McKnight	City of Austin
Marsha Schulz	City of Austin
Marty Stump	City of Austin
Mike Personett	City of Austin
Will Burdrick	City of Austin
Amy Patillo	City of Rollingwood
Robert Wood	City of West Lake Hills
Jessica Schmerler	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Charlie Watts	Travis County
David Greear	Travis County
Jon White	Travis County
Morgon Cotton	Travis County
Jon Geiselbrecht	TxDOT – Austin District
Rose Marie Klee	TxDOT – Austin District
Dan Keesee	U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation
Agencies/Organizations Invited but not Present	
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. Army Corps of Engineers	
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	
U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration	
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality	
Texas Historical Commission	
Lower Colorado River Authority	
Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Conservation District	

City of Sunset Valley	
Project Sponsors and Staff in Attendance	
Name	**Organization**
Michael Penic	CDM-Smith
Abby Tomlinson	HNTB
Eric Holsten	HNTB
Loretta Schietinger	HNTB
Mike Hutchinson	HNTB
Summer Lawton	HNTB
William Smithson	HNTB
James Kratz	Jacobs
Jesus Martinez	Jacobs
Jimmy Robertson	Jacobs
Stephanie Messerli	Jacobs
Tricia Bruck	Jacobs
Sean Beal	Mobility Authority
Jessica Engelhardt	Rifeline
Lynda Rife	Rifeline
Melissa Hurst	Rifeline
Mason Gemar	University of Texas – Center for Transportation Research

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

- Agenda
- Overview of Dynamic Traffic Assignment Study Results
- 2035 Travel Times on General Purpose Lanes and Express Lanes
- Section 4(f)/Section 6(f) and Chapter 26 Memorandum on Proposed Operational Configurations
- Virtual Open House flyer
- A summary of each operational configuration

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

Welcome *(Sean Beal, P.E., 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.

Operational configurations work stations *(Lynda Rife, Rifeline)*

Ms. Rife explained that the six operational configurations have been broken into four work stations focused on the northern portion of the project limits from Cesar Chavez Street to Loop 360. Below is a summary of the highlights from each work station:

- **Station 1** - One Express Lane in each direction, with and without a downtown direct connection
    - TWG members liked the collector-distributor system at Loop 360

    - Concerns about additional columns in Lady Bird Lake, northbound entrance ramp at Bee Cave Road, noise impacts associated with Loop 360 fly-over, merging two lanes down to one lane near Loop 360, additional shade over Barton Creek, and height of direct connection into downtown over Lady Bird Lake
- **Station 2** - Two Express Lanes in each direction, with and without a downtown direct connection
    - TWG members liked improvement of ramps, connection to downtown, improvements to safety and capacity, direct connection is good for transit
    - Concerns about traffic on Cesar Chavez Street, noise associated with direct connection to downtown, elevated lanes over Lady Bird Lake, northbound entrance ramp at Bee Cave Road, right-of-way needs at Lamar Beach, stormwater treatment near parkland and construction impacts over lady Bird Lake
    - Safety/driver expectation concerns with left-hand entrance to general purpose lanes near Loop 360
    - Direct connection into downtown is better for transit, without a direct connection there are negative operational impacts
    - Request for a northbound-to-southbound Texas turn-around at Barton Skyway (all configurations include a southbound-to-northbound Texas turn-around at Barton Skyway)
    - A question was raised about how Barton Springs Road will be impacted
- **Station 3** - Two Express Lanes in each direction, with elevated ramps near Bee Cave Road and Barton Skyway
    - TWG members liked that this configuration did not require right-of-way in Zilker Park and that there is no additional elevation over Lady Bird Lake
    - Concern that traffic volume and weaving from the additional northbound ramp from the Express Lanes may cause negative impacts on the general purpose lanes, consider braided ramps near Bee Cave Road and Barton Skyway.
    - Concerns about elevated lanes near Barton Skyway and additional columns within Lady Bird Lake
    - Safety/driver expectation concerns with left-hand entrance to general purpose lanes near Loop 360
- **Station 4** - City of Austin Proposal
    - TWG members liked the collector-distributor system, Texas turnaround at Barton Skyway and that there was no additional elevation over Lady Bird Lake
    - Right-of-way needs including Section 4(f) will be evaluated for all operational configurations, none of the operational configurations require right-of-way in the greenbelt
    - Northbound collector-distributor system will tie into the existing exit ramp to Cesar Chavez Street at the same elevation as the existing exit ramp
    - Safety/driver expectation concerns with left-hand entrance to general purpose lanes near Loop 360
    - Request to provide renderings for both views (east and west) of Lady Bird Lake

The work stations operated in a round robin fashion. Each group spent about 10 minutes reviewing the design, key characteristics, right-of-way needs and construction cost estimates for each operational configuration with a member of the Study Team. A facilitator/scribe was also available to capture comments and questions. Once everyone had the opportunity to review/discuss each of the configurations, the TWG reconvened as one large group and the Study Team member at each work station made a brief report to the whole group on the highlights of their group's discussion.

Review configurations from Loop 360 to Slaughter Lane *(Stephanie Messerli, P.E., AICP, Jacobs)*
Ms. Messerli provided an overview of all configurations from Loop 360 to Slaughter Lane.

Comments/Questions/Responses:

- There are concerns about construction activities in the greenbelt related to impacts on endangered species habitat. (*Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*)
  Response: *Initially we considered widening the existing bridges over Barton Creek, but that would have required new columns to be placed in Barton Creek. All operational configurations under consideration feature travel lanes on new bridges over Barton Creek within the existing MoPac right-of-way. These new bridges would span the creek and columns would be placed outside the water channel.*

- Is it less disruptive to build a new structure than widening an existing structure? *(Travis County)*
  Response: *Constructing new bridges would have less impact on traffic flow than widening the existing bridges.*

- *What is the construction schedule? (City of Austin)*
  Response: *All configurations would require lengthy construction timeframes, especially at US 290 and over Barton Creek.*

- What is the project delivery method? (*City of Austin*)
  Response: *The Mobility Authority is considering a design-bid-build delivery approach to allow for more prescriptive measures over sensitive areas of the corridor such as Barton Creek.*

Review traffic data *(Mason Gemar, University of Texas Center for Transportation Research; Will Smithson, HNTB; James Kratz, P.E., Jacobs; Michael Penic, P.E. CDM-Smith)*

Ms. Rife provided an introduction to the dynamic traffic assignment study. The Mobility Authority worked with the University of Texas Center for Transportation Research (CTR) to provide data that would help define how the addition of Express Lanes on MoPac South could impact travel times on the downtown street network. CTR conducted an independent analysis of these impacts through a local dynamic traffic assignment, or DTA, study. A video was shown that describes the results of this study featuring Jennifer Duthie, Ph.D., Director of the Network Modeling Center at CTR. This video is available at www.MoPacSouth.com.

Will Smithson described the corridor level traffic studies conducted to evaluate each of the operational configurations.

James Kratz addressed traffic operations along Cesar Chavez, 5th Street and 6th Street from MoPac South to Lamar Blvd. under various operational configurations as well as the existing and future no-build scenarios. He showed a video animation of the VISSIM modeling results.

Each analyst providing highlights from the traffic modeling effort:

- All configurations provide better traffic operations than doing nothing.
- There is a significant advantage in separating the through traffic movements in the Express Lanes from the merge/weaving movements in the general purpose lanes.
- The configurations featuring a direct connection to downtown operate better than those without a direct connection.
- The configurations that feature two Express Lanes in each direction perform better than those with one Express Lane in each direction.

Comments/Questions/Responses:

- All the configurations improve travel times on the general purpose lanes compared to the No Build. (Travis County)

- What is the difference in travel time savings for an Express Lane user in the configurations featuring a downtown direct connection verses the wishbone? (City of Austin)

  Response: *The configuration with two express lanes and a direct connection performs slightly better than the wishbone; due to rounding they are both shown as nine minutes from Slaughter Lane to Cesar Chavez.*

- Are the travel times averaged? (Travis County)

  Response: *Average peak travel times and speeds were used.*

- Will this project encourage more people to travel downtown during the peak hour where currently they may choose to travel downtown at off-peak times? (City of Austin)

  Response: *It's possible. The regional model does account for changes in travel patterns and projected growth, it does not account for telecommuting. The Express Lanes provide reliable travel times for all roadway users including transit.*

- Is there an estimated toll rate on the Express Lanes? (Travis County)

  Response: *Toll rates have not yet been established. The configurations that feature two Express Lanes in each direction would have a lower toll rate than those that feature one Express Lane in each direction.*

- Did you calculate total Vehicles Miles Traveled (VMT) for each configuration? (CapMetro)

  Response: *Total VMT remains the same in the model for all configurations with some slight variations for routing.*

- Did you look at emissions? (City of Austin)

  Response: *This modeling effort did not include an emissions analysis, however all configurations reduce congestion compared to the No Build Alternative; therefore a reduction in emission would be expected. CAMPO agreed to look into emissions associated with the MoPac South project.*

Environmental Assessment update *(Jimmy Robertson, AICP, Jacobs)*

Mr. Robertson provided an update on some of the environmental studies currently underway:

- Threatened and Endangered Species – Presence/absence surveys have been conducted for birds, karst invertebrates, salamanders, and mussels. No listed threatened, endangered or candidate species were encountered during these surveys. We are currently preparing a Biological Evaluation and plan to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Water Quality – We have been reviewing water quality controls such as permeable friction course, water quality ponds, vegetative controls and hazardous materials traps. All operational configurations would be able to meet the requirements within the Edwards Aquifer Rules for removal of Total Suspended Solids.
- Barton Creek – All operational configurations feature travel lanes on new bridges over Barton Creek within the existing right-of-way that would span the creek. The Study Team has been working with the MoPac Bicycle and Pedestrian Bridge Project Team to implement lessons learned from that project. If the project is approved for construction, a geotechnical investigation would be conducted prior to construction to determine subsurface soil and rock conditions, determine if there are any karst features in the footprint of the proposed bridge foundations, and provide foundation recommendations for the bridge supports.
- Capitol View Corridors – None of the operational configurations under consideration would impinge on protected capitol view corridors.

Comments/Questions/Responses:

- What is being done at Gaines Sink? (*City of Austin*)

  Response: *TxDOT has decided not to disturb Gaines Sink for the following reasons:*
  - *The sink is already surrounded by roadways and development.*
  - *Previous geotechnical investigations and construction of existing structures in the US 290/MoPac South area have not shown any subsurface voids.*
  - *The proposed bridge would span this feature and continue the same level of protection as exists today.*

- Are there opportunities to treat stormwater coming from existing pavement? Will the agreements for SH 45SW be implemented on MoPac South? (*City of Austin*)

  Response: *We are at a preliminary stage in the design process; detailed plans for stormwater management have not been developed at this point. Stormwater treatment*

will focus on new pavement, but given the extent of the proposed improvements BMPs will likely treat the runoff coming from existing pavement as well. Water quality controls being developed through collaboration between the Mobility Authority and City of Austin for SH 45SW will be considered for MoPac South as practicable during the final design phase.

- Are there any special considerations for the Butler Landfill? (*City of Austin*)
  Response: *None at this point in the process.*

- Will the Environmental Assessment address direct and indirect impacts to parks? (*City of Austin*)
  Response: *Yes, both direct and indirect effects will be considered. A traffic noise analysis will be conducted on the entire project including adjacent parkland and the results will be documented in the Environmental Assessment.*

- Does the traffic noise analysis account for PFC? (*Travis County*)
  Response: *No, the noise model does not provide credit for PFC.*

- Will the Environmental Assessment address impacts to groundwater?
  Response: *Yes.*

- Suggestion to mitigate for dead zones under bridges. (*City of Austin*)

- Define how the discovery of voids will be handled before construction begins. (*City of Austin*)
  Response: *Void mitigation protocols will be developed for this project later in the process. Protocols being developed through the collaboration between the Mobility Authority and City of Austin for SH 45SW will be considered for MoPac South as practicable during the final design phase.*

Upcoming events and meetings *(Lynda Rife, Rifeline)*

Ms. Rife briefed TWG members on the following events:

- Virtual Open House available on the project website (www.Mopacsouth.com) beginning October 21, 2015
- Open House on November 10, 2015 at Palmer Events Center from 3-7 p.m.
- Stakeholder workshops scheduled with the city of Rollingwood, Austin ISD, Sierra Club and Parks community
- Deadline for official comments related to the Open House is November 20, 2015

Meeting Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:00 p.m.