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TxDOT Requests Public Input on Proposed Options for Upgrades to US 77

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) invites the public to attend one or more of five opportunities to comment and provide input on proposed upgrades of US 77 to a controlled access facility that meets interstate standards. The purpose of the meetings is to review proposed options for upgrading US 77 and to present recommendations. The first round public meetings were held in early March. This second round of public meetings is being held as part of TxDOT's continued effort to gain public input on issues related to proposed improvements and to provide an opportunity for public comment. Meetings will be held on:

- Sept. 2nd in Riviera at Riviera ISD Cafeteria – 203 Seahawk Drive;
- Sept. 3rd in Raymondville at L.E. Franks Tourist Center – 501 S. 7th Street;
- Sept. 8th in Driscoll at Driscoll ISD Cafeteria – 410 W. Avenue D;
- Sept. 9th in Sarita at Sarita Elementary School Cafeteria – 300 E. La Parra Avenue; and
- Sept. 10th in Ricardo at Ricardo ISD Cafeteria – 138 W. County Road 2160.

Each of the five meetings will follow the same format. There will be an Open House from 4:30 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. for viewing the exhibits. A formal presentation will begin at 5:30 p.m. Project personnel will be available during the Open House and following the presentation to answer questions on the project, including questions regarding the right of way acquisition process and relocation assistance. All interested persons are encouraged to attend and comment on the proposed improvement options.

The project area extends from the interchange of US 77 and Interstate Highway (IH) 37 in Corpus Christi to the interchange of US 77 and US 83 in Harlingen, with proposed improvements between Robstown and Combes. The project area is approximately 127 miles long, crossing through 12 communities and urbanized areas, including Corpus Christi, Robstown, Driscoll, Bishop, Kingsville, Ricardo, Riviera, Sarita, Raymondville, Lyford, Sebastian, and Harlingen. Parts of the project area have recently been improved to interstate standards, such as from IH 37 to State Highway (SH) 44 near Robstown and from Harlingen to Combes. Thus, the proposed construction area is approximately 109.5 miles long within or near US 77 in Nueces, Kleberg, Kenedy, and Willacy Counties.

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Based on public input from the first round of public meetings, TxDOT is considering possible locations for new overpasses, interchanges, and frontage roads. At Driscoll and Riviera, relief routes are being considered. The relief route options include east, west, and through these communities. These possible relief routes would likely be tolled and would require additional right of way. A limited amount of right of way may also be required in certain other areas.

Although funding is not currently available to construct the proposed improvements, TxDOT is evaluating the proposed project because of the need to improve mobility and safety for traffic traveling on US 77 and for communities along this highway. A potential funding source for the upgrade of US 77 could come from TxDOT's agreement with Zachry American and ACS Infrastructure to develop the Texas portion of the future I-69. The Zachry/ACS team will begin work on a master development plan and master financing plan for I-69/TTC. The developer and TxDOT will focus on using existing highway facilities, such as the southern portion of US 77, wherever possible for planning the I-69 corridor. TxDOT and Zachry/ACS will also develop a specific plan to upgrade US 77 from Brownsville to Corpus Christi to interstate standards, possibly making US 77 an eventual part of I-69/TTC. The proposed Zachry/ACS master plan would provide for the upgrade of US 77 without tolling that portion of the road, except at the possible relief routes. TxDOT is responsible for completing the environmental assessment, which is the focus of this project.

The Corpus Christi and Pharr TxDOT Districts have been upgrading portions of US 77 to interstate standards for a number of years as funds became available. In those areas where the facility has not been upgraded to freeway standards, there are no overpasses separating high-speed through traffic from local traffic at intersections.

The lack of overpasses for local traffic crossing the highway and the lack of ramps and frontage roads for traffic entering or leaving US 77 increase the risk of serious accidents and compromise traffic flow on this route. TxDOT will continue working with communities and landowners along US 77 to determine the best possible locations for overpasses, frontage roads, and entrance and exit ramps. The public will have the opportunity to comment on the proposed locations at the upcoming public meetings.

As traffic increases, the need to separate high-speed through traffic from traffic crossing, entering, or exiting the highway becomes increasingly important to ensure traffic flow and safety. A recent study indicates that traffic within the project area is expected to grow by approximately 75 percent between 2004 and 2024. Population growth and trade are two factors associated with this projected traffic growth.

According to the Texas Water Development Board, population in the Coastal Bend area is expected to grow by 28 percent by the year 2020 and by 58 percent by the year 2050. Population in the Rio Grande Valley is expected to grow by 60 percent by the year 2020 and by 170 percent by the year 2050. At the present time, the Rio Grande Valley contains the largest population in the United States that is not served by an interstate highway.

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In terms of trade, the Ports of Brownsville and Corpus Christi have announced plans to increase their capacity, and there are planned infrastructure improvements in Mexico that will result in increased trade-related truck traffic on US 77. Truck traffic already represents 20 to 25 percent of the traffic on US 77 within the proposed project area.

All interested persons are invited to attend one or more of these public meetings to view the exhibits and offer comments to the project team and TxDOT. Spanish-speaking staff will be available during the Open House. Persons requesting simultaneous Spanish translation during the presentation or other special communication or accommodation needs are encouraged to contact 1-800-490-9933 or 361-884-2626 by Aug. 25, 2008. TxDOT will make every reasonable effort to accommodate these needs. Please submit your written comments by Sept. 25, 2008, to US 77 Highway Upgrade, P.O. Box 3706, Corpus Christi, TX 78463-3706.

Additional information on the project is available on the websites of the Corpus Christi, Brownsville, and Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs): www.corpuschristi-mpo.org, <http://planning.cob.us/mpo/index.asp>, and www.myharlingen.us/new_mpo.htm.

Información en español

El Departamento de Transporte de Texas (TxDOT) invita al público a asistir a la segunda serie de reuniones públicas sobre la propuesta de convertir la autopista 77 (US 77) a una instalación de acceso controlado que satisface los estándares interestatales. El área del proyecto se extiende desde la intersección de US 77 y la autopista interestatal 37 (IH 37) en Corpus Christi hasta la intersección de US 77 y US 83 en Harlingen, con mejoramientos propuestos entre Robstown y Combes. TxDOT está considerando posibles localizaciones para los nuevos pasos elevados, intercambios, y carreteras de acceso. En Driscoll y Riviera, se están considerando autopistas de descongestión. Las opciones para las autopistas de descongestión incluyen el este, oeste, y a través de estas comunidades. Estas posibles autopistas de descongestión probablemente serían autopistas de cuota y requerirían más derecho de paso. Una cantidad limitada de derecho de paso también podría ser requerida en ciertas otras áreas. El propósito del proyecto propuesto es mejorar la movilidad y la seguridad de tráfico viajando en US 77 y para las comunidades a lo largo de esta autopista.

Personal que habla español estará disponible durante la Exhibición Abierta. Personas que requieren traducción simultánea de inglés al español durante la presentación u otros servicios especiales de comunicación o servicios auxiliares, pueden comunicarse al 1-800-490-9933 o 361-884-2626 antes del 25 de agosto de 2008. TxDOT hará un esfuerzo razonable para acomodar estos servicios. Comentarios por escrito referente a las mejoras propuestas deberían ser dirigidos a US 77 Highway Upgrade, P.O. Box 3706, Corpus Christi, TX 78463-3706. La fecha plazo para recibir comentarios es el 25 de septiembre de 2008.