

## **Long-Range Transportation Improvement Plan Public Input Report from Precinct-based Open Houses**

Four precinct-based open houses were held to discuss the Williamson County Long-Range Transportation Plan and gather public input. Attendees were able to view exhibits, which displayed population and employment statistics, transit routes and proposed mixed-use developments. Additionally, projected levels of service for proposed roads in the year 2035 were illustrated using two scenarios – the proposed projects being built compared with the projects not being built. Participants were also provided with handouts, including Frequently Asked Questions, a list of proposed transportation projects by precinct and a map displaying current road-bond projects that have either been completed or are in the design or construction phase.

### **Meeting Notification**

An e-mail was sent to all Williamson County elected officials, city transportation officials, school districts and chambers of commerce. A second e-mail was sent to the SH 29 interested-parties database, and a postcard was sent to major employers and elected officials. A press release was also distributed to media outlets throughout Williamson County.

### **Summary of Comments:**

A standardized input form was provided to attendees that included the following questions:

- What other factors should the Commissioners Court consider when making decisions about transportation for the County?
- What role should transit play in the County's transportation plan?
- What is the most important project to you in this plan, and why?
- Is there anything that has been left off the project list?
- Additional comments?

In response to these questions, the most important transportation projects identified included the O'Conner Extension, SH 79, Chandler Road Extension, the Liberty Hill Bypass, expansion of FM 1460, CR 269 extension and the expansion of east/west corridors near 183, 183A and Ronald Reagan Blvd. The need for bus and rail lines, as well as bike lanes was also identified.

Suggested transportation projects that were not represented on the project lists included Old Georgetown Road from Loop 397 to Chandler Road, Gattis School Road/CR 130, east of SH 130 connecting to CR 137, Jake Bridge over Brushy Creek, a new north-south road along the transmission lines in Hutto, CR 175, SE 1 Southeast arterial, FM 2243, upgrades to existing bridges, road maintenance, passenger rail from Georgetown through Austin to San Antonio, and light rail projects.

Projects identified by attendees as not needed included the Liberty Hill Bypass and the expansion of SH 29 from Ronald Reagan to the Burnet County Line, as well as the Chandler Road Extension. One person felt there were too many projects on the list, in general.

Eight individuals commented that transit was a key factor or should be a major consideration in planning transportation projects. Two individuals gave specific projects they supported: using the existing rail line

between Georgetown and Round Rock for commuter rail and commuter rail from Taylor to Round Rock. One individual felt the current Capital Metro Red Line will be adequate, but recommended some bus/van routes to carry individuals to the terminals. One individual commented that he preferred buses that use existing roads over rail. Two other attendees communicated their opposition to toll roads.

### **Precinct 1 Open House:**

The first open house was held in Precinct 1 at the Rattan Creek Community Center, located at 7617 Elkhorn Mountain Trail in Austin, Texas, on Monday, March 30, 2009, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Twenty-seven people attended the open house; we received two written comments and one request to be placed on our e-mail list.

#### Written Comments:

Chad Chadwell suggested that the county should reduce, elevate or relocate the rail lines. He believes that transit is a key to almost everything else: quality of life, safety, attracting new businesses and retaining existing businesses. He stated that the O'Conner Extension, bus, rail and bike lanes within cities and neighborhoods are the most important projects in this plan.

Matt Szekely commented that demographics drive the decision-making process and the presentation materials were very effective. He prefers bus over rail because it is more flexible and can leverage existing roads. He is glad the county is being proactive.

### **Precinct 4 Open House:**

The second open house was held in Precinct 4 at the Taylor Public Library, located at 801 Vance Street in Taylor, Texas, on Tuesday, March 31, 2009, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Thirty-two people attended the open house; we received nine written comments that evening.

#### Written Comments:

Susan Brock stated that Old Georgetown Road from Loop 397 to Chandler Road should be added to the list of needed county transportation projects.

Alma Holiday indicated that the county should incorporate light rail into highway projects. She does not believe it is wise to have the same kind of land use (pattern) and development that has happened in California. She believes we need to be more progressive in what transportation means to this area. She further stated that transit should play a huge part in the county's transportation plan. Highways should not be the only solution to transportation. She loves to have someone else drive her to places. She stated that limiting the amount of roads would reduce run-off that is caused by too much impervious cover. She believes that Highway 79 is the most important project in this plan because it is an important entrance into the town of Taylor. She believes that light rail has been left off the project list.

Ed Komandosky commented that the most important projects in the Long-Range Transportation Plan were Chandler Road and Highway 79 through Taylor.

Jim Sackrider stated that the most important roads are not on the project list. Gattis School Road/CR 138, east of SH 130 and connecting to CR 137 needs to be expanded, and the two-banked 90-degree turns need

to be eliminated. He also stated that Jake Hill Bridge over Brushy Creek will need to be widened and a second bridge added to the east of Jake Hill in the next 10 years. He also commented that the Long-Range Plan should include a north-south road that crosses Brushy Creek between Jake Hill (CR 137) Bridge and 973-Norman's Crossing. The LCRA Transmission Line Route provides an opportunity to route such a major project and mitigate the economic damage the lines inflict.

Johnny Sanford stated that the most important project was Chandler Road to Highway 95 because it will make it easier to get to Taylor. He also wanted to make sure the new high school and college located at 973 and the Loop were considered in the plan.

Joe Savage supported the use of the existing ROW (abandoned rail) between Georgetown and Round Rock for commuter rail. He also commented that the county did a great job of allowing public input.

Jane L. VanPraag commented that in the 1999 study, Williamson County was cited as one of the top five fastest-growing counties in the nation. She stated that the Frequently Asked Questions handout stated that we are 13<sup>th</sup>-fastest growing today; we are not increasing our population as predicted; our projected transportation needs will not be as great. She believes we need light rail in existing right-of-way from Elgin to Austin, running east to west or east to Central Austin. Bus schedules and routes need to be practical for the masses; it is foolish to expect commuters to spend more than one hour commuting to and from work. She was glad to see little population growth projected for Precinct 4 because this area is exceptionally fertile land and should stay agricultural. She does not want any tollways at all and no public/private partnerships. She believes our energy needs and economy will take a dynamic new direction that will negate additional highways. The county should keep what they have well maintained, and therefore, safe. She felt the presentation did not substantiate why employment will double by 2035 despite our current recession.

Bob Vantil would like to add commuter rail from Taylor to Round Rock into the project list.

### **Precinct 2 Open House:**

The third open house was held in Precinct 2 at Pat Bryson Municipal Hall, located at 201 North Brushy in Leander, Texas, on Monday, April 6, 2009, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. Fifty-seven people attended the open house; six written comments were received that evening.

#### Written Comments

Suzy Bates stated that keeping traffic off the main roads through town is an important factor when making decisions about transportation for the county. She stated that lanes coming into Georgetown on IH-35 from the north, prohibiting trucks are a great idea and using lanes for specific purposes is clever. She believes that since we have tracks already in place, there needs to be some planning for using them. She stated that the loop around Liberty Hill is important. She stated the need to get all through-traffic away from the churches, schools, etc. She stated now is the time to think about special routes to help vehicles that are transporting materials.

Michele Gibson stated that the 2035 population density and job density do not support the need to expand SH 29 from Ronald Reagan to the Burnet County Line. She does not support building SH 29 through Liberty Hill.

Patricia Curry stated that current and future water supply should be a factor the Commissioner's Court considers when making decisions about transportation for the county. She believes transit could help conserve resources, including funding and water. She does not support the Liberty Hill Bypass and the existing SH 29 should be expanded.

Oscar Solis asked the county to consider future price escalations. He stated, "If you can buy right-of-way now for future projects, please do so." He does not support transit for the county. The current Red Line will be adequate for commuters. The county may want to consider a few local routes to get folks from home to the Red Line terminal. He considers the east-west corridors between US 183, 183A & Ronald Reagan to be the most important projects in the plan. The two-lane roads need improvement. He stated the need for a left- turn lane on northbound Lakeline at Osage in Leander. He encouraged the county to continue the aggressive action to improve mobility in the area. He stated, "We cannot afford to sit around and do nothing while the area continues to grow."

A comment card was completed with no name. The individual encouraged the county to consider flooding and preserving the beauty of the Hill Country when it plans for transportation. The county should consider future rail to address clean-air and mobility in 30 years. The individual wanted the loop around Liberty Hill stopped.

Patrick Harlow stated the county needs to be fiscally responsible and not approve any toll roads. County residences should be considered when making decisions about transportation. Road maintenance should be the highest priority project. He believes that there are too many projects being considered. He stated there should be no more eminent domain for toll roads.

### **Precinct 3 Open House:**

The fourth open house was held in Precinct 3 at the Williamson County Central Maintenance Facility/ Central United Road Services building, Training Room #4, located at 3151 SE Inner Loop in Georgetown, Texas, on Tuesday, April 7, 2009, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Thirty-one people attended the open house; five written comments were received that evening.

#### Written Comments

Scott Barnes stated that transit should have a very high priority in the county's transportation plan, as well as maintenance of existing roads. He suggested that the county re-route freight rail lines to allow for light rail and passenger rail. The most important project in this plan was the passenger and commuter rail from Georgetown, through Central Austin, and south to San Antonio. He believed that mixed-use, urban centers near rail and transit hubs were left off the project list. He stated that the highest priority should be given to the expansion of FM 1460 between Georgetown and Round Rock because it is a safety necessity.

One individual stated that buses for rural areas and general transportation for the elderly should be a factor considered by the county when making decisions about transportation. The individual felt that SE1- South East Arterial should be added to the list of projects because it continues to get overlooked.

Joe Savage wanted the County Commissioners to know that we depend on them to ignore Highway 29 and Liberty Hill detractors and advocate the vision of our future road needs. He stated that transit should play a significant role in the transportation plan. He stated it is our responsibility to build for the future in relationship to transit. He stated, "Great public involvement."

Joseph Greene, III stated that the Leander area has great north/south accessibility, but needs east/west arterials. FM 2243 should be improved and widened to the five lanes in Georgetown. He stated that transit should play a heavy role in future planning, even if it includes underground tunnels like in Washington D.C. The most important project on the list was CR 269 Extension, known as Reveille Blvd from 183 to Parmer/Reagan Blvd. He would like to add to the proposed road list FM 2243 from Reagan Blvd. to Georgetown; it is the most important road for Leander residents; it's also the most dangerous. He wanted to thank the county for following through on Reveille Blvd.

One individual stated that the most important project in the plan was the SH 29 Corridor Study. They also stated that the county should increase the number of law enforcement officers and ensure a competitive salary to attract highest caliber officers.

### **E-mail Comments**

We have received three comments via [roads@wilco.org](mailto:roads@wilco.org).

Kay Peebles commented that eastern Williamson County is blessed with very fertile "black land" fields. The incursion of additional highways into this area would not only reduce the amount of arable land, but the impact of the roadway and the byproducts of the vehicles using these roads would have an adverse effect on the ecosystem. There are large fields of cotton, corn, maize and other crops grown here along with cattle ranches, which not only provide their commodities, but bring dollars and jobs into the economy.

Especially concerning is the Chandler Road Extension. While she understands the drawbacks of Highway 29, there must be a better way to avoid the occasional flooding problem and any increased traffic flow problems than to take this step. She stated that we must start focusing more on mass-transit options rather than continually building more roads. She indicated, as the study points out, a great number of people in Williamson County work in the Austin area. She believes mass transit would be a better way to move them there. She commented that Texans are reluctant in general and are used to having their cars, but they have always seen this as an either-or proposition. If a campaign could be put together to show people that there would be great benefits to them by using mass transit three days a week and still taking their cars in twice a week to deal with errands and other activities, she thinks that they could begin to look at it differently. Reducing our dependence on foreign oil is a hot point with many Texans and this would be a benefit, as well as, reducing their stress level during the work week. A great deal of the sell is in the approach.

Additionally, Ms. Peebles had two primary issues. She stated, "I feel that the adverse effects far outweigh the benefits of the Chandler Road Extension, not to mention the fact that I live in the area and regardless of what the models say, I cannot see the need for this addition. The money could be better spent in upgrading existing roads and bridges.

The second area of importance to her is the mass transit section of the plan. "I think that it is a very good start, but only a start. It needs to be expanded and invested in to a greater degree." She did not see anything in the plan about upgrading existing bridges. She stated, "I am sure that our bridges are in no better condition than those in the rest of the country and every study done shows that the nation's bridges are in a less than acceptable state. I know that a lot of highly trained and experienced people have worked on this plan and there is obviously a need to address the problem. My hope is that those working on this project are truly interested in the concerns of the residents who will be affected on a daily basis by these changes and not just playing lip service to them. My degrees may not be in civil engineering, but I and

the other area residents have a daily experience of the issues addressed here; I really believe that our input is valuable.”

Marci Cannon stated that she would like to add a new alignment of CR 175 to the plan to make it go straight to intersect FM2243. She also would encourage safety improvements to the intersection of FM 2243 at CR 175.

Vinaya Rao provided the following suggestions (verbatim).

1. Tool 45 connectivity improvements:

Extend Great Oaks drive to connect to Tool 45 as shown in the attached map file. Four lane elevated road (similar to what was done on Tool 45 from Palmer lane to Lake Line interchange). This sort of low level elevation will help animals to move around without hitting passing vehicles and costs less too. Tool gates for extended Great Oaks entrance and exit should be about 1/2 mile away from the interchange.

2. Intersection improvements:

At O'Conner intersection of 620: South bound - Add one additional right lane just before BlockBuster movies. Make that right lane only turn till 620 west bound including to the shopping center and dedicate the two left side lanes traffic direction to 620 east bound as more traffic head toward 620 East.

From Wyoming Springs all the way up to Great Oaks west bound on 620, add one more lane.

At O'Conner intersection of 620: About 500 feet before HEB, dedicate the third right west bound lane only for right turn including turn to north bound on O'Conner.

At O'Conner intersection of 620: North bound - Add one additional right lane till Brushy Creek sign. Make it a dedicated right-lane turn to HEB and to the apartment.

At the intersection of O'Conner and Liberty Walk, create a dedicated right lane only exit of about 100 feet or less (match with the left lane only turn length).

Follow above logic on the intersection of Great Oaks and 620.

3. Resurfacing:

Resurface Great Oaks all the way up to the Fire station near Brushy Creek Elementary (both directions).  
Resurface O'Conner all the way up to Avery Ranch entrance.  
Resurface Liberty Walk from O'Conner intersection till the end of that road.

4. Traffic lights and Stop Signs:

Add traffic lights at the intersection of Great Oaks - O'Conner and at the intersection of O'Conner and Liberty Walk.

Add a stop sign on the intersection of Liberty Walk and Northfield.

5. Parking:

Parking lane marks around Cat Hollow park (may have to take out about 10 feet of park space to create dedicated parking space). This needs to be done before resurfacing Liberty Walk road.