



Central Texas Regional  
Mobility Authority

## AGENDA ITEM #17 SUMMARY

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Quarterly briefing on the MoPac Improvement Project.

Department: Engineering

Associated Costs: None

Funding Source: N/A

Board Action Required: No

Description of Matter:

The report is an account of the activities on the MoPac Improvement Project from October through December, 2011.

Attached documentation for reference:

GEC Quarterly Activities Report and Board Presentation

Contact for further information:

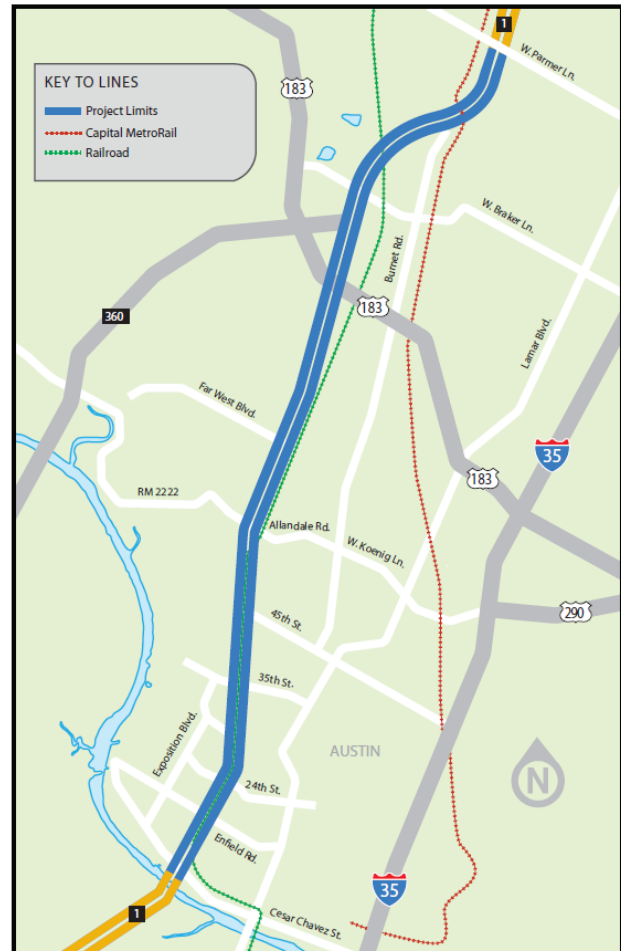
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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The 11-mile stretch of MoPac between Parmer Lane and Cesar Chavez Street is one of Austin's most important arteries, serving as a key route to downtown and points beyond. As a primary alternative to Interstate 35, MoPac moves more than 180,000 cars and trucks each day. This stretch of MoPac is currently seeing high levels of congestion and unreliable operations. At the urging of local and state leaders, the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (Mobility Authority), the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the City of Austin, and Capital Metro (CapMetro) have teamed up to develop a reasonable solution to the mobility problem in this corridor that takes into account the needs of drivers, transit riders, and the concerns of surrounding neighbors.

Any proposed improvements would require approval from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). TxDOT and the Mobility Authority are currently working together to complete schematic design and environmental studies following the requirements set by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (also known as "NEPA"). The schematic design and environmental phase is scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2012. If the approved Project has a toll component, the Mobility Authority will take responsibility for the financing, design, construction, operations, and maintenance of the facility.

This report describes the status of the MoPac Improvement Project and documents the activities accomplished in the fourth quarter of 2011.



# ACTIVITIES

The following activities have been accomplished by TxDOT, the Mobility Authority, and their consultants during the reporting period.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA) AND SCHEMATIC DESIGN

- **Environmental Process Schedule:** The environmental process is on schedule. An environmental finding from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is anticipated in the fall of 2012.
- **EA Document Status:** In late November, TxDOT received comments and recommendations on the draft EA from FHWA. In December, responses to FHWA comments and revisions to the EA were submitted to TxDOT Environmental Affairs Division (ENV). In early January 2012, ENV transmitted the responses and revised EA to FHWA for review and legal sufficiency evaluation. If the revised EA is deemed satisfactory for further processing, it will be released for public review and a Public Hearing held in the spring of 2012.
- **Schematic Design:** The schematic is being finalized and will be available for public comment at the upcoming community open houses and at the Public Hearing. The current schematic now includes the approved sound wall locations, proposed bike and pedestrian improvements, and updated signage. FHWA will review the schematic as part of the environmental document review process.
- **Design Exceptions:** FHWA completed its review of the submitted design exceptions, found them satisfactory, and has no further comments. The Project Team submitted a final version of the design exceptions to FHWA in early December. Final approval, however, will not be granted until completion of the NEPA document.
- **Sound Walls:** In November, the Austin City Council – acting in the City's capacity as adjacent property owner to the proposed project – voted to approve proposed sound walls along the MoPac corridor as part of the MoPac Improvement Project and permitted construction of sound wall #3 in City right-of-way along Great Northern Blvd. In addition, the council's resolution directed the City Manager to negotiate the appropriate agreement for use of the City's right-of-way, and to clarify disposition of existing MoPac agreements. In December, following the Austin City Council's approval of the November resolution on sound walls within city right-of-way, the locations of the currently proposed sound walls along the entire project were posted on the project's website at [www.mopacexpress.com](http://www.mopacexpress.com).
- **Historic Resources:** In October, TxDOT presented a project update to the City of Austin's Historic Landmark Commission. Topics included the project's history, sound wall workshops held during the summer, and historic eligibility recommendations and effects findings. In November, the Project Team received Texas Historical Commission (THC) comments on Section 106 Documentation, a federal process to preserve historic properties. The THC concurred with the Project Team's determination of eligible historic places and had only four comments related to the affected properties determination. At this time, the Project Team has met with the parties which submitted the comments, addressed each comment, and all issues are resolved.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### Messaging, Information, and Meetings

- **Stakeholder Meetings:** The Project Team continues to coordinate with stakeholders. Various stakeholder meetings held in the fourth quarter of 2011 include:
  - A project status briefing was given to the City of Austin's Urban Transportation Commission along with several individual meetings with various City of Austin staff
  - A project status briefing and summary of the proposed bicycle/pedestrian accommodations was given to the Austin Cycling Association
  - Meetings continued with utility representatives – including electric (both transmission and distribution), water, fiber optic, and cable – regarding project development and utility coordination issues
  - A project status briefing was held with the Capital Metro Transit Authority (CMTA)
- **Elected Official Briefings:** The Project Team has expanded stakeholder outreach to one-on-one briefings with local and regional elected officials. The purpose of these meetings is to provide an update on the project's status and schedule. These meetings will be initiated in January and held throughout 2012.
- **Informational Workshops:** Informational Workshops are anticipated to be held in mid-2012 with the purpose of providing general information to key stakeholders on express lanes and dynamic pricing.
- **Community Open Houses:** Open Houses, featuring project-specific information, are planned to be held in March 2012, prior to the Public Hearing in Spring 2012. The purpose of these open houses is to provide the opportunity to share and discuss project updates with interested citizens.
- **Project Updates:** The Mobility Authority sends Project Updates via e-mail on a monthly basis to several key stakeholders. These Project Updates provide a short summary of the progress achieved on the Project over the previous weeks. Project Updates were e-mailed on October 27, November 23, and December 28.
- **E-Newsletter:** The fourth project e-Newsletter was sent out to project stakeholders on October 14, 2011, and featured the progress of the environmental study, the announcement of the recommended Express Lanes alternative, the sound wall voting results, bicycle and pedestrian coordination efforts, and the selected aesthetic concept. The next e-Newsletter will be sent out in mid to late February 2012.
- **Project Focus Groups:** In December, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), working on behalf of the Mobility Authority, conducted three focus groups with Austin area drivers to obtain user feedback on proposed corridor signing (signage text and placement), as well as driver understanding of the express lane concept. A fourth focus group will be held in January 2012 in Bryan/College Station to sample responses from drivers unfamiliar with the Austin area. The results from this study, which will be available next quarter, will be utilized in the development of signage requirements for the project and tailoring of messaging at the Informational Workshops.

## PROJECT DEVELOPMENT / PROCUREMENT

- **Operations Plan/Toll Design:** With Express Lanes as the recommended alternative, the Project Team has moved forward with refinements of an operations plan and the toll design for the project. This includes preparing guidelines for the design of express lane tolling structures and traffic readers.
- **Utilities:** TxDOT and the Mobility Authority are continuing discussions with major utilities along the corridor. The Team's goal is to reduce the number of utility relocations and start long lead-time efforts to reduce impact to the construction schedule. In the past quarter, TxDOT, Mobility Authority, City of Austin, Austin Energy, Austin Water Utility, and other utilities met multiple times to discuss the sound wall proposed along Great Northern Blvd. and further coordinate constructability and access issues.
- **Design/Build (D/B) or P3:** In response to a September 30, 2011 Request for Information (RFI), the Mobility Authority received 22 responses from the transportation infrastructure industry on potential delivery options for the financing and/or development of the MoPac Improvement Project. In December, the Mobility Authority conducted a series of one-on-one meetings with responders that requested a meeting. The responses and discussions will be considered in the Mobility Authority's determination of the most appropriate delivery method for this project. A recommendation on which approach to take is anticipated to come before the Mobility Authority Board of Directors in early 2012.

### Context Sensitive Design (CSD)

- **Bike/Pedestrian Mobility:** The Project Team has continued to coordinate with stakeholders including the bicyclist/pedestrian mobility community, City of Austin, CAMPO, and FHWA on potential improvements to the bike and pedestrian facilities along and across the MoPac Corridor. In November, the Project Team participated in the first annual "Ask the Agency" forum, held by the Austin Cycling Association. The Project Team fielded questions and provided information about the project's proposed bicycle and pedestrian improvements which were developed in conjunction with the stakeholders.
- **Project Aesthetics:** As a result of the work from the citizen Aesthetics Committee and the Context Sensitive Design-focused Open House held in May, the Project Team has been utilizing the preferred aesthetic concept in order to finalize the aesthetic guidelines for the project. These guidelines will be included in the contract documents to make sure the final design and materials reflect the aesthetics desired by the project's stakeholders and the community. In early 2012, the guidelines will be provided to the City of Austin, a financial partner for the project aesthetics, for their concurrence.

## FUNDING / AGREEMENTS

- **TIFIA Program:** In late December, the Mobility Authority submitted a Letter of Interest (LOI) for the 2012 Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) credit program. The LOI included a request for a loan of approximately \$72 million. It is anticipated that the US DOT will respond in approximately four months.
- **City of Austin Proposition 1:** This past quarter, the City of Austin and Mobility Authority personnel took steps forward to utilize the 2010 Proposition 1 \$100,000 contribution

towards the MoPac Improvement Project. The contribution will help fund the aesthetic guidelines development and additional traffic operations modeling related to the project's downtown connections. The Project Team anticipates an Interlocal Agreement to be drafted soon and council action is anticipated in Spring 2012.

- **Union Pacific Railroad Preliminary Engineering Agreement:** In October, and following earlier coordination, the Mobility Authority provided the Union Pacific Railroad a draft Preliminary Engineering Agreement (PEA) in order to initiate preliminary reviews of proposed work within UPRR property (i.e. MoPac bridge widening over UPRR tracks). The PEA is currently being processed by UPRR.
- **TxDOT Project Development Agreement:** The Project Development Agreement will clarify the roles of TxDOT and the Mobility Authority during the upcoming final design, construction, operations, and maintenance of the Project. The Mobility Authority previously prepared and is currently revising a draft which will be sent to TxDOT for review in early 2012.

## SCHEDULE

**The overall Project remains on schedule.** An environmental finding from FHWA is anticipated by the fall of 2012. If the Express Lanes alternative moves forward as the FHWA-approved preferred alternative and the project is further developed as design/build, the bond sale would occur in early 2013 followed by an anticipated start of design and construction. It is anticipated that, following this schedule, a facility could potentially be open to traffic in 2016. If the project moves forward as a P3, it is still anticipated that the facility could be open to traffic in 2016.

### SCHEDULE RISK ASSESSMENT



Environmental Process / TxDOT & FHWA Coordination



Resolution on Design Exceptions by FHWA



Public and Political Opinion



Coordination with UPRR / City of Austin / CapMetro



Traffic and Revenue - Financing

### UPCOMING MILESTONES

- Determination of project development and implementation approach (D/B vs. P3)
- FHWA ruling that the EA is deemed satisfactory for further processing
- Community Open House Meetings and Public Hearing

## MILESTONES MATRIX

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Restart Environmental Study and Public Involvement</b>	Summer 2010	Complete
<b>Market Valuation / Exercise Primacy</b>	Fall 2010	Complete
<b>Develop and Refine Preliminary Alternatives</b>	Fall 2010	Complete
<b>Conduct Open House Meetings (Round 1 &amp; 2)</b>	Fall 2010	Complete
<b>Reasonable Alternatives Refinement</b>	Winter 2010/ 2011	Complete
<b>Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and Schematic Complete - Initiate Review Process</b>	February 2011	Complete
<b>TxDOT Austin District EA Review Begins</b>	February 2011	Complete
<b>Restart Aesthetics Committee</b>	March 2011	Complete
<b>Complete Level 2 Traffic and Revenue (T&amp;R)</b>	May 2011	Complete
<b>Context Sensitive Design Advisory Committee Meetings</b>	March-May 2011	Complete
<b>TxDOT Environmental Division EA Review</b>	Spring 2011	Complete
<b>Conduct Open House Meeting (Round 3)</b>	May 2011	Complete
<b>Conduct Sound Wall Workshops</b>	Summer 2011	Complete
<b>FHWA Resolution on Design Exceptions</b>	Summer 2011	Complete
<b>FHWA Begins EA Review</b>	Fall 2011	In Progress
<b>EA is deemed "Satisfactory for Further Processing" by FHWA</b>	Early 2012	
<b>Conduct Community Open Houses and Public Hearings on the Draft EA</b>	March 2012	In Preparation
<b>Submittal of Final EA to TxDOT/FHWA</b>	Spring 2012	
<b>Environmental Finding from FHWA</b>	Fall 2012	