



**CENTRAL TEXAS
Regional Mobility Authority**

AGENDA ITEM #13 SUMMARY

Quarterly briefing on the MoPac Improvement Project.

Strategic Plan Relevance: Regional Mobility

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 January through March, 2012.

Reference documentation:

GEC Quarterly Activities Report and Board Presentation

Contact for further information:

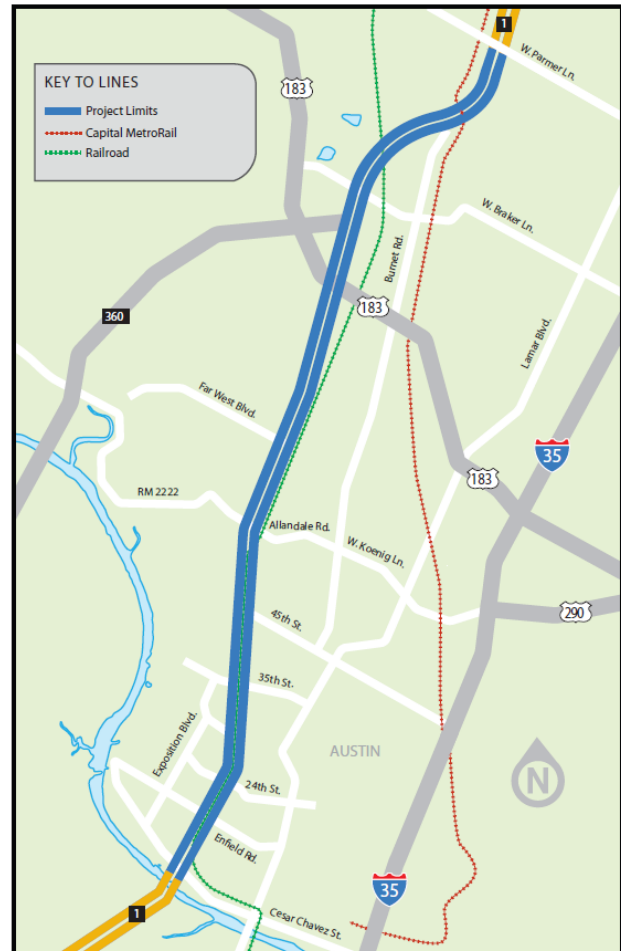
Wesley M. Burford, P.E., Director of Engineering

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 from January 2012 through March 2012.



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:** As of the date of this report, the environmental process is currently on schedule. An environmental finding from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is anticipated in the fall of 2012.
- **EA Document Status:** It is anticipated that FHWA will find the draft EA “satisfactory for further processing” (SFP) in mid-April. This will then allow the draft EA to be available to the public for review and comment. A Public Hearing is anticipated to be held in May. The project is still on schedule to receive an Environmental Finding in August 2012.
- **Schematic Design and Design Exceptions:** The schematic will be available for public comment at the upcoming Public Hearing; FHWA will review the schematic as part of the environmental document review process. FHWA conditionally approved the nine submitted design exceptions; however, final approval will not be granted until completion of the NEPA document.
- **Historic Resources:** As part of the Section 106 consultation process, the Team met with representatives of Rescue Austin Memorial Park (RAMP) and the Old West Austin Neighborhood Association (OWANA). In February 2012, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) concurred with the determination of no adverse effects to historic properties.

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 first quarter of 2012 include:
 - A project status briefing was given to the Pemberton Heights Neighborhood Association
 - A project status briefing was given by the Mobility Authority Executive Director Mike Heiligenstein to the CAMPO Transit Working Group.
- **Elected Official Briefings:** The Project Team met with over 20 local, regional, and state elected officials and representatives in order to keep them apprised of the project’s status. Response has been overall positive, and these important connections will be continued through the life of the project.
- **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:** In March 2012, two Community Open Houses were held in anticipation of the Public Hearing. Information was provided on the environmental process, the express lanes alternative, sound walls, project aesthetics, and bicycle/pedestrian mobility improvements. A combined total of 371 members of the public attended, and feedback on the project and its various elements was received by the Team.

- **Project Updates:** The Mobility Authority distributes 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 February 16 and March 23.
- **E-Newsletter:** The fifth project e-Newsletter was sent out to project stakeholders on February 23, 2012, and featured an invitation to the March 2012 Community Open Houses. The next e-Newsletter will be sent out after SFP, in anticipation of the Public Hearing.
- **Project Focus Groups:** In January 2012, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), working on behalf of the Mobility Authority, held the fourth and final focus group in Bryan/College Station to sample responses on proposed corridor signing (signage text and placement), as well as driver understanding of the express lane concept from drivers unfamiliar with the Austin area. Various sign layouts and text were presented and the focus group clarified what they liked and disliked. Any resulting updates to the proposed express lane signage based the focus group feedback will be coordinated with TxDOT.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT / PROCUREMENT

- **Operations Plan/Toll Design:** Refinements to the operations plan and the toll design for the project continue.
- **Utilities:** TxDOT and the Mobility Authority are continuing discussions with major utilities along the corridor.
- **Design/Build (D/B) or P3:** The Mobility Authority has made the recommendation to the Board of Directors to move forward at this time with the design/build process for the MoPac Improvement Project, if environmentally cleared. Therefore, a Request for Qualifications for Design-Build Teams is being developed and anticipated to be issued in mid-April. The procurement of a D/B Contractor is anticipated to take approximately 8 to 12 months.

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 and network connectivity along and across the MoPac Corridor.
- **Project Aesthetics:** Draft Aesthetic Guidelines were completed and discussed with TxDOT. Updates and revisions based on TxDOT and Mobility Authority review are currently being addressed.

FUNDING / AGREEMENTS

- **TIFIA Program:** The Mobility Authority anticipates hearing back in late Spring/early Summer 2012 from USDOT regarding the December 2011 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.
- **City of Austin Proposition 1:** The Mobility Authority continues coordination with city staff to develop the financial support agreement in order to utilize the 2010 Proposition 1 \$100,000 contribution for the MoPac corridor.
- **Union Pacific Railroad Preliminary Engineering Agreement:** The Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) has signed the Preliminary Engineering Agreement (PEA) and has begun preliminary reviews of proposed work within UPRR property (i.e. MoPac bridge widening over UPRR tracks).
- **TxDOT Project Development Agreement:** The Project Development Agreement (PDA) is currently being drafted with a May 2012 submittal to TxDOT anticipated. The PDA will clarify the roles of TxDOT and the Mobility Authority during the upcoming final design, construction, operations, and maintenance of the Project.

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, procurement completion of the D/B Contractor is anticipated in early 2013. The anticipated start of design and construction is mid-2013 with a potential facility 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

- FHWA ruling that the EA is deemed satisfactory for further processing
- Public Hearing
- Issuance of RFQ and selection of Short List

MILESTONES MATRIX

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