

**IH 820 Public Hearing
CSJs: 0008-14-058, 0008-14-059, and 0014-16-194**

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS / RECOMMENDATIONS

**Public Hearing Summary and Analysis/Recommendations
August 14, 2008**

IH 820: From IH 35W to SH 121/183/SH 26

District/County: Fort Worth / Tarrant County

CSJ: 0008-14-058, 0008-14-059, and 0014-16-194

Proposed Improvements: The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Fort Worth District proposes to improve a six mile section of Interstate Highway (IH) 820 in Tarrant County, Texas. The improvements extend between IH 35W and State Highway (SH) 121/183/SH 26 in Tarrant County

The proposed improvements would widen the existing four-lane freeway to a 10-lane freeway from IH 35W to SH 121/183/SH 26. There would be three 12-foot wide general purpose lanes (non-toll) in each direction plus auxiliary lanes and 10-foot wide inside and outside shoulders. Two managed (toll) lanes would be provided in each direction within the median from west of IH 35W to SH 121/183/SH 26. The managed (toll) lanes would be 12-feet wide with four-foot wide inside and 10-foot wide outside shoulders. The proposed improvements would provide for two 12-foot wide eastbound and westbound frontage lanes, discontinuous between US 377 and Iron Horse Drive, with auxiliary lanes and turn lanes at intersections. The proposed project includes the reconstruction of the IH 820/IH 35W interchange.

The proposed improvements would require additional right-of-way of approximately 41.93 acres, which includes the relocation of three businesses and three residences. In addition, right-of-way would be required from two Section 4(f) properties: North Richland Hills Tennis Center (0.58 acres) and the North Richland Hills Athletic Center (0.52 acres). Programmatic Section 4(f) evaluations were prepared for these properties.

Need and Purpose: Transportation improvements are needed on IH 820 to address current and projected traffic demands and facility deficiencies. The traffic demand on IH 820 results from many causes including high population growth, proximity to employment centers, lack of sufficient alternative routes, and high use of single occupancy vehicle users. There are insufficient lanes on IH 820 to carry the existing and projected east-west traffic demand. The high traffic volumes on the highway result in many effects, including slow travel speeds and extended hours of congestion, increased accidents, and increased air emissions.

The purpose of the proposed project is to improve mobility throughout the corridor to relieve existing traffic congestion, improve local traffic circulation, and accommodate future travel demand.

Environmental Document Approval: The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved the environmental assessment for satisfactory for further processing on May 23, 2008.

TxDOT conducted two public meetings: the first held on June 3, 1993, and the second held on April 27, 2006.

Notices and Articles: A notice of public hearing was published in the legal section of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* on June 1, 2008, June 8, 2008, June 15, 2008, and June 22, 2008. A Spanish version of the notice was published in the legal section of *La Semana* on June 6, 2008, June 13, 2008, and June 20, 2008 and in the legal section of *La Estrella* on June 7, 2008, June 14, 2008, and June 21, 2008. Notices were mailed to adjacent property owners and public officials.

Public Hearing Date and Place: The public hearing was held at the Richland Hills Church of Christ, 6300 North East Loop 820, North Richland Hills, Texas on July 1, 2008.

Attendance: Approximately 387 people attended the public hearing. Of these, approximately 286 were private citizens. The remaining attendees were from TxDOT, the design consultants, elected officials, city and county representatives, and other interested parties.

Conducted by: Ms. Maribel Chavez, District Engineer for the Fort Worth District of TxDOT, gave the introduction for the public hearing. Ms. Judy Anderson, Programs Administration Engineer for the Fort Worth District of TxDOT, explained the public hearing process, project introduction, the environmental assessment, and the Section 4(f) evaluations. Mr. Darrell Thompson with Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc., Project Manager, discussed the recommended corridor improvements. Mr. Scott Hall, District Right-of-Way Administrator for the Fort Worth District of TxDOT, explained the right-of-way acquisition and relocation assistance process.

Exhibits: Plans illustrating the proposed project were displayed for public view and comment. These plans included design schematics on aerial photograph, a video rendering of the project, and the Environmental Assessment document. TxDOT's *Right-of-Way* booklet and *Relocation Assistance* booklets (both in English and Spanish) were made available to the public. Handouts showing general public information and the public hearing agenda were given to attendees.

Comments from Elected / Public Officials:

Verbal:

Twenty elected/public officials spoke in favor of the proposed project and for a speedy implementation. This included three letters read from the Mayor of Roanoke, Mayor of Fort Worth, and the Mayor and City Manager from Keller.

Three comments were directed at the proposed access to Haltom Road from IH 820 in the City of Haltom City. A redesign of the access locations from Haltom Road from the frontage road system was requested by the City of Haltom City municipal officials.

Written:

Twenty-seven elected / public officials wrote in favor of the proposed project and for a speedy implementation

One city official wanted their city to have the opportunity to review the final engineering plans for SH 121/SH 183 and had requested additional signage along SH 121/183 for the major cross streets in the City of Hurst.

One city official expressed concern of the inability of the environmental process to address current and future traffic problems.

Comments from the Public:

Verbal:

Six people objected to the tolling of IH 820 and opposed the construction of the managed/HOV lane system.

Three people expressed concern for the price of the managed/HOV lane system stating it would be unaffordable for the majority of citizens.

Fourteen people spoke in favor of the proposed project and request no additional delays for project implementation.

One person requested continuous frontage roads from US 377 to Iron Horse Drive.

Two people requested that no foreign companies be used to construct IH 820 or manage the managed/HOV lane system.

One person stated that the managed/HOV lane system is economic discrimination to environmental justice populations, citing a report produced by the Center for Transportation Research.

One person requested TxDOT to use the best available technology for the implementation of tolling the managed/HOV lane system.

One person requested TxDOT reconsider the closure of the Meacham Boulevard exit because it would impact businesses at the exit.

One person stated that Comprehensive Development Agreements (CDAs) are the most expensive way to fund transportation projects and should not be used. The commenter stated that government officials, state, county, and local have forced CDA agreements upon the public.

Written:

Thirty-seven people objected to the tolling of IH 820 and opposed the managed/HOV lane system.

Eight people expressed concern on the proposed price of the managed/HOV lane system stating that four dollars for one-way was excessive and few people would be able to afford to utilize these lanes.

One hundred forty-five people wrote in favor of the proposed project and requested no additional delays for project implementation.

Four people commented that the environmental study was too old and did not account for the current and proposed traffic congestion and problems.

One person expressed concern about potential conflicts of interest between public officials and contractors utilized to construct IH 820 and maintain the managed/HOV

lane system. The commenter proposed all potential conflicts of interest be published on the internet.

One person expressed concern for weaving distances from the access to and from the managed/HOV lane system.

One person requested the westbound exit ramp from IH 820 to Holiday Lane be moved east of the Callaway Branch Channel.

One person wanted considerations for bicycle and pedestrian access along the service road.

One person objected to the drop and wishbone ramps from the managed/HOV lane system, citing construction cost. The commenter recommended slip ramps instead.

Two people requested continuous frontage roads from US 377 and Iron Horse Drive.

One person requested information on the mitigation opportunities concerning noise impacts. The commenter also stated they would prefer excess revenue generated by the managed/HOV lane system to be used for mass transit.

Six people requested specific information on how their properties would be affected by the IH 820 project and stated questions addressing specific impacts to their properties.

Fifteen people requested that TxDOT not use foreign companies in the construction of IH 820 or the management of the managed/HOV lane system. The commenters stated they preferred Texas and U.S. companies.

Three people requested construction impacts be minimized with construction occurring during night hours and avoiding lane closures.

One person requested access be maintained for the Iron Horse Golf Course, via the existing box culvert, during construction and after the project is completed.

Three people commented that the managed/HOV lanes were economic discrimination and are double taxation.

One person requested TxDOT make minor improvements to IH 820 for temporary relief from congestion while waiting for the current proposed project. Suggestions made by the commenter included moving the concrete traffic barriers and adding additional lanes and moving specific exit ramps to facilitate traffic flow.

Two people expressed concern that air quality would deteriorate because of the proposed project, despite TxDOT's assurance that it would improve.

Three people cited current roadway problems that would need to be addressed in the final design of IH 820. These problems included confusion of left exits, horizontal and vertical deficiencies creating blind spots, poor signing and pavement markings, current exit inefficiencies, and ingress/egress at the major interchanges causing traffic problems.

One person questioned how TxDOT would account for out-of-state drivers utilizing the managed/HOV lane system.

Three people requested reasons why the project implementation for IH 820 has taken so long.

Two people requested information on the affects to adjacent roadways from the proposed project.

One person stated that separate toll lanes do not promote the maximum efficiency for the roadway system.

Two people expressed a desire for mass transit along IH 820.

One person requested the rate/percentage that the existing IH 820 is overcapacity and the rate/percentage IH 820 is overcapacity with only one additional lane added in each direction.

One person expressed concern for the existing flooding that is occurring in the neighborhoods between North Park and the Iron Horse Golf Course and suggested a ditch be placed behind the proposed noise barriers to allow for additional drainage.

One person objected to the closure of the Meacham Boulevard exit citing the effects to their business that relies on this access. The commenter requested TxDOT maintain this access.

One person opposed the proposed Haltom City redesign stating it would negatively affect his property. Additionally, the commenter stated TxDOT has worked diligently on impacts to his property from the IH 820 proposed project and the City of Haltom City has not contacted him on the potential impacts of their proposal to his property.

One person requested the egress from IH 35W southbound be located north of the Great Southwest Parkway. Additionally, the commenter would prefer TxDOT start construction of the IH 35W section of the proposed project first for greater facilitation of traffic during construction of the remaining project.

One person requested a noise barrier be placed at the North Richland Hills Tennis Center.

One person stated concerns about access to IH 820 within City of Haltom City. A redesign of the access locations from Haltom Road from the frontage road system was requested by the City of Haltom City city officials.

Summary of Major Comments/Issues that were Addressed: Detailed TxDOT response to issues and concerns can be found in the *Comment and Response Report*.

The verbal and written comments suggest an overall support for the proposed project and a desire for the project to proceed quickly. Several comments raised concern regarding the following: (1) opposition to the managed/HOV lane system; (2) opposition to the use of foreign companies for the construction, operation, or maintenance of the proposed project; (3) cost to utilize managed/HOV lane system is too expensive at four

dollars per one way; (4) the age of the environmental analysis and its failure to address current and future traffic demands; (5) proposed access redesign to Haltom Road from IH 820 through the City of Haltom City as requested by city officials; and (6) continuous frontage roads from Iron Horse Drive to US 377.

TxDOT Response to Public Hearing Comments

- (1) TxDOT is experiencing a monetary shortfall to fund large roadway projects and the proposed private partnership is one method TxDOT has employed to finance, design, construct, and maintain IH 820. Without the private partnership, this roadway expansion would be substantially delayed or not constructed.
- (2) The Texas Legislature will determine how and when foreign companies may participate in the financing, construction, operation, and maintenance of the state's transportation infrastructure. TxDOT will adhere to these legislative directives. A proposer to design, construct, and maintain the managed lane system has not been determined. Senate Bill 792 does not place restrictions on foreign companies' participation in CDAs. The facility will be solely owned by the State of Texas and not by a foreign company.
- (3) All toll rates would be set in accordance with the North Central Texas Council of Government's (NCTCOG's) Regional Transportation Council (RTC) "Managed Lanes Policies." Per the policies, a fixed-fee schedule will be applied during the first six months of operation; dynamic pricing will be applied thereafter. The maximum toll rate that could be applied is 75 cents per mile and will be updated monthly during the fixed schedule phase. Market-based tolls and a toll rate cap will be established during the dynamic-pricing phase; the rate will be established to maintain a minimum average corridor speed of 50 miles per hour. HOVs will pay the full rate in the off-peak period but will receive a 50 percent discount during the peak period.
- (4) The Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed using the most recent, available information and received approval to proceed to a public hearing by the FHWA on May 23, 2008. The EA addressed all required potential impacts of the proposed facility to biological resources, cultural resources, air quality, noise impacts, and socioeconomic issues. These resources were reviewed based on the most current engineering designs using the latest traffic numbers for the proposed project. The engineering design was modeled for 2030 future traffic conditions.
- (5) Based on our review, TxDOT cannot support incorporation of Haltom City's Collaborative Plan into the preliminary geometric schematic as presented. The Collaborative Plan as presented does not appear to provide for the safe and efficient movement of traffic or a higher level of service compared to the preliminary schematic presented at the July 1, 2008, public hearing. Obtaining schematic approval and environmental clearance for the IH 820 corridor is paramount for the region in moving forward with the proposed improvements to IH 820. TxDOT is committed to continue working with the city in resolving this issue to develop a mutually acceptable access plan for Haltom Road once environmental clearance is obtained.
- (6) Frontage roads cannot be provided between US 377 and Iron Horse Drive because of the potential Section 4(f) property impacts to the golf course and the public park (i.e., property would need to be acquired from the golf course and park). Additionally, to construct a frontage road between US 377 and Iron Horse Drive would require an at-grade railroad crossing, which is not allowed for roadway improvements along the interstate system funded through the FHWA. (TxDOT strives to minimize impacts to public parks and recreational facilities.)

Recommendation: After review of the comments received during the public involvement phase, TxDOT will continue to work with the local municipalities and property owners during the design and construction phases of the project. All comments have been satisfactorily addressed and the project is recommended for approval as a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).