

freeway **TODAY**

Paving the way for a new freeway

It's been a long time coming, but it's finally here. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) will break ground on the Marsha Sharp Freeway sometime this summer.

In preparation, a new rail line is being built northwest of town, the department is buying right-of-way, buildings are being demolished, and utilities are next on the list to be relocated.

The 15.5-mile rail line should be finished in December. The line runs north past Reese Development Center, crosses SH 114 and finally turns east across FM 179 to connect with the Santa Fe line at US 84.

In the meantime, TxDOT is putting the finishing touches on right-of-way acquisition. The department has acquired about 72 percent of the 357 parcels along the freeway route and spent more than \$110 million on right-of-way acquisition and relocation of businesses and residents.

The freeway will run from IH27 west down Fourth Street, then turn southwest down the Brownfield Highway and end just past West Loop 289.

The first phase of construction—on Loop 289 from 34th Street to Slide Road—is scheduled to begin next year, said Frank Phillips, TxDOT construction contract administrator and engineer in charge of overseeing freeway design and plan development.

Phillips added that much of West Loop 289 will be rebuilt as a part of this project. Plans include widening the West Loop to six lanes and building an interchange with two flyovers—one from the westbound lanes of Brownfield Highway



The Burrus Elevator, built in the early 1920s, stands abandoned at the corner of Fourth Street and Avenue P. The elevator will be demolished next year to make way for the Marsha Sharp Freeway.

to the southbound lanes of Loop 289 and the other from the northbound lanes of Loop 289 to the eastbound lanes of U.S. 82.

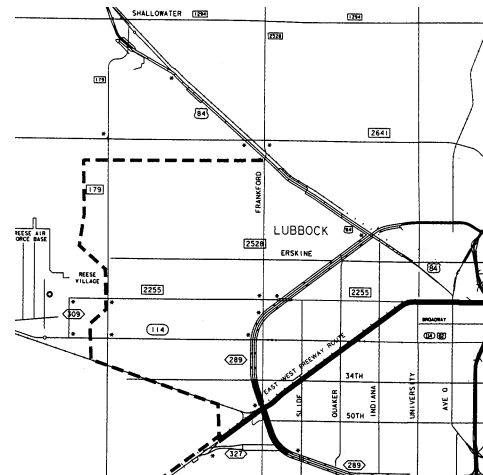
“We plan on building the frontage roads first. Once they are complete, traf-

Dates to Remember

Summer 2002 - Construction begins on first phase of the Marsha Sharp Freeway from 34th Street to Slide Road (F.M. 1730).

Summer 2003 - Construction begins on second phase of the Marsha Sharp Freeway, main lanes from Memphis Avenue to University and frontage roads from University to Avenue L.

Summer 2005 - Construction begins on third phase, main lanes and frontage roads from Memphis to Salem Avenue.



The dotted line indicates the new rail line northwest of town.

A long time coming

The concept of an east-west access is not a new one. This idea was first introduced in the 1964 Lubbock Urban Transportation Plan, a document created to address future traffic growth and transportation needs beyond the year 1985. The 1964 plan was replaced in 1969 by the second volume that suggested making "heavy improvements" along U.S. 82 from Loop 289 to Avenue A. The idea was to provide a highway that would temporarily handle the traffic volume until a freeway could be completed at another location. Interestingly, that other location was farther south along 37th or 38th Street. The third volume in 1975 was actually presented to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and called for substantial improvements to U.S. 82 with a proposed freeway somewhere between 32nd and 38th Street.

It was later determined that this location was not appropriate for freeway traffic, and the idea of building the freeway along U.S. 82 was presented to the public in 1989 at three general meetings held at Saint Luke's United Methodist Church and Ramirez Elementary School.

It was here that Senator John Montford took a more active role.

"Senator Montford was clearly a driving force behind this project," said Davis Melton, TxDOT environmental coordinator. "Without him, this freeway would not be where it is today."

Senator Montford appointed a regional committee to monitor freeway planning and development, and his aides called TxDOT once a week to find out how things were progressing.

"I could expect my weekly phone call every Friday afternoon," Melton said. "Senator Montford wanted to know if things were going okay or if we were having any problems."

A public hearing in 1993 drew more than 1,000 participants. Public comments extended into the wee hours of the morning, said Melton.

"We thought we would be there all night," he explained. "People were concerned about how this project, both the freeway and the rail relocation, would affect their lives and the Lubbock community."

But, that was the turning point for the project, he noted.

"From there, we moved ahead, completing the environmental document and addressing issues such as the relocation of businesses and residences, noise levels, and impacts to land uses," he said.

It took four years for the state to complete the three-volume 1,100-page environmental document. The FHWA, TxDOT Environmental Division and the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), signed the document in April of 1995. And, in July of that year, the FHWA signed the Record of Decision which completed the environmental process and gave the Lubbock District the authority to begin developing plans and buying right-of-way.



The new rail line runs north from U.S. 82 past Reese Development Center, then east to tie in with U.S. 84 and the Santa Fe line.

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fic will be moved from the main lanes while we work on the rest of the project," he said. "This will reduce the disruption to traffic and allow work on the main lanes to be completed as quickly as possible."

The interchange will be a 3-tier structure with frontage roads at ground level. The loop main lanes will be next with the freeway as the third level. The two flyovers will cap off the top portion of the project.

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Granite Construction Company has finished the earthen berms for the new rail line being laid northwest of town. The project is scheduled for completion in December. At right, a gas station and small store will be demolished to make way for the freeway.



Some funding in place for freeway

The Texas Transportation Commission awarded \$16.5 million recently to the Lubbock District for a Marsha Sharp Freeway project that includes building main lanes and frontage roads along U.S. 62/82 from Salem to Memphis Avenue. The project is scheduled for construction in 2005.

The money was part of the \$27.5 billion 2002 Unified Transportation Program (UTP), a 10-year development plan for transportation projects in Texas. The Commission updated the UTP annually to help plan federal and state-funded projects.

A delegation from the Chamber of Commerce traveled to Austin earlier this year to ask the Commission for an additional \$20 million for this phase of the freeway. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) committed another \$6.3 million in Urban Mobility funds, bringing the total available funding for the third phase of construction to \$22.8 million.

Today's decision brings the funded portion of the freeway to \$97 million, just over half of the \$185 million projected for construction. Right-of-way costs

are estimated at \$160 million.

Funding actually in place for the freeway includes \$46.4 million from the Commission, \$22.8 million from Urban Mobility funds, \$20 million from federal demonstration funds, and \$7.88 million from district discretionary funds.

The last few years, Lubbock's Chamber of Commerce has been the driving force behind funding requests, said Steve Warren, TxDOT director of transportation planning and development.

He added that a delegation traveled to Austin four years in a row to request money from the Texas Transportation Commission. Their efforts garnered \$17.8 million to fund the West Loop 289 project, and another \$12.1 million that would go toward the portion of the freeway through Texas Tech University.

"Our success so far I attribute to the Chamber and their diligent efforts to line up the necessary funding for this freeway," he noted. "This year the delegation asked for \$20 million. We got \$16.5, but we are grateful for that."

The \$97 million funds the first three

of six phases in the freeway project.

"We still have a longway to go," added Warren. "If we get money this year that still leaves three phases and the 19th Street flyover to be funded."

But it will happen, he said.

"We've put almost \$130 million into this project so far," he added. "I'd say we are committed to building a freeway."



For questions concerning right-of-way acquisition, call Claude Kneisley at **806 748-4417**

For construction questions, call Frank Phillips, P.E. at **806 748-4574**

Contamination halts drainage project

Groundwater contamination is a nationwide problem—one that has cost the taxpayers millions of dollars in the last two decades.

The Lubbock District is seeing its share of soil and water contamination along the route designated for the Marsha Sharp Freeway.

In fact, the freeway storm sewer drainage project, started in 1995, was brought to a sudden halt a year later when contractors dredged up water and soil contaminated with gasoline from leaking storage tanks.

The first phase of the freeway drainage system runs from University Avenue to Avenue U, then north along Avenue U to the Yellowhouse Canyon. The project was stopped just 700 feet short of University Avenue.

Soil and water contamination along

the Marsha Sharp Freeway could cost the state as much as \$3 million over the life of the project, according to Davis Melton, Lubbock District environmental coordinator.

There are 14 high risk sites along the route, any one of them a potential problem for construction, said Melton.

“So far only three of the sites are creating problems,” he said. “Portions of the freeway are at ground level or elevated so we’ll avoid some of the other locations.”

Last year the district hired an outside consultant—ENTRIX, Inc.—to research TNRCC (Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission) records to determine the extent of the contamination and to find out what type of contamination existed.

The consultant also drilled six sites at 40 feet and 15 sites at 15 feet. The shallow borings were more dispersed and targeted soil samples only with the deeper borings providing groundwater samples.

Melton added, “The consultant found hydrocarbons such as benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, total xylenes—it goes on from there, but it pretty much means they found gasoline contamination.”

Later, the district hired another consultant—LCA Environmental—to develop a soil and groundwater management plan on how to work in a contaminated area.

Actually, it’s such a big problem that TxDOT convinced the TNRCC to help with the clean up.

“They are out there right now pumping wells and trying to get rid of the contamination,” Melton added.

But, district priority is to get the storm sewer project back on track, and that will probably mean working with more contamination.

“We still have 700 feet left,” he said. “It’s unlikely that the TNRCC will get this all cleaned up. And, when we start trenching again, it’s likely we’ll find more contamination.”

Melton said the objective for the department is to work within a designed groundwater and soil management plan to keep what’s left of the contamination from washing upstream to the North Fork of the Brazos River.

“The consultant is working on the plan,” he added. “We’ll start trenching again as soon as we have the plan and when we start construction on the freeway.”



Contractors bore holes to check for levels of gasoline contamination on the Fourth Street storm sewer project.