

freeway TODAY

Freeway on schedule for fall letting

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved Lubbock’s 200-page reevaluation environmental document this week, clearing the way for the December letting on the first phase of the Marsha Sharp Freeway.

The document was submitted in September along with public comments garnered from an August 29 public hearing.

Approval of the document means that TxDOT is on schedule to put the project out for bid in December. Construction should begin in late February or early March.

TxDOT was required to submit an additional document to address design changes on the freeway resulting from an extensive reevaluation of five crucial environmental concerns. These included improving local access, adapting to Texas Tech’s Master Land Use Plan, reducing freeway costs, improving traffic flow, and reducing environmental impacts.

“TxDOT had to take a hard look at the original freeway design and decide if it really fit Lubbock’s character. Many aspects of the original design, we felt, needed to change,” explained Davis Melton, TxDOT Lubbock District environmental coordinator.

The emphasis originally was on moving people across town. New emphasis needed to focus on local access, said Melton.

“The downsizing of the West Loop 289 interchange was one way we accomplished this,” added Melton.

The original design called for a four-level interchange consisting of frontage roads, loop and freeway main lanes and

eight flyovers. The new three-level design only has two flyovers and allows TxDOT to place exit and entrance ramps at more favorable locations, improving local access.

Other access improvements included reevaluating the placement of ramps all along the freeway and opening up Oxford Avenue to improve access to the Covenant medical system.

Texas Tech University’s Master Land Use Plan resulted in a number of design changes.

Said Melton, “The university redefined its land use strategy in their 1997 master plan, and we had to accommodate those changes in our freeway design.”

Changes included closing Indiana Avenue and the rerouting of traffic to a new thoroughfare—the Texas Tech Parkway—to be built within the next few years. Also, TxDOT included more pedestrian overpasses and also closed traffic access on Boston Avenue.

Another consideration in making these design changes was freeway cost. Just downsizing the West Loop project saved the state \$14 million, said Melton.

Traffic flow is another area that always bears additional scrutiny. Engineers made design improvements at intersections, and on interchanges and frontage roads to facilitate traffic flow.

Reducing environmental impacts was a top priority with TxDOT engineers. In fact, at the east end the freeway will be elevated to avoid extensive soil and groundwater contamination—oil, gasoline and other solvents. The original design called for depressing the freeway at the east end.

All these changes were made for one

reason, said Melton.

“Our goal is to build a freeway that is sensitive to human and natural environments,” he added.

Right of Way Summary

Parcels	354
Appraisals ordered	354
Appraisals received	354
Approved appraisals	354
Offers made	354
Offers accepted	301
Checks requested	296
Final offer letters sent	50
Condemnations requested	47
Hearings set or held	46
Closed parcels	337
Approved appraisal values	\$130,987,852.00
Approved values closed	\$87,682,764.00
Amount of offers accepted	\$77,298,687.00

Project #1

- \$48 million
- Let in December 2002
- Widening of South Loop 289 from four to six lanes from 34th Street to Slide Road.
- Rebuilding frontage road system under the main lanes.
- Building the 50th Street overpass and extending 50th Street to Frankford.

Project #2

- \$103 million
- Lets in FY 2003
- Building total freeway from Salem Avenue to Avenue L.
- Building 19th St., Quaker Avenue, Fourth Street and Avenue Q interchanges
- 16 bridges and 4 pedestrian overpasses—three at Texas Tech and one at Avenue U

Project #3

- \$54 million
- Lets in FY 2007
- Building 34th Street and Slide Road interchanges
- Build main lanes from Salem to outside West Loop 289, just east of the waterpark
- 8 bridges

Project #4

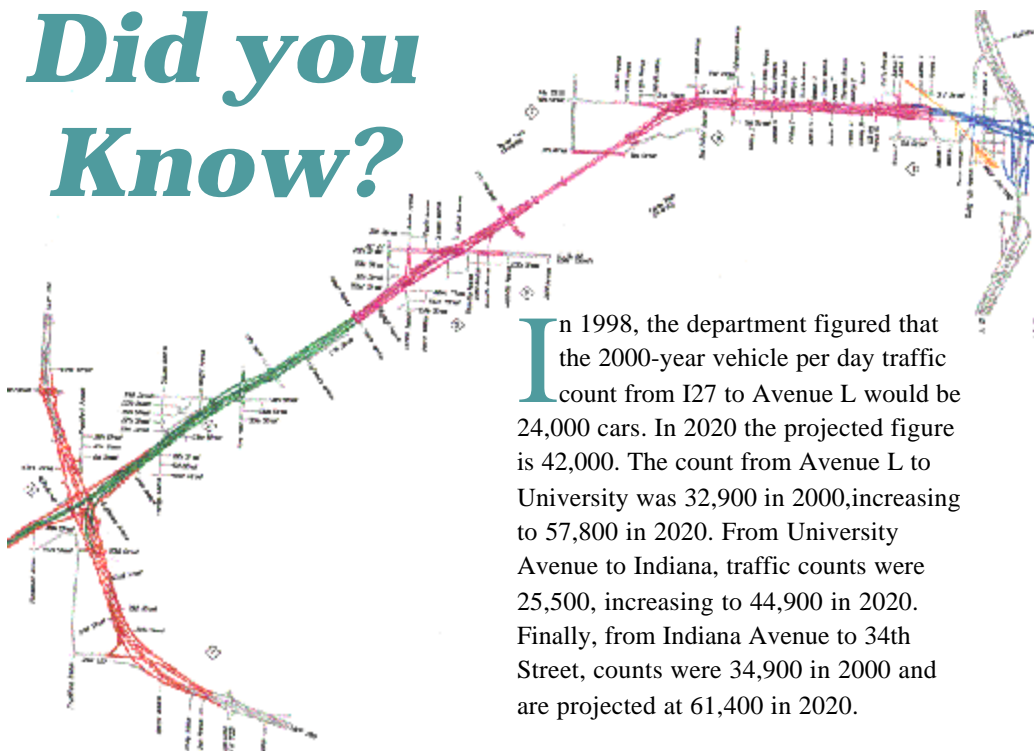
- \$63 million
- Lets in FY 2010
- Building I27 interchange.



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**



Did you Know?



In 1998, the department figured that the 2000-year vehicle per day traffic count from I27 to Avenue L would be 24,000 cars. In 2020 the projected figure is 42,000. The count from Avenue L to University was 32,900 in 2000, increasing to 57,800 in 2020. From University Avenue to Indiana, traffic counts were 25,500, increasing to 44,900 in 2020. Finally, from Indiana Avenue to 34th Street, counts were 34,900 in 2000 and are projected at 61,400 in 2020.

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TxDOT Environmental Specialists Joslyn Tomlinson and Davis Melton inspect grasses at the location where the third freeway storm sewer system will be built. There are four systems that will accommodate water flow from the Marsha Sharp Freeway. Three of these are already in place.



Natural drainage a goal for freeway

A crucial aspect of designing any highway is the drainage system. It's important to address, in the initial design, how the runoff will be handled.

At the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), engineers decided a long time ago that a natural system would be the best way to address drainage on the new Marsha Sharp Freeway scheduled to go to construction this year. In other words, instead of a complicated and expensive pump system, engineers elected to let gravity do the job.

"TxDOT decided a long time ago not to build or maintain a pump system," said Davis Melton, environmental specialist for TxDOT's Lubbock District. "We did build a storm sewer system on a portion of the freeway to handle the runoff. But, we're still relying on nature to get the water to that system."

The drainage system for the freeway is divided into four segments. The first segment runs from just southwest of West Loop 289 to 19th Street

Water from this segment will drain as it always has, via the streets in curb and gutter into area playa lakes.

Runoff water from 19th Street to Avenue U will drain down Avenue U to the city's canyon lakes system. The drainage will follow a new underground storm water sewer system built several

years ago at a cost of \$7 million.

"We still have some work to complete this project," he said.

Work came to a halt several years ago when contractors discovered gasoline contaminated soil and groundwater just 700 feet east of University.

"The Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission (TNRCC) has been working to clean up the site so we can get back in and finish the project," said Melton.

When work resumes, the storm sewer line will extend past University Avenue to 19th Street. In addition to draining water from the freeway, the new system will intercept rising groundwater before it can spill over onto freeway main lanes.

"The design includes a porous system with a special overflow to allow rising ground water to drain into the canyon," he said.

The third drainage system runs just east of Avenue U to Buddy Holly Avenue and down Buddy Holly Avenue to Atzlan Park. This particular drainage project was added later when consultants, after reevaluating water flow from the freeway, decided that the current capacity would not be enough to handle the amount of water draining into the Yellowhouse Canyon. TxDOT will install a new drainage pipe to handle the overflow.

However, not all the water will drain

into the Yellowhouse Canyon, said Melton. A portion will follow a designated route from just east of Buddy Holly Avenue to Mckenzie Park. This fourth and final project is designed so water will enter the North Fork of the Double Mountain Fork of the Brazos River just upstream from where it merges with Blackwater Draw.

In addition, not all of the drainage projects are approved, however. Drainage projects one, two and four were approved in the original Environmental Impact Statement, but project three has yet to receive approval from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). That approval is necessary before the new design can be incorporated into the final freeway plans.

"The department is working on an environmental reevaluation document that includes all the changes that we've made on freeway design since 1995," said Melton. "Hopefully, the FHWA will move quickly on this. We're ready to build the freeway."