



# Need & Purpose & Project Description

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CSJ: 0086-14-065

US 59 (LP 20) Mainlanes Over IH 35/U-P Railroad Line

From: 0.33 Miles West of IH-35

To: 0.160 Miles West of McPherson Rd

Prepared by: Laredo District

Date: January 6, 2016

The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried-out by TxDOT pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated December 16, 2014, and executed by FHWA and TxDOT.

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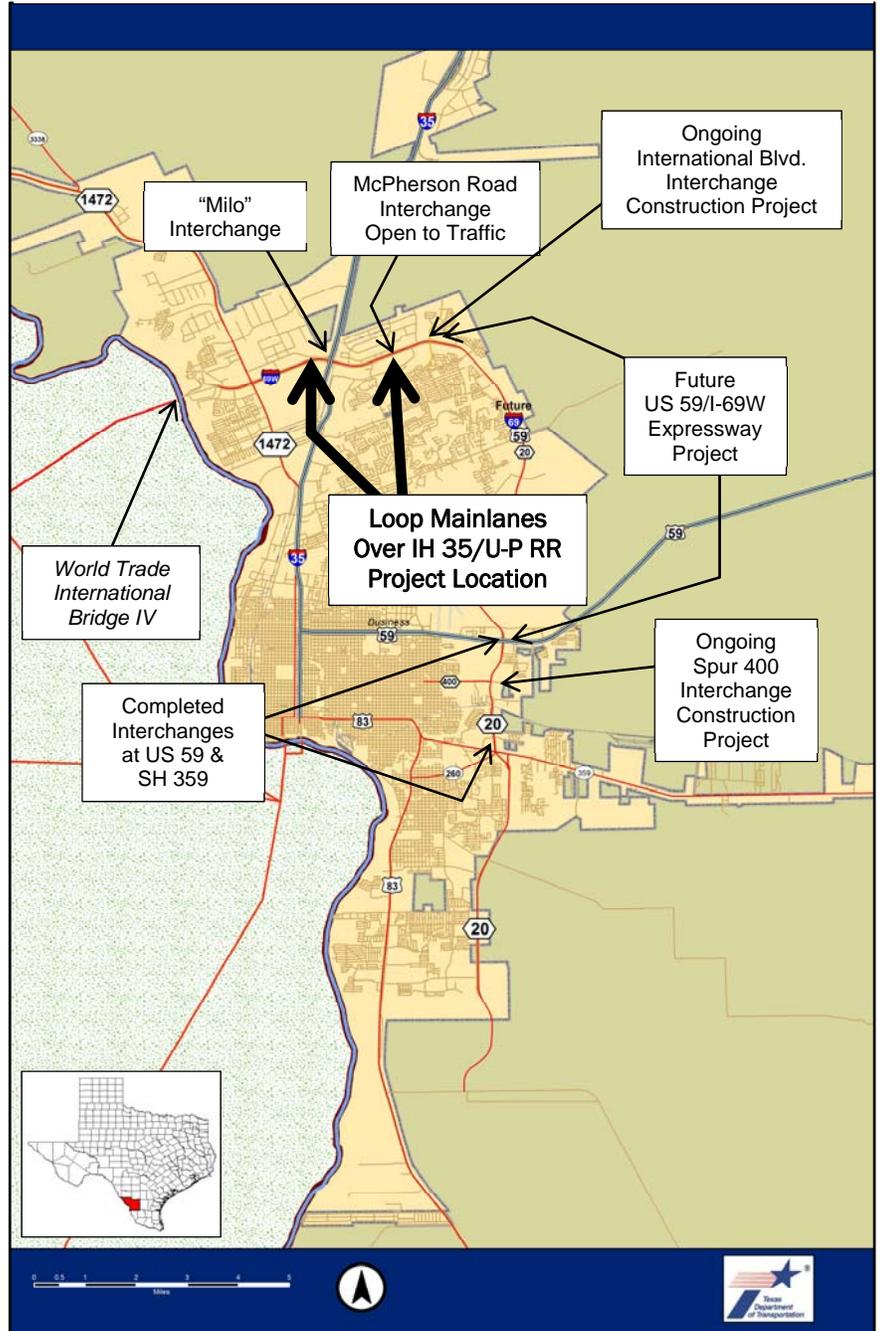
**Purpose & Need and Project Description  
for the Construction of the  
US 59 (Loop 20) Mainlanes over IH 35 and the Union-Pacific Railroad Project  
CSJ: 0086-14-065**

**1. Projects Need and Purpose**

The upgrade of US 59 (previously designated as Loop 20 but now officially designated as US 59 and as a portion of the Future I-69 corridor) is needed due to the increasing levels of congestion along this portion of US 59/Loop 20. In addition, the US 59/Loop 20 roadway (referred to in this document as the Loop) from SH 359 to the entrance of the World Trade International Bridge IV is now designated as a part of the Future I-69W system (I-69W is the western leg of I-69 in south Texas); the official I-69W designation will be applied as this roadway is upgraded to meet urban interstate standards.

The purpose of this project is to construct mainlanes over IH 35 and the adjacent Union-Pacific Railroad line in order to upgrade this portion of the Future I-69W corridor to urban interstate design standards as required by Congressional legislation concerning the I-69 system. In addition, the upgrade of the Loop to interstate standards which includes this project has been identified by TxDOT, the City of Laredo, Webb County and the Webb County-City of Laredo Regional Mobility Authority (WC-CL RMA) as the priority project of this community.

**Figure 1: General Project Location Map (Laredo, Webb County)**



## 2. Project Background Information and Proposed Work

Historically, the Loop was envisioned in the early 1990s to provide another arterial route around the eastern urbanized areas of Laredo to connect the World Trade International Bridge IV to FM 1472, IH-35, US 59, SH 359, and US 83 in south Laredo. As part of this planning vision, the World Trade International Bridge IV received a Presidential Permit to become an international crossing for commercial trucks only. A major interchange at IH 35 (known locally as the "Milo" Interchange) was environmentally cleared by FHWA at that time and which involved the existing IH 35 frontage roads and the IH 35 mainlanes, widening the IH 35 mainlanes over the Loop frontage roads, and constructing eight direct connectors between IH 35 and the Loop. It also included constructing the Loop frontage roads (to pass under the IH 35 mainlanes and the U-P Railroad line) and the Loop mainlanes which would eventually pass over the IH 35 mainlanes and the U-P Railroad line.

The available project files and 1996 aerial photos indicate that the first section of Loop 20 constructed in this area included a two-lane roadway on what is now the west bound frontage road. The interchange at the IH 35 intersection was not in place in 1996 and the Loop 20 roadway connected only to the IH 35 east-side frontage road. At that time, Loop 20 crossed the Union-Pacific Railroad line at-grade which is located on the east side of IH 35 at this location. Starting in approximately 2000, the second (now eastbound) frontage road was constructed along with the IH 35 mainlanes bridges over Loop 20. As part of this project, the Loop 20 frontage roads were constructed under the U-P Railroad line and the IH 35 mainlanes as well as two direct connectors to/from IH 35 to the Loop to the west side of IH 35. While the direct connectors allowed enhanced, uninterrupted access to the western side of the Loop to and from IH 35, the Loop crossing under IH 35 required traffic to go through an intersection with multiple traffic signals, which is the current situation. The excess dirt from the railroad underpass construction was placed between the Loop frontage roads east of IH 35 in anticipation of the eventual construction of the Loop mainlane bridges over IH 35/U-P Railroad, over McPherson Road and over International Boulevard.

The World Trade International Bridge IV, located at the western end of the Loop, opened to traffic in early 2001 and rapidly became the busiest international trade crossing in Texas as well as the overall U.S./Mexico border due to the interstate level of roadways on each side of the border.

In the mid-2000s, the IH 35 mainlanes from the Loop to approximately 5-miles north were widened and the third direct connector (out of a total of eight) that extends from northbound IH 35 to the Loop on west side of IH 35 was constructed.

It should be noted that the proposed Loop mainlanes over IH 35 and the adjacent U-P Railroad as well as interchanges at McPherson Road and International Boulevard were included in the original Milo Interchange design and environmental clearance. However, approximately ten years ago the TxDOT-Laredo District, TxDOT-Environmental Affairs Division and FHWA concluded that implementing any additional phases of the Milo Interchange project would be environmentally studied and cleared as stand-alone Categorical Exclusion projects instead of completing a re-evaluation of the original, early 1990s Milo Interchange Environmental Assessment. Of the original Milo Interchange design, the Loop frontage roads, the widened IH 35 mainlanes and three of the eight direct connectors and the McPherson Road overpass envisioned in the original Milo

Interchange project are in now service. The remaining five direct connectors remain unbuilt at this time. The interchange at International Boulevard is under a construction contract at this time.

Other projects on Loop 20 were undertaken further to the south in order to provide a relief route for the highly congested US 83 (a.k.a. Zapata Highway) in south Laredo. This included extending Loop 20 to approximately 7.5-miles south of the SH 359 intersection and constructing interchanges at US 59, SH 359 and Spur 400. The Spur 400 interchange construction is ongoing at this time.

Loop 20 was designated in February 2014 as part of US 59 as well as a part of the Future I-69 system by the Texas Transportation Commission, TxDOT and FHWA. These designations formally recognized that upgrading the Loop has local, regional, state and national implications. Also in 2014, the Loop from 0.33-mi. west of IH 35 (the western terminus of this project) to the entrance into the World Trade International Bridge IV was officially designated as a portion of I-69W as it was determined that this section meets urban interstate design standards. Because this project corridor is part of the Future I-69W system, federal law indicates that this roadway must be upgraded to interstate standards no later than 2035. As an additional note, the northern portion of the Loop is locally known as Bob Bullock Loop.

Because of these recent changes in the official highway designation and its local name have made references to this roadway confused; therefore, this roadway is referred to in the remainder of this document as the “Loop”.

Current Project Limits. This project’s limits of work are from 0.33-mile west of IH 35 (connecting with the existing I-69W mainlanes) to 0.160-mile west of McPherson Road (connecting to the McPherson Road and ongoing International Boulevard interchange projects).

Proposed Work: The proposed Loop mainlanes would consist of three 12-ft. travel lanes in each direction, 4-ft. inside and 10-ft. outside shoulders and appropriately placed on-off ramps. The mainlanes would be constructed between the existing Loop frontage roads with all work completed within the existing, approximately 300-ft. wide right-of-way. Traffic impacts will be minimal as all substantial work with this project will be on the undeveloped area between the existing frontage roads. This project does not include the construction of any additional direct connectors between the Loop and IH 35. There are no displacements, relocations or Section 4(f)/6(f) within or adjacent to this project.

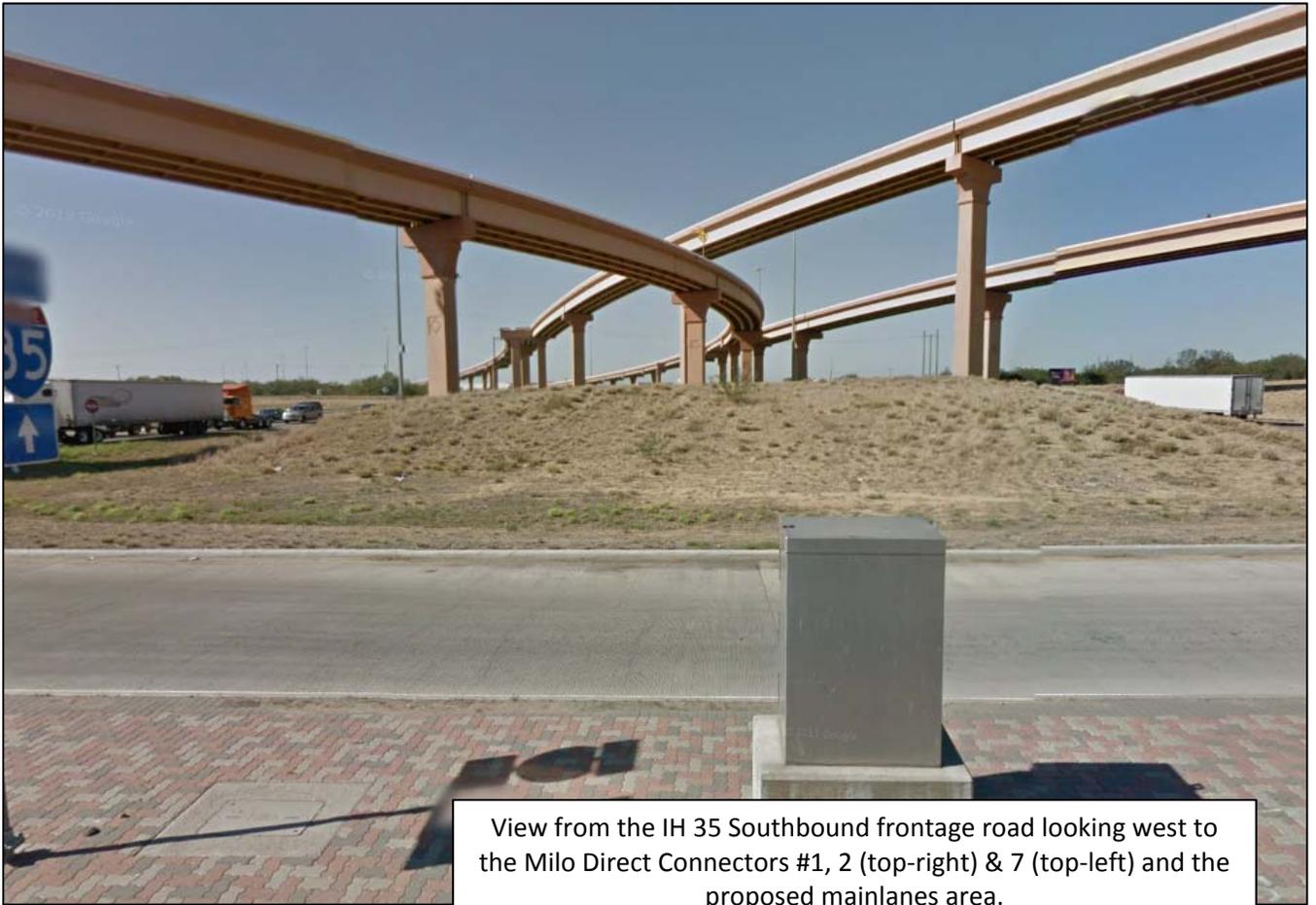
This project would fully integrate with the existing I-69W mainlanes west of IH 35 as well as the McPherson Road interchange that opened to traffic in 2014. It will also integrate with the International Boulevard interchange project that is currently under a construction contract; construction work there is scheduled to start in the near future. Upon completion of these projects, through traffic will have uninterrupted service from International Blvd. to the entrance to the World Trade International Bridge IV. All of these inter-related projects are to be constructed to urban interstate (I-69W) design standards.

Figure 2. Aerial Photo Map (circa 2015)  
 0.33-mi. west of IH 35 to 0.16-mi. west of McPherson Road

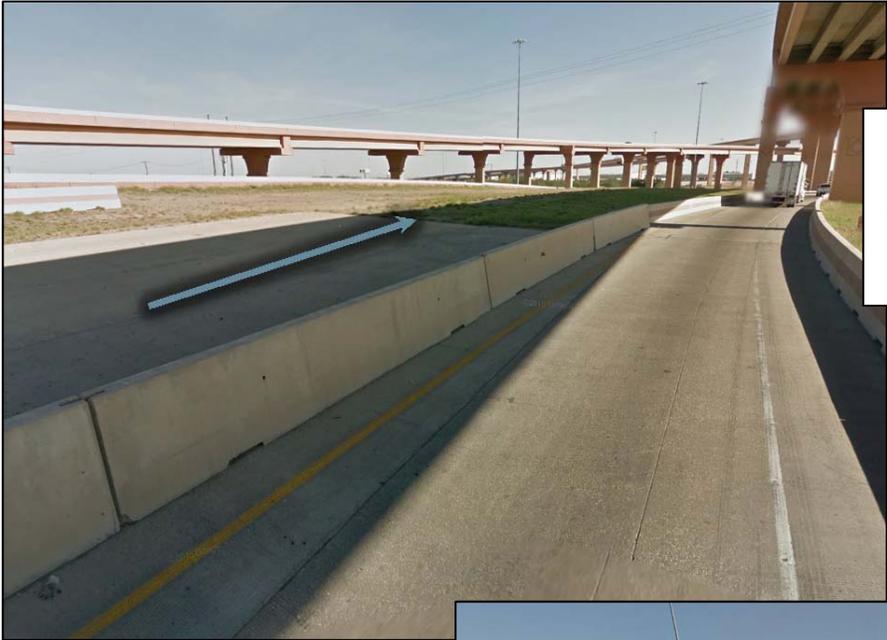




View from Milo Direct Connector #7 looking northeast. The IH 35 Mainlanes and U-P Railroad line that will be bridged by the Loop Mainlanes are visible in the center of this photo. The US 59 Loop frontage road underpasses at the U-P Railroad are also visible. The existing stockpiled dirt to the east of the U-P Railroad line where the overpass approach is to be constructed is also visible in the upper right of this photo.



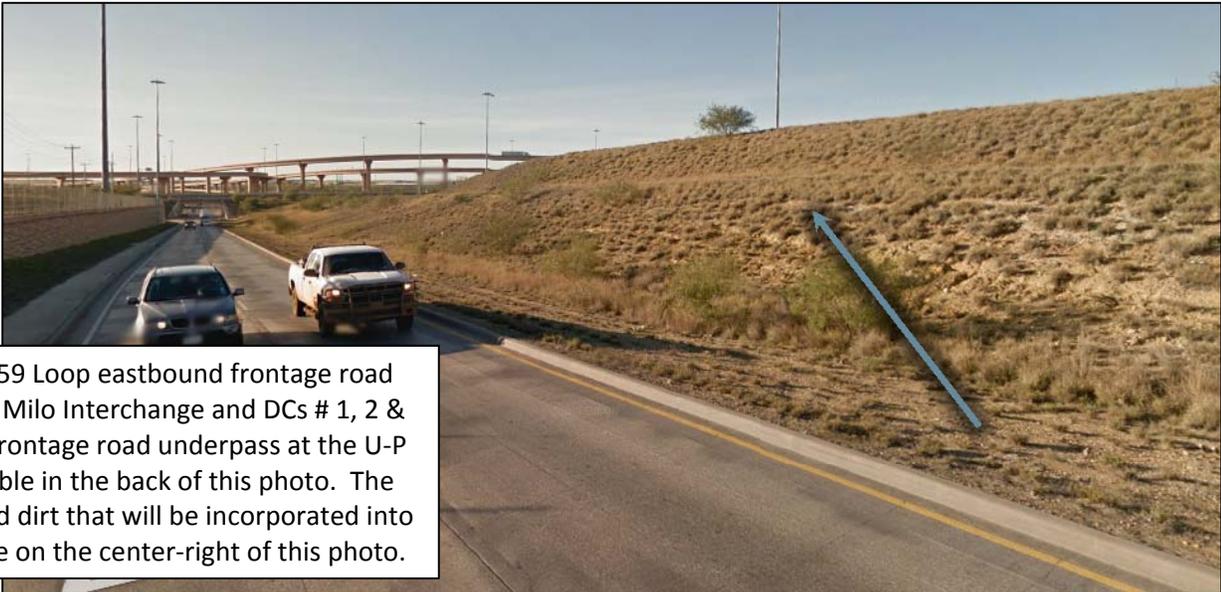
View from the IH 35 Southbound frontage road looking west to the Milo Direct Connectors #1, 2 (top-right) & 7 (top-left) and the proposed mainlanes area.



View from the I-69W/US 59 Loop eastbound frontage road. The eastern end of the I-69W mainlanes (and western terminus of this project) are visible in the center-left of this photo.



View from the IH 35 southbound frontage road looking east at the IH 35 mainlanes that pass over the existing US 59 Loop frontage roads. The U-P Railroad line and US 59 Loop frontage road underpasses are visible in the back of this photo.



View from the US 59 Loop eastbound frontage road looking west at the Milo Interchange and DCs # 1, 2 & 7. The US 59 Loop frontage road underpass at the U-P Railroad line is visible in the back of this photo. The previously stockpiled dirt that will be incorporated into this project is visible on the center-right of this photo.