

# Interim Update Report

## Interstate 69 Corridor Segment Committee 5



The Texas Transportation Commission created the Interstate 69 (I-69) Corridor Advisory Committee and Corridor Segment Committees to assist the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) in the transportation planning process of the I-69 Corridor. Both sets of committees will provide a locally focused, citizen driven basis of planning along the corridor.

**I-69 Advisory Committee:** The I-69 Corridor Advisory Committee (CAC) was created by Minute Order 111294 on March 27, 2008 for the purpose of facilitating and achieving consensus among affected communities and interested parties on desired transportation improvements along the I-69 Corridor. The Advisory Committee studied the future needs of the I-69 Corridor and published their findings and recommendations in *A Citizen's Report on the Current and Future Needs of the I-69 Corridor 2008*.

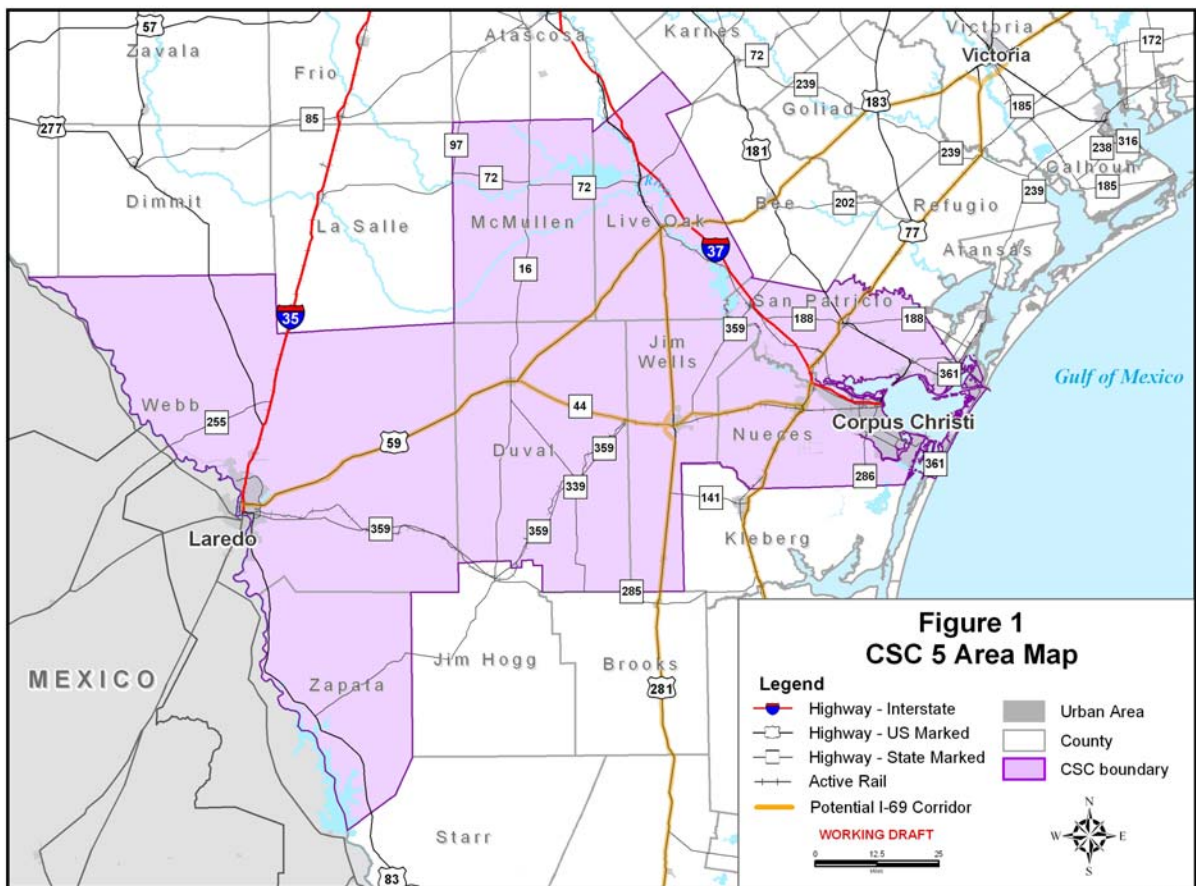
**I-69 Segment Committee 5:** I-69 Corridor Segment Committee 5 (CSC 5) is one of five Segment Committees created by Minute Order 111527 on September 25, 2008 for the purpose of providing input and recommendations on the designated routes of the I-69 Corridor in their areas. The Segment Committees are composed of members representing cities, counties, metropolitan planning

organizations, ports, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, and the Texas Farm Bureau along the I-69 Corridor. The Segment Committees continue to meet and study environmental planning features and plan the best route for their communities. The Segment Committees will report their findings, advice and recommendations to the Texas Transportation Commission and TxDOT's Executive Director.

The area included in CSC 5 is shown in **Figure 1** and includes the counties of Duval, Jim Wells, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, San Patricio, Webb, and Zapata. CSC 5 encompasses portions of the U.S. 59, U.S. 77, U.S. 281 and SH 44 routes. Members of the committee currently include those individuals listed in **Table 1**.

### Interim Committee Update

In September 2010, TxDOT's Executive Director, Amadeo Saenz, spoke with the Chairs of the I-69 Segment Committees about how the process is going, asked that each committee compile an update on their progress and work, and asked that the CSCs identify projects that they currently see as priorities in their areas. This information would be used to update the Texas Transportation Commission on the progress of the CSCs thus far.



**Table 1 – CSC 5 Committee Members (November 2010)**

<u>Member</u>	<u>Appointing Entity</u>
David Ainsworth, Sr.	Corpus Christi MPO
Richard Borchard	Port of Corpus Christi
Arnoldo Cantu	City of Freer
Tim Clower	Nueces County
Ray De Los Santos	City of Alice
Roberto Elizondo	Duval County
Rosalva Guerra	Zapata County
Jim Huff	Live Oak County
Pearson Knolle	Texas Farm Bureau
Nelda Martinez	City of Corpus Christi
Josephine Miller	San Patricio Economic Development Corporation
Rodrigo Ramon, Jr.	City of Robstown
L. Arnold Saenz	Jim Wells County
Sandy Sanders	Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce
Keith Selman	City of Laredo & Laredo Urban Transportation Study Webb County
Terry Simpson*	San Patricio County
Sylvia Steele	City of George West
TBA	McMullen County
TBA	Port of Laredo

\* Committee Chair

### **CSC 5 Update Information**

Using the topics outlined below, members of CSC 5 reported the following information on the current progress of committee efforts.

#### How the Segment Committee process has worked

CSC 5 members report that the meetings have been productive with good presenters and knowledgeable participants. A lot of data has been collected that is specific to local conditions. Information about project engineering and development requirements has been shared which lets the committee know what is possible or must be included.

CSC 5 members add that their segment has come a long way in understanding their role and have worked well with Segment 4, with whom they regularly meet. They also indicated that the committee process has been working well.

#### What has been working well

CSC 5 members communicate that the use of aerial and project mapping and dividing into working groups during meetings is helpful, along with the opportunity to listen and have information flow both ways between committee

members and TxDOT. Additionally, members report that having combined meetings with CSC 4 and 5 is beneficial and appreciate the attendance of railroad and trucking industry representatives at committee meetings so information useful in planning can be shared. The CSC meetings are open to the public and CSC members feel the open meetings and allowing opportunities for public input are beneficial to the process. The CSC members agree that the CSC coordination effort has worked well and that they have accomplished a lot in identifying the transportation problems to be solved as well as the transportation facilities, important destinations, and planning features to consider when developing an I-69 Corridor Program.

#### What can be improved

CSC 5 members acknowledge that having more information on funding would be helpful in order for them to best understand what can be accomplished on the corridor in the future. Members would also like to spend less time repeating issues from previous meetings and on technical matters, such as design and alignment details, that cannot be resolved at this stage of the project development process. The CSC's ability to provide meaningful input could be improved if TxDOT provided further clarification on what can be recommended from an engineering perspective as part of the effort to develop a viable and cost effective I-69 Corridor Program. In locations where relief routes are recommended by the committee, committee members feel it would be helpful to have preliminary alignments for these relief routes.

#### Tasks completed by the Segment Committee

CSC 5 members have reviewed the highways within their segments and collected information about local traffic patterns and issues such as emergency vehicle access. Committee members have also identified choke points, needed relief routes, additional roads and connecting facilities that should be considered, along with problem areas or environmental issues to consider with project planning. Some members communicate that sections of the corridor are very rural and isolated, and applying full federal interstate standards throughout these areas seems to be an unnecessary expense.

#### Helpful Segment Committee activities and exercises

Members of CSC 5 report that listening to other members discuss their needs is a beneficial activity which has prompted them to think about their own issues. Viewing maps with footprints over-laid on top of existing roads being considered for upgrade has been helpful during the conceptual interstate layout exercise because this allowed members to see and understand the impact of converting existing roads to interstates. Small group exercises, such as reviewing conceptual interstate layout maps, have been particularly helpful to the members. Committee members add that small group meetings involving TxDOT staff and committee members from specific local areas within the segment are also beneficial.

### Potential future activities and exercises

Committee members want to have public involvement activities to gain input from members of their communities on their preliminary plans and ideas for I-69 and would like information about funding to better understand the cost for building I-69 in their communities.

### Major challenges and key issues related to developing I-69 with Segment 5

Funding for upgrading the existing roadways to an interstate is consistently mentioned by CSC 5 members as being the major challenge related to developing I-69. Additionally, some members see routes around small towns such as Odem and Refugio as a challenge for future corridor planning. Preserving right of way for future corridor improvements was also cited as a challenge for developing I-69.

### Committee members, engaging the public and their communities in the Segment Committee process

Members of CSC 5 report that they have spoken with individuals in their communities about I-69 and their committee's activities. Specifically, members provide reports on CSC 5 activities to economic development and chamber of commerce boards, government leaders and transportation committees in their local areas. Other members have specifically invited members of their communities to attend CSC meetings, including trucking and rail industry representatives. It was acknowledged by CSC members that meeting with local organizations outside of CSC meetings is important when preparing for future Segment Committee meetings. The CSC members agreed that this localized CSC outreach should continue over the course of developing an I-69 Corridor Program.

### Additional helpful public engagement and involvement activities

CSC 5 members recommend having public meetings, open house sessions or other public outreach activities. Members would also like additional media coverage with local papers, radio and television stations.

### **Preliminary CSC 5 Prioritization**

CSC 5 members prepared a preliminary list of project priorities as a "snap shot" of current conditions which reflect interim priorities at this stage of the CSC process. The priorities are subject to change through further work of and review by the CSC. These results are not a commitment by TxDOT to advance priorities as currently ordered. The priorities may be changed in the future based on additional input, environmental approvals, and funding availability.

To develop the initial priorities, committee members independently ranked their top sections. The initial priorities were collectively discussed by the committee and members were afforded opportunities to submit a revised ranking of

their preliminary priorities based upon the results of the discussion.

The current CSC 5 priority sections are shown in **Figure 2**. Most priority sections focused on relief routes for Freer, Alice (SH 44), Odem and San Diego, along with projects on U.S. 59 from the border to east of Laredo. Specifically, the following sections are currently noted as preliminary priorities for CSC 5:

- U.S. 59/SH 44 Relief Route at Freer
- SH 44 Relief Route at Alice
- U.S. 59 upgrade and connector from the border to east of Laredo
- SH 44 Relief Route at San Diego
- U.S. 77 Relief Route at Odem

### **Prioritization Rationale**

In establishing their preliminary priorities, CSC 5 members noted a number of factors they consider as rationale for selecting their priority segments. Rationale mentioned most often by committee members includes:

- Serves High Truck Volumes
- Improves Travel Times
- Multi-modal Connections (Air, Sea, Rail)
- Supports Economic Growth
- Addresses Safety Concerns
- Available Room to Expand Highway
- Serves High Traffic Volumes
- Serves Emergency Evacuation

### **Next Steps**

As previously noted, the current priorities are preliminary and may be refined as the committee continues its efforts. Upcoming work of CSC 5 is anticipated to include the following activities:

- Reviewing order of magnitude cost estimates and funding opportunities
- Identifying limits of potential projects, and refining the CSC project priorities
- Discussing and planning public involvement activities

