



US 77 Woodsboro/Refugio Route Study Stakeholder Working Group Meeting #3 Meeting Notes

Date: October 18, 2018

Time: 5 p.m. - 6 p.m.

Location: Refugio Elementary School
601 Crockett Street
Refugio, Texas

Purpose: To present the findings of the route study to the Stakeholder Working Group (SWG), discuss a preferred approach recommended by TxDOT, and to see if it would be possible to reach a consensus on whether the SWG can recommend to TxDOT that the project should be advanced into the environmental/schematic process.

Attendees: See sign in sheets
(SWG, public and staff)

Discussion:

1. Welcome/Opening Remarks

Judge Robert Blaschke, Refugio County

Judge Blaschke opened the meeting and welcomed the SWG and the general public in attendance. Judge Blaschke reviewed the agenda with the attendees. He stressed that the study is coming to a critical juncture and that it is “decision time” for how the community wants to plan for the new interstate.

2. Presentation of Study Findings (see presentation slides for additional context)

Dustin Elliott, Project Manager, HNTB

Dustin provided the SWG with an overview of the study, including

- Purpose and Need for the study
- I-69 System in Texas
- How the Stakeholder Working Group has participated and contributed to the study
- Conceptual Route Development
- Traffic projections
- Public Engagement
- Key themes and concerns expressed by the public at the June 21, 2018 open house
 - Remove the West Route option along O’Brien Street as an option

- Move the West Route option farther west
- Loss of property tax base with the West Route option
- Inadequate comparable replacement housing if the West Route option were selected
- Potential loss of revenue for existing businesses and dim prospects for new businesses along existing US 77 with a relief route
- It may be a challenge financially for the Town of Refugio to extend its street network to connect with the East Route option
- Large-scale agricultural operations on the east side of the Town of Refugio that would be impacted by the East Route option

In response to these concerns, Dustin explained that the project team developed two conceptual route options in the vicinity of the Town of Refugio:

- Modified West Route Option: This route option would extend farther west around the County Fairgrounds complex. It would avoid most of the residences and businesses on the west side of Refugio. It increases the length of the option by approximately 1/3 compared to the West Route option.
- Modified East Route Option: This route option would be closer towards the town compared to the East Route option. Such a shift may make it more palatable for the town to extend some of its streets to connect to an interstate highway and provide motorists an opportunity to access the town's services and businesses.

Clarifying note: These modified conceptual route options were developed to the same level of design detail as the East, Central and West conceptual route options. This may not have mentioned in the presentation.

3. Preferred Approach and Overview of Environmental Schematic Process (see presentation slides for additional context)

Paula Sales-Evans, Transportation Planning and Development Director, TxDOT Corpus Christi District

Paula explained that based on the study findings and TxDOT's consideration of the feedback received during the open house comment period, TxDOT's preferred approach is

Refugio area

- Move forward into the environmental/schematic phase
- Develop a route within a broader Eastside Corridor
- Remove from further consideration as route options:
 - Central Option
 - West of US 77 in the Town of Refugio, Including West and Modified West Options

Woodsboro area

- Upgrade existing US 77 from south of Refugio to south of Woodsboro to interstate standards as conceptualized in the route study
- Move forward into the environmental/schematic phase either as part of the Refugio project or as a stand-alone project

Paula then provided an overview of the numerous tasks involved in the environmental/schematic process to identify a preferred alternative and reach an environmental decision. She explained that this route study provides the basis for the environmental/schematic process as the purpose and need has been defined, the community has been engaged in informing TxDOT of its concerns and opportunities, environmental and community features have been identified and the typical highway section and potential route options have been conceptualized. TxDOT expects and wants the community to remain engaged in this next project development phase.

Facilitated Discussion

Judge Robert Blaschke, Refugio County and Mitzi Ellison, Nancy Ledbetter Associates

At the conclusion of Paula's presentation, Judge Blaschke opened up the discussion with the SWG as to their thoughts about the preferred approach. The following is a general description of individual group member remarks and questions:

- Refugio County Commissioner Gary Bourland: In the Refugio area, focus developing the interstate highway on the east side of the town
- Janice Sykora, Woodsboro Independent School District (WISD) Superintendent: When would construction begin?
(Paula answered about 6-8 years as there are numerous activities related to environmental clearance, right-of-way, utility adjustments, design, and obtaining construction funding before construction could begin. No other phase of project development has been funded)
- Lee Lewis:
 - This is the first time seeing the two new route options and there hasn't been enough information shared with the stakeholder working group to make an informed decision. All route options should be retained as alternatives moving forward.
 - With the East route option, there are concerns regarding emergency response and public safety that have not been fully explored as part of this study.
 - In the second stakeholder working group meeting, the West route option was noted on the matrix as the highest performing in a number of the purpose and need objectives.
- Hoss Whitt, Refugio County Memorial Hospital: TxDOT is just going to build the least expensive option
- Melissa Gonzales, Refugio Independent School District (RISD) Superintendent: RISD is opposed to the west route given its proximity to Refugio Elementary School.

- Refugio Mayor Wanda Sykes and Tina Bonam, Refugio Travel Center Manager expressed concerns about the diversion of traffic from existing US 77 and what that could do to economic viability.

Judge Blaschke asked the SWG if there was general agreement in recommending TxDOT move this project forward into the environmental/schematic process. There was general agreement on that point.

TxDOT Corpus Christi District Engineer Valente Olivarez stated that the route study process was not the end of public involvement for the project, but rather just the beginning. He encouraged the attendees and community in general to remain engaged in public involvement activities in the environmental/schematic phase and throughout the project development process.

SWG member Dr. Tim Rainey suggested the judge conduct an informal straw poll regarding what conceptual route option or area of Refugio that each member favored. Judge Blaschke agreed and the results were:

East-13

Central-2

West-0

*Two members abstained

**Noted on the flip chart was a comment (*to paraphrase*) to continue studying multiple alternatives – 2 people polled for more study

4. Closing Remarks

Judge Robert Blaschke, Refugio County

Judge Blaschke thanked the SWG for their involvement and insights to inform the route study. He also thanked the general public for their interest in the study and their community. He urged all of the attendees to work toward a community vision that will help future generations and that the future interstate is “our highway” and we have to plan for it.

Attachments:

- Agenda
- Sign-in sheets (stakeholders, public and staff)
- Presentation slides
- 10/19/18 e-mail from SWG member Dr. Tim Rainey



AGENDA

US 77 Woodsboro/Refugio Route Study
Stakeholder Working Group Meeting
Thursday, October 18, 2018
5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Refugio Elementary School

1. Welcome/Opening Remarks – *Refugio County Judge Robert Blaschke*
2. Presentation of Study Findings – *Dustin Elliott, HNTB and Paula Sales-Evans, TxDOT*
3. Overview of Environmental/Schematic Process – *Paula Sales-Evans, TxDOT*
4. Stakeholder Working Group Facilitated Discussion
Facilitated by: Refugio County Judge Robert Blaschke and Mitzi Ellison, Nancy Ledbetter Associates
5. Closing Remarks and Adjourn – *Refugio County Judge Robert Blaschke*

TxDOT and consultant staff will be available afterwards to answer questions regarding the study.



SIGN-IN SHEET
 US 77 Woodsboro/Refugio Route Study
 Stakeholder Working Group Meeting
 Thursday, Oct. 18, 2018
 5 to 6 p.m.
 Refugio Elementary School



Driven by Texans

Name	Affiliation	Address	Phone Number	Email Address	Initials
Brenda Belasquez	Manager, Fast Break	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
Robert Blaschke	Judge, Refugio County				RLB
Gary Bourland	Commissioner, Pct. #3, Refugio County				GB
Steve Connor	Manager, H.E.B., Refugio Store				
Enrique Diaz	Police Chief, Town of Refugio				[REDACTED]
Wanda Dukes	Mayor, Town of Refugio				WD
Juanita Froudiger Tina Bonam	Manager, Refugio Travel Center				TB
Melissa Gonzales	Superintendent, Refugio ISD				MG
Pinky Gonzales	Sheriff, Refugio County				PG
Mario Hernandez	Manager, Stripes, Refugio Store				
Wes Holmstrom	Cox Holmstrom				WH
Lee Lewis	O'Connor-Braman				LL
Amanda Mendoza	Manager, Woodforest Bank				AM
Irene Muguerza	President, Refugio County Chamber of Commerce				IM
Don Pullin	Fire Chief, Refugio Volunteer Fire Department				DP
Dr. J. Tim Rainey					JTR
Lee Riemenschneider	Fire Chief, Woodsboro Volunteer Fire Department				LR
Kay Roach	Mayor, Town of Woodsboro				KR
Andy Rooke Becky Rooke	F.B. Rooke and Sons				AR
Janice Sykora	Superintendent, Woodsboro ISD				JS
Hoss Whitt	Refugio County Memorial Hospital	HW			
Roxann Wiginton	Woodsboro Farmer's Co-Op				



PUBLIC SIGN-IN SHEET
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Name	Affiliation
Megan Garza	home owner
Jim Henke	home owner
Claude & Elena Freeman	home owner
Caleb Vela	homeowner
Kenneth Wright	homeowner
Marsha Wright	homeowner
Tiffany McWilliams	Store manager
Rita Trojcek	Homeowner
Gerald Morgan	Home owner
Allen Trojcek	HOME OWNER
Dee Anna Cobb	Home Owner / Business owner
Jamie Steele	Homeowner
Deb Bauer	City Attorney
Carla Thomas	Homeowners
Dyanne Thomas	Homeowners
Karen A Watts	Mayor Pro Tem - Refugio



PUBLIC
STAFF SIGN-IN SHEET
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Driven by Texans

Name	Organization	Email Address	Initials
Maria Gomez			
RUBY GARCIA	HOMEOWNER / DISTRICT CLERK	[REDACTED]	RGA
Estelita Jimenez		[scribble]	
Rose & Rey	HOME OWNER	[scribble]	
Liz Sudd	Home owner	[scribble]	
Shwela Paynter	HOMEOWNER	[scribble]	
Jeff	/	[scribble]	JR
Jim Shepherd		[scribble]	
Janelle Shepherd		[scribble]	
JERRY STRATMANN	HOME OWNER	[scribble]	
Dale Skrobarek		[scribble]	
BRYAN MCGEE	HOME OWNER	[scribble]	
ASHLEY MCGEE	HOME OWNER	[scribble]	
		[scribble]	
		[scribble]	



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Name	Affiliation
John S. Wood JOHN S. WOOD	MRC
Dorlenton Cox	
Valerie Crutchfield	
Tina Sledge	
Hugh & Tracey Gregorczyk	home owner
Shini Myer	home owner
Burt Feidman	home owner
Jim Rauter	home owner
RICHARD JANKOVSKY	resident
Sage DeLeon	LNY
Alexandra Williamson	Property Owner
Lenny Williamson	
Paula A. Marchak	Property Owner
Derm Whin	home owner



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Name	Affiliation
O. G. RAVBLE	HOME OWNER
Darren Drake	Home owner
Curtis Drake	Home Owner
Ryan Linney	Home owner
Lisa Heming	Homeowner, Refugio ISD
Cy Bar	Land Owner
Shannon Hendley	homeowner
Stacy Hendley	"
PAUL HEARD	LAND OWNER
VAN HUSEMAN	" "
Robbie Thomas	Land Owner
Cynthia Strauch	Homeowner, RISD, land owner
Jo Williams	homeowner, RISD
Malaise Williams	Risd,
Al RAE Huseman	land owner
Kate and Sandy Kepke	Home Owner



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Name	Organization	Email Address	Initials
Roger Beall, P.E.	TxDOT – Transportation Planning & Programming	[REDACTED]	
Rickey Dailey	TxDOT – Corpus Christi District		RD
Dustin Elliott, P.E.	HNTB		DE
Mitzi Ellison	NLA		ME
Robert Isassi, P.E.	TxDOT – Corpus Christi District		RI
Steve Linhart, AICP	TxDOT – Transportation Planning & Programming		SL
Valente Olivarez, Jr., P.E.	TxDOT – Corpus Christi District		VO
Amy Redmond	TxDOT – Transportation Planning & Programming		
Rafael Riojas, P.E.	HNTB		RAR
Paula Sales-Evans, P.E.	TxDOT – Corpus Christi District		PSE
Will Smithson	HNTB		
Elizabeth Vermillion	HNTB		
Victor Vourcos, P.E.	TxDOT – Corpus Christi District		VEV
Bridget Hinze Weber	NLA		BW
Sean Wray	HNTB		



STUDY FINDINGS

US 77 Woodsboro/Refugio Route Study
Stakeholder Working Group Meeting



Study Timeline and Milestones

- Refugio County Commission unanimously approved Resolution 2016-R-14 in 2016, requesting TxDOT conduct a route study in the Woodsboro/Refugio area
- Began the study in January 2017
- Study placed on hiatus in August 2017 due to Hurricane Harvey
- Study restarted in January 2018
- Open house conducted June 21, 2018 in Refugio
- Final route study report will be published this fall to conclude the study

The need and purpose of the US 77 Woodsboro / Refugio Route Study is to identify US 77 route options that would provide a continuous access-controlled facility that meets interstate standards for future I-69E route designation; improve safety for local through traffic; improve mobility, access, and connectivity; and enhance economic vitality.

US Highway 77 Characteristics in the Study Area

- Designated Hurricane Evacuation Route from south of Woodsboro to US 183 in Refugio
- Highway is on the Texas Highway Freight Network
- 4-lane divided highway from Woodsboro to south of Refugio
 - Posted speed is 75mph and steps down to 55 mph in Woodsboro
- 5-lane principal arterial roadway with center turn lane, signalized intersections and extensive access points in Refugio (Posted speed is 35mph)
- 4-lane divided highway from Houston Street in Refugio to the north
- Highway does not meet interstate standards

Issues Raised by the Stakeholder Working Group

- Additional needs identified by the stakeholder working group at the May 2017 meeting
 - Access to emergency services/hospital
 - Buses to access schools
 - Access to businesses and economic hubs (particularly for trucks entering/exiting the Woodsboro Farmers Cooperative facility in Woodsboro, especially during peak harvest from mid-June to August)
 - Maintain economic viability (concern about small towns being bypassed and losing business)

Traffic Projections

- Existing Conditions

- Average daily traffic between 14,000 and 20,000 vehicles per day
- Current truck usage is higher (22% to 31%) than the statewide average (21.5%)

- Forecasted Conditions

- Traffic along US 77 in study area is projected to increase approximately 80% by 2040
- Truck traffic in the area is anticipated to almost double by 2040
- Mobility will be degraded through Refugio



- Stakeholder Working Group
 - Chaired by Refugio County Judge Robert Blaschke
 - Comprised of elected officials, business representatives and private citizens in the study area
 - To inform TxDOT about community issues and opportunities for consideration in the study
 - Three meetings
 - May 31, 2017: Study overview and discussion of concerns/opportunities
 - April 26, 2018: Review of conceptual route options
 - October 18, 2018: Presentation of study findings

Community Engagement

- Presentations by TxDOT to Elected Officials
 - Refugio County Commissioners Court March 13, 2018
 - Town of Woodsboro June 5, 2018
 - Town of Refugio June 12, 2018
- Meeting with west side Refugio neighborhood residents June 12, 2018
- Open House June 21, 2018

Conceptual Route Options



Modified Route Options In Response to Open House Comments

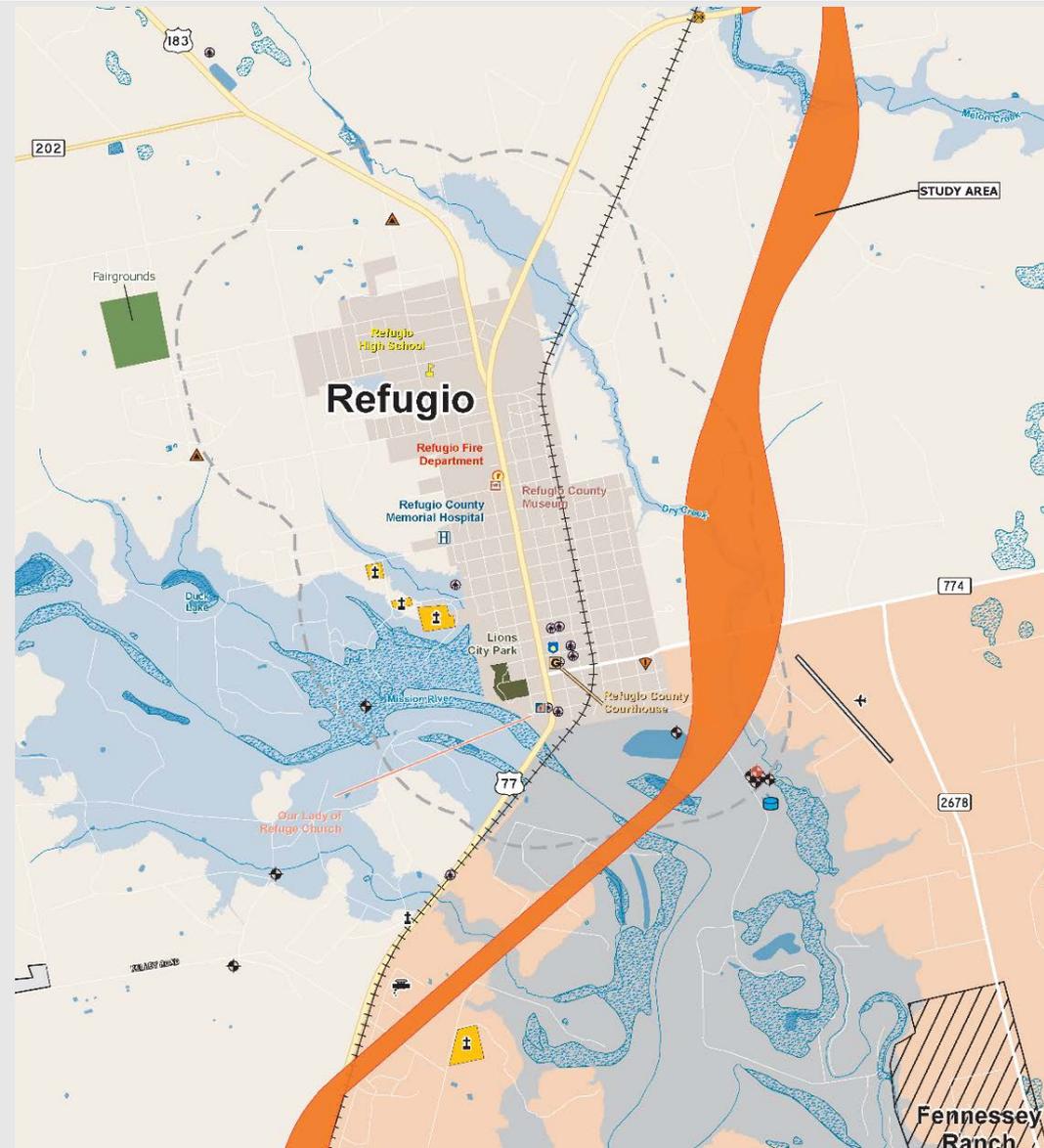
- Route Modifications
 - Modified West Route moved west of Fairgrounds Road to avoid homes and businesses
 - Modified east route moved in closer to Refugio for improved access



PREFERRED APPROACH

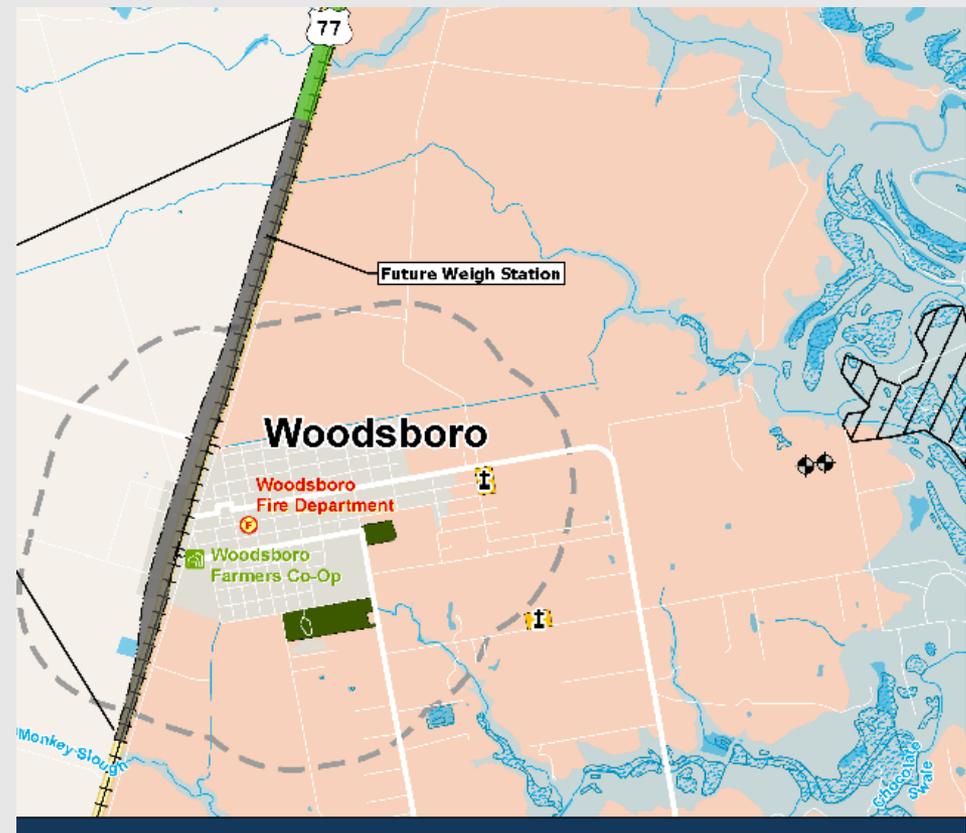
Preferred Approach to Develop I-69E in the Study Area

- Move forward into the environmental/schematic phase
- Refugio area:
 - Develop a route within a broader Eastside Corridor
 - Remove from further consideration as route options:
 - Central Option
 - West of US 77 in the Town of Refugio, Including West and Modified West Options



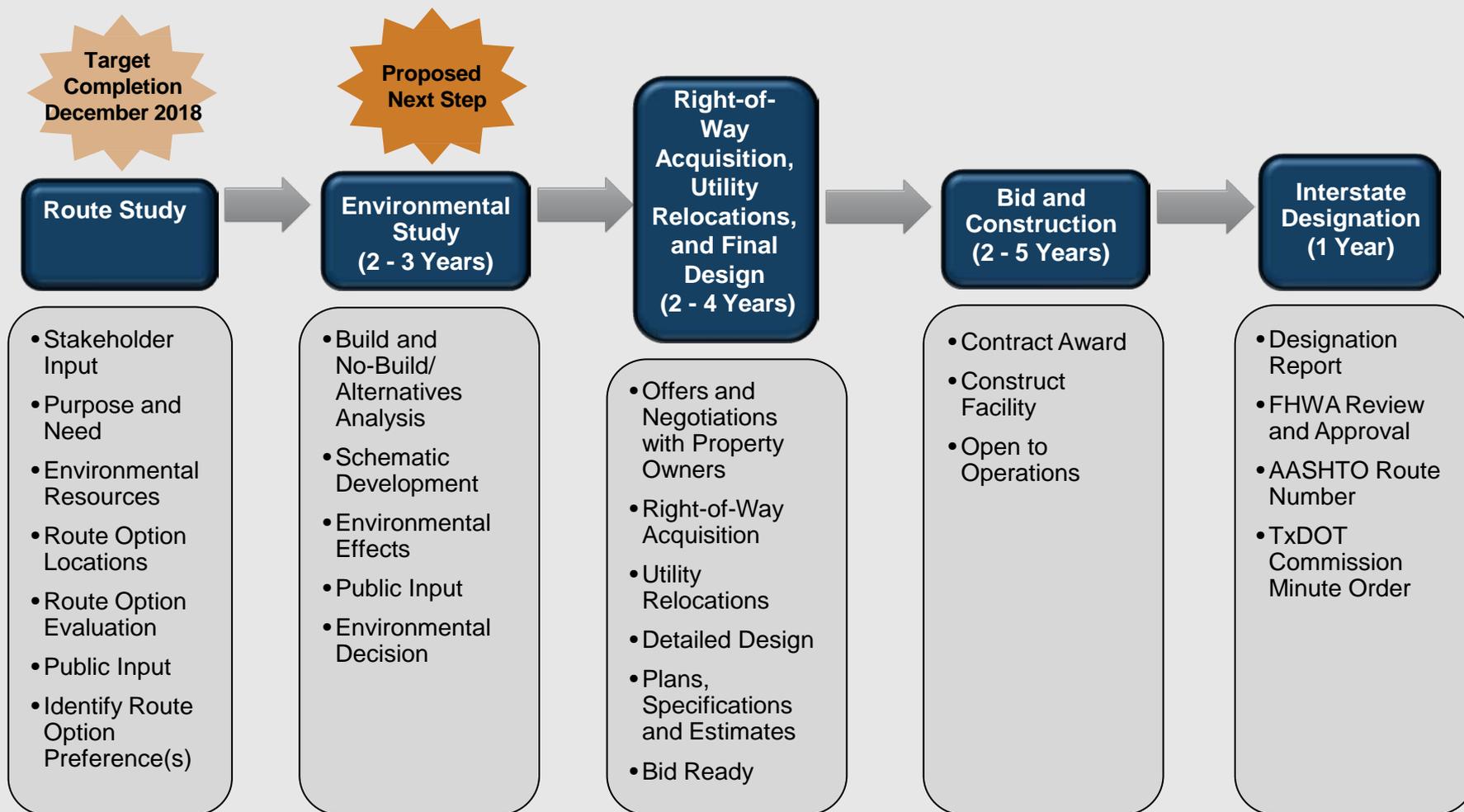
Preferred Approach to Develop I-69E in the Study Area

- In the Woodsboro area
 - Upgrade existing US 77 from south of Refugio to south of Woodsboro to interstate standards as conceptualized in the route study.
 - Move forward into the environmental/schematic phase, either as part of the Refugio project or as a stand-alone project.



OVERVIEW OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY/SCHEMATIC PROCESS

Project Development Process Timeline



The Project Development Process timeline shown is preliminary and based on available funding.

Overview of the Environmental Study/Schematic Process

- As TxDOT will likely use federal funding for project construction, an environmental impact analysis is conducted to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act or “NEPA”.
- This route study will provide the basis for the environmental/schematic process
 - Purpose and Need
 - Conceptual Build Alternatives and Typical Section
 - Public input
 - Environmental and community features
- Alternatives are developed and evaluated for their potential environmental impacts, both adverse and beneficial.
- Build alternatives should be defined enough to determine basic requirements such as required drainage structures, right of way (ROW), business or home relocations, and major utility conflicts.

Overview of the Environmental Study/Schematic Process

- Resource categories characterized and evaluated typically include, but not limited to: noise, air quality, natural resources, historic and archaeological resources, socioeconomics, and hazardous materials.
- There will be opportunities for the public to review and comment during the environmental/schematic process.
- An environmental document will be prepared describing the alternatives, affected environment, environmental impacts and potential mitigation.
- A Notice of Availability is published to inform the public and interested parties that documents are available for review and where to obtain them.
- TxDOT considers the feedback received during the review period and renders an environmental decision.
- The process is expected to take approximately 2-3 years to complete.

STAKEHOLDER WORKING GROUP FACILITATED DISCUSSION

Steve Linhart

From: J Tim Rainey [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, October 19, 2018 12:21 PM
To: 'Judge Blaschke'; 'Gary Bourland'; 'Connor,Steve'; 'Mayor Dukes'; 'Melissa Gonzales, RISD Superintendent'; 'Sheriff Pinky Gonzales'; 'Lee Lewis'; 'Amanda Mendoza'; 'Irene Mugerza'; 'Andy Rooke'; 'Mario Hernandez'; 'Hoss Whitt'; 'Wes Holmstrom'; 'Enrique Diaz'; 'Roxann Wiginton'; 'Kay Roach, Woodsboro Mayor'; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Cc: 'Town of Refugio'; 'Kay Roach, Woodsboro Mayor'; Roger Beall; Amy Redmond; Victor E. Vourcos; Robert Isassi; Paula Sales-Evans; Amanda Longoria; 'L Wright'; 'Dustin Elliott'; 'Mitzi Ellison'; Steve Linhart; 'Tim Delaney'
Subject: RE: US 77 Woodsboro/Refugio Route Study - Stakeholder Working Group meeting #3

This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Fellow citizens of Refugio county.

I kept my mouth shut at the meeting purposely to help Judge Blaschke keep on track. BTW, I think he does an GREAT job overall, and I admire his ability to run the meetings and the county.

In contrast, I'm again amazed at the disingenuity of TxDot. Again, these people are dangerous. Anytime a group, organization, an individual makes a decision that has to be reversed in a court of law to stop people from dying is dangerous. TxDot's indefensible decision NOT to put a four way stop at the intersection of Tx 188 and State 35 and reflects the overall and continuing incompetence of the people representing TxDot. End of argument.

I'm watching TxDot try to make decisions that will affect this community of Refugio County for 100 years and more in the future. Read: Judge Blaschke touched on the fact that we will ALL be long gone and the decisions we are making today will affect our descendants. That is a huge responsibility.

TxDot is dithering over what will be a miniscule bump in the financial landscape over the next century, trying to save the federal government money, rather than looking at the larger implications. I felt like the representatives of TxDot were holding their breath hoping that nobody would notice preserving the Mary Rhodes pipeline running on the East boundaries of the municipality of Refugio as if it were some sacred, historical landmark.

We need an answer to the obvious question: If we dug up/moved/abandoned/replaced the pipeline serving Corpus Christi, what would it cost to place I 69 where it belongs, on the outskirts of Refugio?

I am working on a meeting agenda with TxDOT and I plan to forward it to the members once it's finalized.

It is extremely important that we continue our work together on this route study and all future planning efforts.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanks,
Bobby

Robert Blaschke

Refugio County Judge
808 Commerce St., Rm 104
Refugio, TX 78377
O: (361) 526-4434
F: (361) 526-5100



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