



Notice

Draft Environmental Impact Statement Available for Public Review and Public Hearing

State Highway (SH) 68

From Interstate (I)-2/United States Highway (US) 83 to I-69C/US 281

CSJs: 3629-01-001, -002, -003

Hidalgo County, Texas

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), as the lead agency, is proposing to construct State Highway (SH) 68 from I-2/US 83 to I-69C/US 281 in Hidalgo County, Texas. This notice advises the public that a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) is available for public review on March 21, 2018 and that TxDOT will be conducting a public hearing on the proposed project. The hearing will be held on April 5, 2018 at the Donna North High School located at 7250 N. Val Verde Road, Donna, TX 78537. Displays will be available for viewing at 5:00 p.m. with the formal hearing starting at 6:00 p.m. The purpose of the hearing is to present the recommended preferred alternative and to receive public comment on the proposed project. This hearing will be conducted in accordance with Chapter 26 of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code and will allow the public the opportunity to review the project details as they relate to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listed Louisiana – Rio Grande Canal Company System (also known as the HCID #2).

The proposed SH 68 is currently described in the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Transportation Plan as a 4-lane divided rural highway facility with the potential for main lanes and overpasses. The project is being pursued as a non-toll facility. The proposed project would construct SH 68, a new north-south highway consisting of two northbound and two southbound frontage roads with future mainlanes and overpasses extending from I-2/US 83 to I-69C/US 281. The total length of the proposed project is approximately 22 miles and would require approximately 1,100 acres of right-of-way (ROW). Cities and communities within the study area include the cities of Alamo, Pharr, Donna, Edinburg, and San Juan; and the communities of Faysville, Hargill, Doolittle, Cesar Chavez, San Carlos, La Blanca, Nurillo, Muniz, Lopezville, and North Alamo. The purpose of the SH 68 project is to accommodate population growth and higher traffic volumes, while relieving the burden on the limited number of existing north-south roadways, and provide an alternate north-south evacuation route during emergency events.

The proposed frontage roads would consist of two 12-foot wide lanes in each direction, with 4-foot wide inside shoulders and 8-foot wide outside shoulders. The future mainlanes would consist of two 12-foot wide lanes in each direction, with 4-foot wide inside shoulders and 10-foot wide outside shoulders. Potential mainlane overpasses would usually be located at major roadway crossings. The termini at I-2/US 83 and I-69C/US 281 would include proposed connections to existing frontage roads and proposed direct connector ramps to and from existing mainlanes. Funding has been secured for Phase I of the project which includes the construction of a new four-lane divided rural highway facility from I-2/US 83 to FM 1925. Funding for future phases has not been determined; subsequently, SH 68 would be constructed in several phases, as funding becomes available. 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.

The proposed project would be constructed in a 350-foot typical right-of way (ROW) width, with up to 400 feet of ROW needed at proposed grade separations. The proposed project would displace an estimated 102 residences and eight businesses. Information about the TxDOT Relocation Assistance Program, benefits and services for displacees, as well as information about the tentative schedules for ROW acquisition and construction, can be obtained from the TxDOT district office at the address listed below. Relocation assistance is available for displaced persons and businesses.

The proposed project would impact approximately 140 acres of 100-year mapped floodplains, approximately 4 acres of mapped National Wetland Inventory features, and potentially result in Section 4(f) *de-minimis* impacts to the Donna irrigation district (ID) and the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listed Hidalgo County Irrigation District (HCID) #2. It is anticipated that the Donna ID crossings and the NRHP-listed HCID #2 crossings would all be bridged and completely spanned and therefore likely pose no direct adverse effects to the NRHP-listed and assumed NRHP-eligible IDs under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The draft EIS, maps showing the project location and design, and other information relative to the project will be available for review on March 21, 2018, Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. at the TxDOT Pharr District Office located at 600 W. Interstate 2, Pharr, TX 78577-1231, the SH 68 Project Office located at 4711 S. Alamo Road, Suite 106, Edinburg, TX 78542. For more information visit txdot.gov keyword search "SH 68".

This information will also be available for inspection at the hearing. Verbal and written comments from the public regarding the project are requested and may be presented at the hearing, or submitted in person or by mail to the TxDOT Pharr District Office, Attention: Margil Maldonado Jr., P.E., Project Manager, at 600 W. Interstate 2, Pharr, TX 78577-1231. Comments must be received on or before May 5, 2018 to be part of the official hearing record.

The hearing will be conducted in English. Persons interested in attending the hearing who have special communication or accommodation needs are encouraged to contact Norma Robledo, Pharr District Public Involvement Specialist at (956) 702-6161 or by email at Norma.Robledo@TxDOT.gov. Requests should be made at least five days prior to the public hearing. Every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate these needs.

If you have any general questions or concerns regarding the proposed project or hearing, please contact Margil Maldonado Jr., P.E., Project Manager at (956) 702-6134 or by email at Margil.Maldonado@TxDOT.gov.