



Notice of Intent - United States (US) Highway 181 Harbor Bridge replacement/State Highway (SH) 286 (Crosstown Expressway) improvement project: Nueces County, Texas.

Pursuant to Title 40 CFR 1509.2 and 23 Texas Administrative Code, Section 2.5(e)(2), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) are issuing this notice to advise the public that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared for the proposed United States (US) Highway 181 Harbor Bridge replacement/State Highway (SH) 286 (Crosstown Expressway) improvement project in Nueces County, Texas. The project and study limits include the US 181 and Beach Avenue interchange on the north and the SH 286 and Morgan Avenue interchange on the south. Areas within the city of Corpus Christi are included in the study area. The project will be developed in compliance with Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The US 181 Harbor Bridge project is listed in the Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Organization's Metropolitan Transportation Plan 2010-2035 (the long-range transportation plan) as construction of a new bridge over the Corpus Christi Ship Channel. A Notice of Intent (NOI) for this project was first published on May 20, 2005, for proposed improvements that included the replacement of the existing Harbor Bridge and approaches where US 181 crosses the Corpus Christi Ship Channel, a roadway distance of approximately 2.25 miles. On March 20, 2007, a revised NOI was published to advise the public that the study limits described in the 2005 NOI had been expanded to accommodate added capacity that might have included managed lanes or various tolling strategies; the primary change was to the southern limit which would have extended the project along SH 286 to SH 358 (South Padre Island Drive). On November 3, 2010, the revised NOI published in 2007 was rescinded, via a notice in the Federal Register because of changes in the scope (managed toll lanes) and limits. The project limits have now been revised to eliminate the added capacity that would have included managed lanes and various tolling strategies, and have been reduced on the south end back to SH 286 and Morgan Avenue. The new project limits are as follows: the northern limit is the US 181 and Beach Avenue interchange located north of the Corpus Christi Ship Channel but south of the Nueces Bay Causeway; the southern limit is SH 286 between Morgan Avenue and Baldwin Boulevard; the eastern limit is the Interstate Highway (I)-37/US 181 intersection with Shoreline Boulevard in the Corpus Christi central business district (CBD); and the western limit is the I-37 and Nueces Bay Boulevard interchange. The new project limits total approximately 4.5 miles in length from north to south along US 181 and SH 286, and approximately 2.1 miles in length from east to west along I-37.

The proposed US 181 Harbor Bridge replacement is based on several needs: safety concerns, lack of capacity (need for additional travel lanes), connectivity to local roadways, poor level of service, and increasing traffic demand. In addition to these needs, the bridge's existing structure also has deficiencies, including high maintenance costs and navigational restrictions. The proposed improvements both to US 181/SH 286 and Harbor Bridge will address the structural deficiencies and navigational restrictions, and improve safety, connectivity, and level of service in the study area.



The purpose of the project is to correct these established needs identified above and to promote, enhance and spur economic development in the area. It is anticipated that additional larger ship traffic is expected at the Port of Corpus Christi. The impacts and benefits of such will also be analyzed in the indirect and cumulative impacts analyses for the subject project.

Alternatives under consideration include (1) taking no action, (2) Transportation System Management (TSM)/Transportation Demand Management, and (3) replacing the existing US 181 Harbor Bridge and approach roads with a facility that meets current highway design standards. A Feasibility Study completed in 2003 evaluated four build corridor alternatives, one along the existing alignment and three along new location alignments, as well as the No-build alternative. The Feasibility Study resulted in the identification of a recommended study corridor (new location alignment) for the bridge replacement component. All reasonable alternatives, that meet the Purpose and Need of the project, including the alternatives developed in the Feasibility Study, will be identified and evaluated in the EIS, in addition to the No-build Alternative, based on input from Federal, state, and local agencies, as well as private organizations and concerned citizens.

Impacts caused by the construction and operation of the proposed improvements would vary depending on the alternative alignment used. At this time, to the best of our knowledge, significant impacts are anticipated in and around the community including but not limited to: impacts to residences and businesses, including displacement; impacts to public parkland; social and economic impacts, including impacts to minority and low-income communities; and impacts to historic properties including the bridge itself. Additional impacts could potentially include the following: transportation impacts (construction detours, construction traffic, and mobility improvement); air quality and noise impacts from construction equipment and operation of the roadway; impacts to threatened and endangered species; impacts to waters of the U.S. including wetlands; and potential indirect and cumulative impacts.

A Coordination Plan will be prepared that addresses the project history, need and purpose, preliminary alternatives, and project schedule. A letter that describes the proposed action and a request for comments will be sent to appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies, and to private organizations and citizens who have previously expressed interest in the project. In conjunction with the Feasibility Study completed in June 2003, TxDOT developed a public involvement plan, sponsored three Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings, held two public meetings, and distributed two newsletters. Initial agency and public scoping meetings were held in June 2005 and May 2007. A new public involvement program will be developed that includes a project mailing list, project website, project newsletters, new agency and public scoping meetings, a CAC and a Technical Advisory Committee, and informal meetings with interested citizens and stakeholders. In addition, a public hearing will be held after the publication of the draft EIS. Public notice will be given of the time and place of the hearing. The draft EIS will be available for public and agency review and comment prior to the public hearing.

Public and agency scoping meetings will be held at the TxDOT Corpus Christi District Office—Training Center, 1701 S. Padre Island Drive, Corpus Christi, TX 78416



by TxDOT on August 9, 2011 to provide an opportunity for participating agencies, cooperating agencies, and the public to be involved in review and comment on the draft Coordination Plan, defining the need and purpose for the proposed project, determining the range of alternatives for consideration in the draft EIS, and establishing methodologies to evaluate alternatives. The public scoping meeting will be held as follows:

Date: Tuesday, August 9, 2011
Format: Open House: 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
TxDOT Presentation: 6:30 – 7 p.m.
Public Comment Session: 7 – 8 p.m.
Location: TxDOT Corpus Christi District Office – Training Center
1701 S. Padre Island Drive
Corpus Christi, TX

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action is addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Comments or questions concerning this proposed action and the EIS should be directed to the FHWA or TxDOT at the addresses provided below.

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Victor E. Vourcos, P.E., Advance Project Development Engineer, Texas
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Corpus Christi, Texas 78416. Telephone: 361-808-2378