

NEWS ARTICLES



Environmental group, city at odds over road

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Depending on whom you talked to, the proposed elevated flyover that would connect the Texas City megaport to Interstate 45 is the most environmentally feasible alternative or the worst idea on earth.

The Texas Department of Transportation held a sparsely attended public hearing Wednesday on the proposed roadway that would be built near the Texas City Wye, where state Highways 146 and 3 merge with Loop 197. It is aimed at easing expected traffic congestion once — and if — the \$600 million Texas City International Terminal at Shoal Point is built.

Evangeline Whorton, chairwoman of the environmental group Scenic Galveston, led the opposition to the proposed roadway. Her argument focused on the bridge's starting point, which is near the entrance to the organization's Virginia Point Peninsula Preserve.

"What we will be looking at is this giant retaining wall and a bridge," an exasperated Whorton said.

Scenic Galveston owns almost the entire frontage of Loop 197 along the proposed route of the elevated bridge.

In particular, Whorton felt betrayed by state highway officials who she claimed promised her and other members of her group that roadway area near the entrance to Scenic Galveston's property would not be developed. She said too that state officials promised that a direct connector would merge with I-45 further north than the plan calls for now.

"I am angry tonight," Whorton said. "Scenic Galveston opposes overdevelopment of Loop 197... We refuse TxDOT the right to infringe upon our entrance and properties with such connector development."

Whorton insisted that there are more "suitable" and "agreed upon" routes.

She said she would support leaving Loop 197 as is as a preferred alternative to building the elevated bridge.

That idea is not feasible, Texas City Mayor Matt Doyle said.

He said that once the megaport is open, the additional truck traffic would be too much for the Wye to handle and would force truck traffic into the surrounding communities.

He said Texas City's proposed port would be a much more attractive economic engine with the widening of the Panama Canal, which will double in capacity by 2014.

"By then, the economy will be back on its feet and running solid," Doyle said. "We do not want 10,000 (container) trucks running through our community. We want to make this as efficient as possible.

"It's far better for the environment than the alternative."

While the hearing was held this week, construction of the connector is nowhere near being ready to start.

First, the need for the road is not there as SSA Marine, which has the exclusive agreement to build the container terminal at Shoal Point has yet to begin construction on the site.

Construction of the bridge also will be dependent upon federal dollars, which have yet to become available.

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