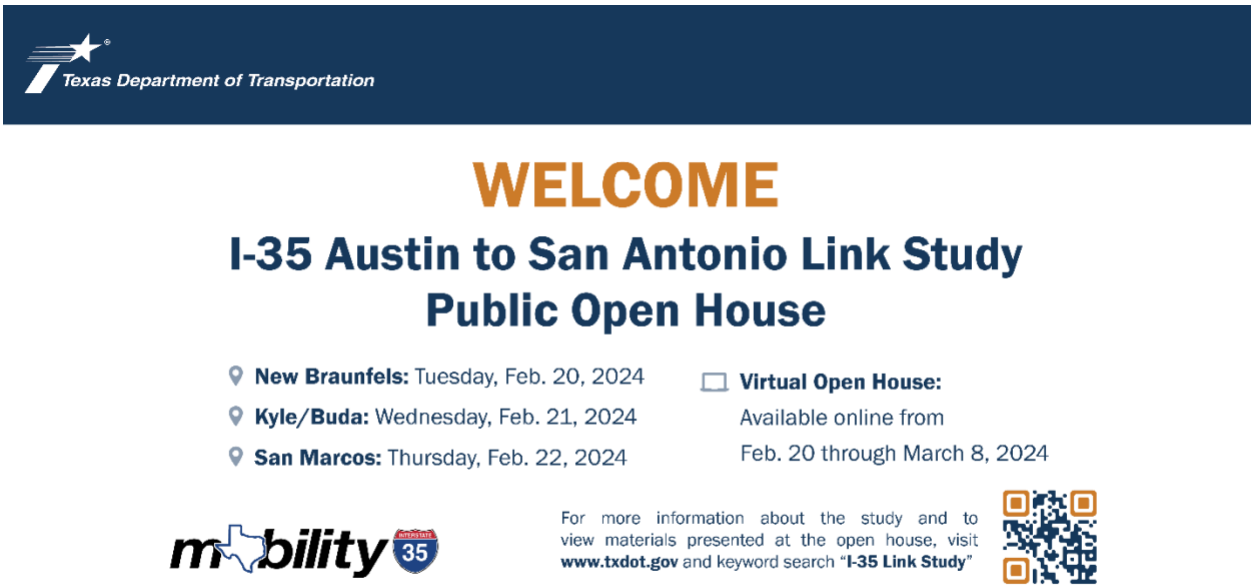
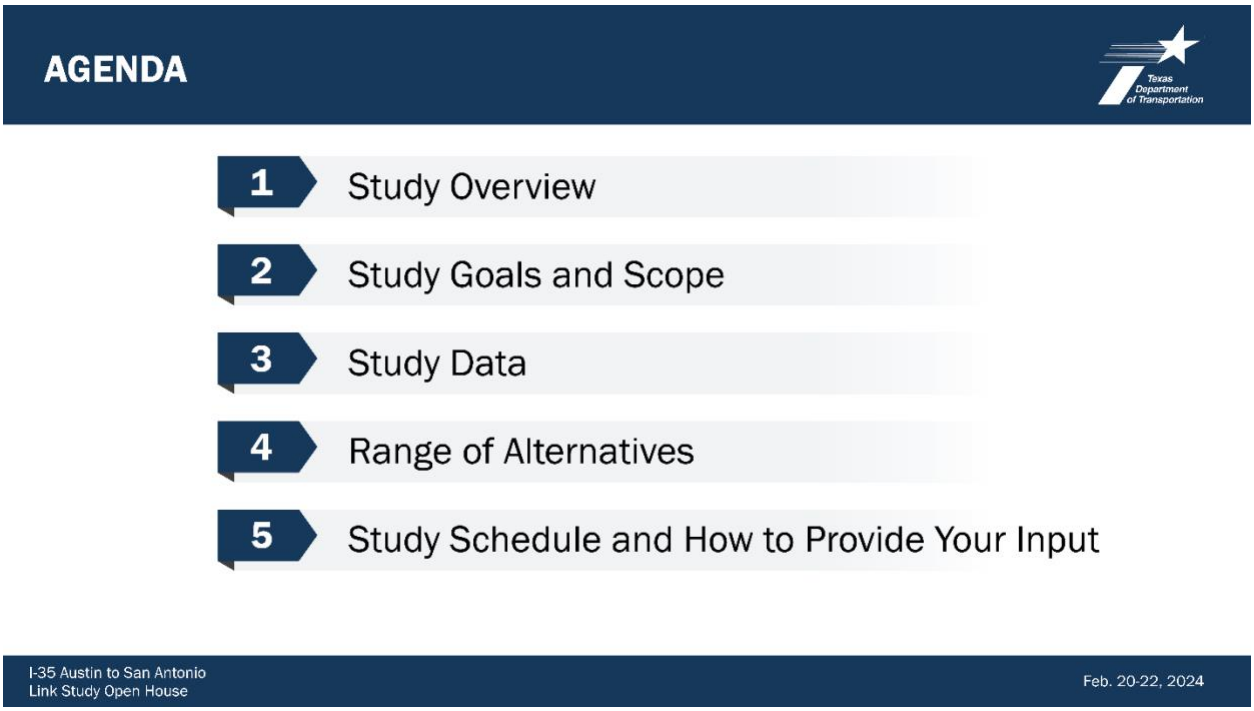
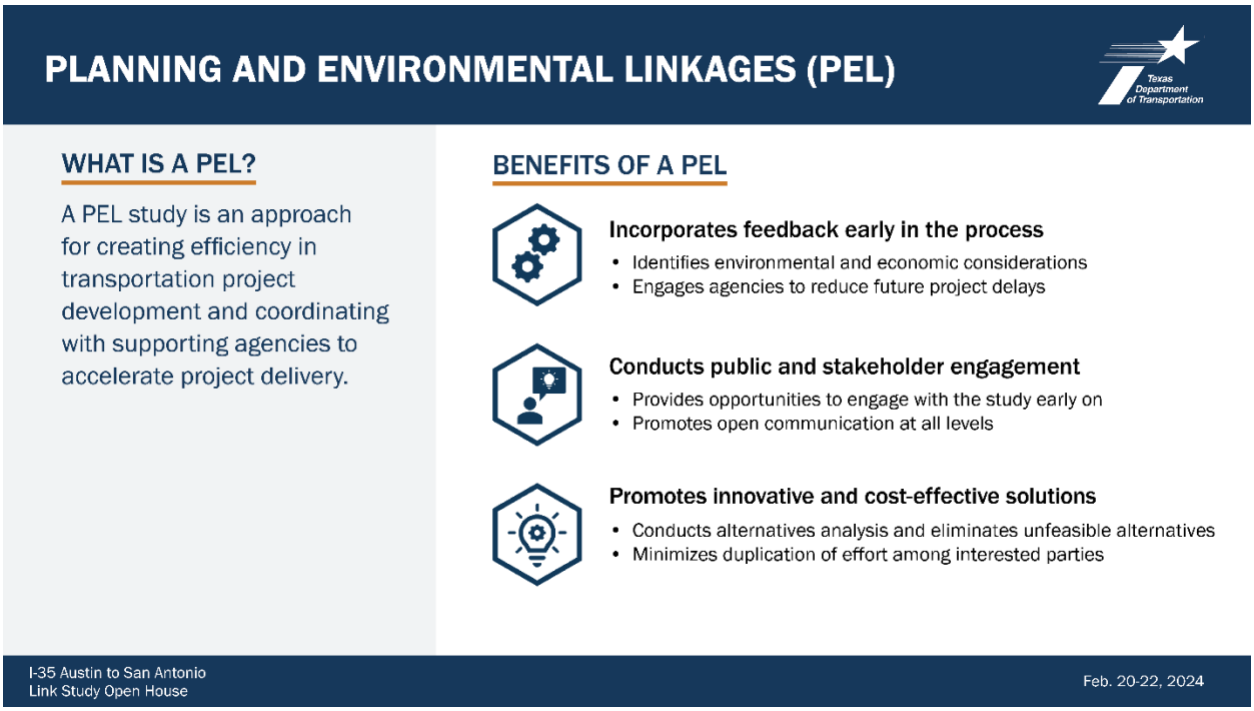


Welcome to the public open house for the I-35 Austin to San Antonio Link Study. The Texas Department of Transportation appreciates your interest in the study and thanks you for your participation. This virtual open house meeting complements the in-person meetings that were held on February 20, 21, and 22, 2024. These meetings provide an opportunity to review and comment on the draft purpose and need, the range of alternatives developed to address the I-35 corridor needs, and the evaluation process that will be used to identify the feasible and recommended alternatives for this study.

Before we provide the study details, let's pause for a TxDOT safety moment. TxDOT reminds you to slow down when driving through work zones. Since January 1, 17% of crashes on I-35 in Hays County occurred in a work zone, while 29% of crashes on I-35 in Comal County occurred in a work zone. More information about this and other TxDOT safety campaigns, including the End the Streak Campaign, can be found by visiting txdot.gov.



Today's presentation will begin with an overview of the study and its purpose. The study goals and scope will then be discussed, followed by an overview of the study data and key findings. Next, we will review the range of alternatives the study will consider. Finally, we'll cover the schedule and how you can provide your input.

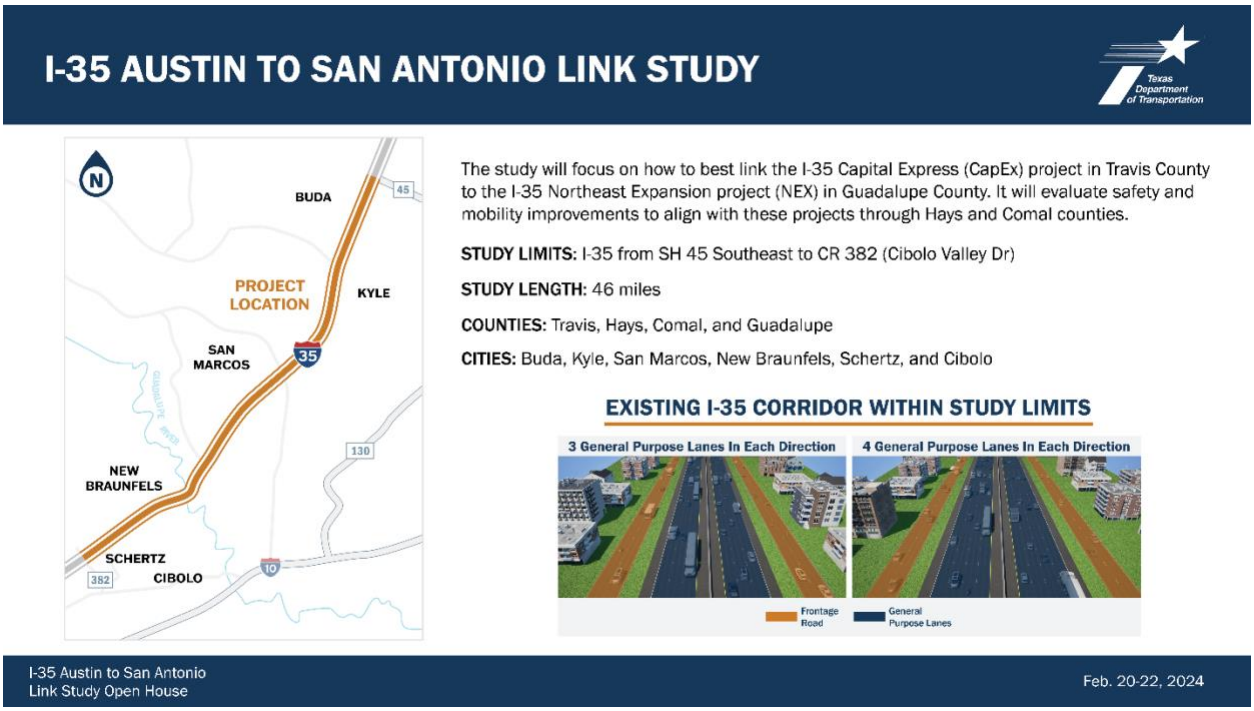


A Planning & Environmental Linkage Study, also known as a PEL, is a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision-making. The approach allows for creating efficiency in transportation project development and coordinating with supporting agencies to accelerate project delivery.

The study will follow Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines for PEL documents to allow the information collected and analyzed through this study to be used in future phases of the project.

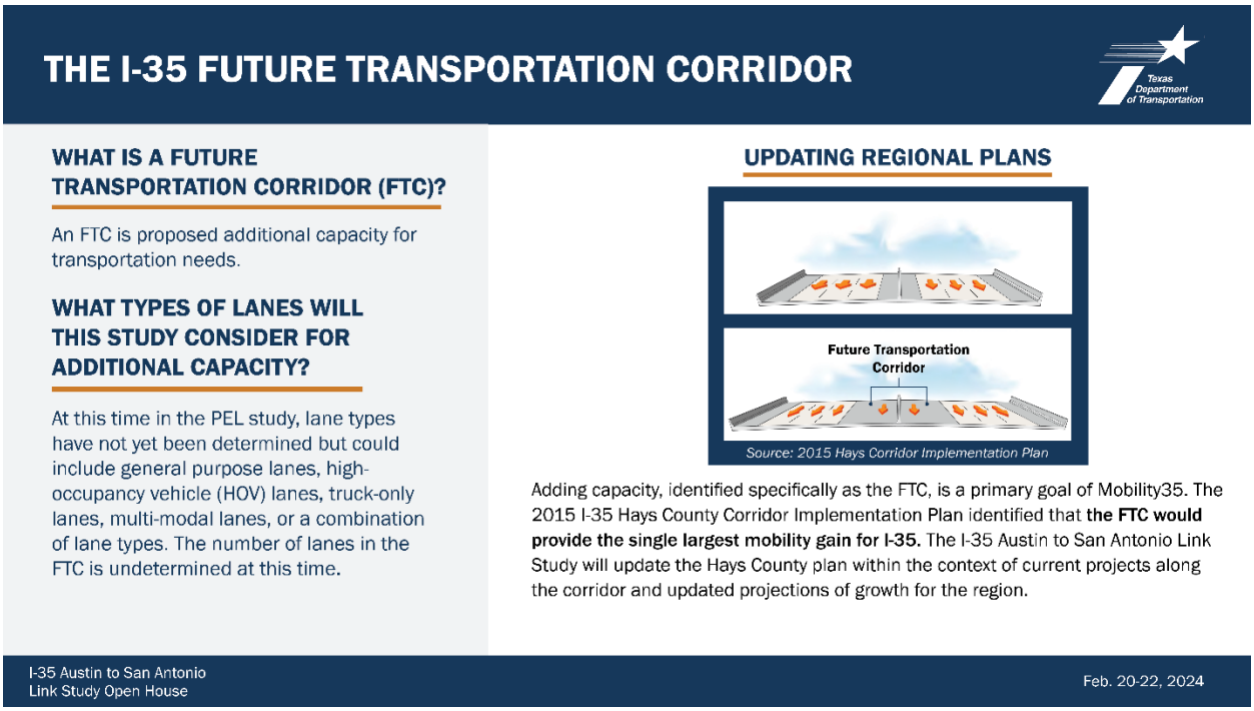
The benefits of a PEL include:

- Incorporating key inputs early in the process through the identification of environmental and economic considerations and engaging agencies to reduce future project delays,
- Conducting public and stakeholder engagement by providing opportunities to engage with the study early on and promoting open communication at all levels,
- And promoting innovative and cost-effective solutions through an alternatives analysis that eliminates unfeasible alternatives and minimizing duplication of efforts among interested parties.



This study will focus on how best to link the I-35 Capital Express South project in Travis County to the I-35 Northeast Expansion project in Guadalupe County. It will evaluate safety and mobility improvements to align with these projects along the 46 miles of I-35 from SH 45 Southeast to County Road 382, or Cibolo Valley Drive, through Travis, Hays, Comal, and Guadalupe counties.

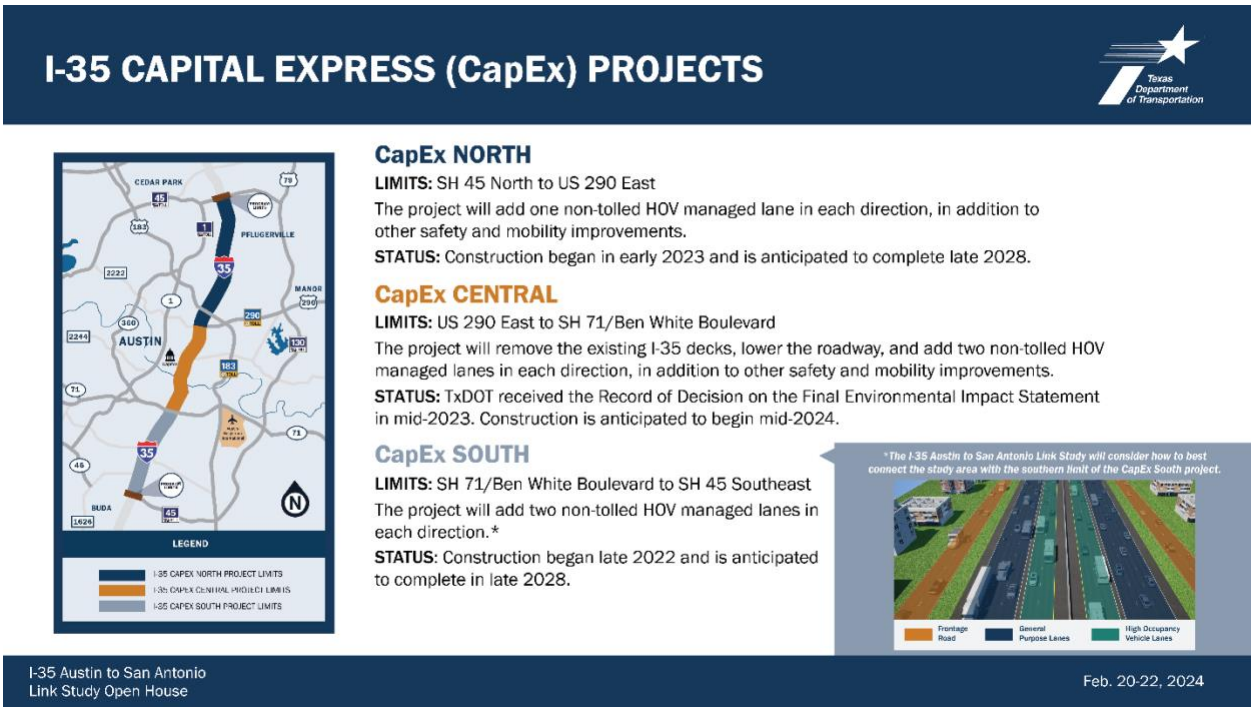
The majority of the study limits on I-35 between Austin and San Antonio currently include three general purpose lanes in each direction and there is a small section in the New Braunfels area that has four general purpose lanes in each direction.



As we evaluate how to link the section of I-35 between Austin and San Antonio, a future transportation corridor will be evaluated. A Future Transportation Corridor, or FTC, is proposed to provide additional capacity for transportation needs.

The study will evaluate what type of lanes will be considered for additional capacity. The lane types have not been determined at this time but could include general purpose lanes, high-occupancy vehicle or HOV lanes, truck-only lanes for freight, multi-modal lanes or a combination of these lane types. The number of lanes in the FTC is undetermined at this time and a no-build alternative will also be considered.

Adding freeway capacity, identified specifically as the FTC, is a primary goal of Mobility35. The 2015 I-35 Hays County Corridor Implementation Plan identified that the FTC would provide the single largest mobility gain for I-35. The I-35 Austin to San Antonio Link Study will update the Hays County Plan within the context of current projects along the corridor and update projections of growth for the region.



Next, I will share more information on the two projects this study aims to link, starting with the I-35 Capital Express or CapEx projects from generally Round Rock to Buda. These projects are broken into 3 sections.

The CapEx North project will add one non-tolled HOV managed lane in each direction along the project limits, in addition to other safety and mobility improvements from SH 45 North to US 290 East. Construction began in early 2023 and is expected to conclude in late 2028.

The CapEx Central project will remove the existing I-35 decks, lower the roadway, and add two non-tolled HOV managed lanes in each direction along the project limits, in addition to other safety and mobility improvements. Construction is expected to begin mid-2024.

The CapEx South project will add two non-tolled HOV lanes in each direction along I-35 from State Highway 71, or Ben White Boulevard, to State Highway 45 Southeast. Construction began in late 2022 and is expected to conclude in late 2028.

This study will consider how to better connect the study area with the southern limit of the CapEx South project.

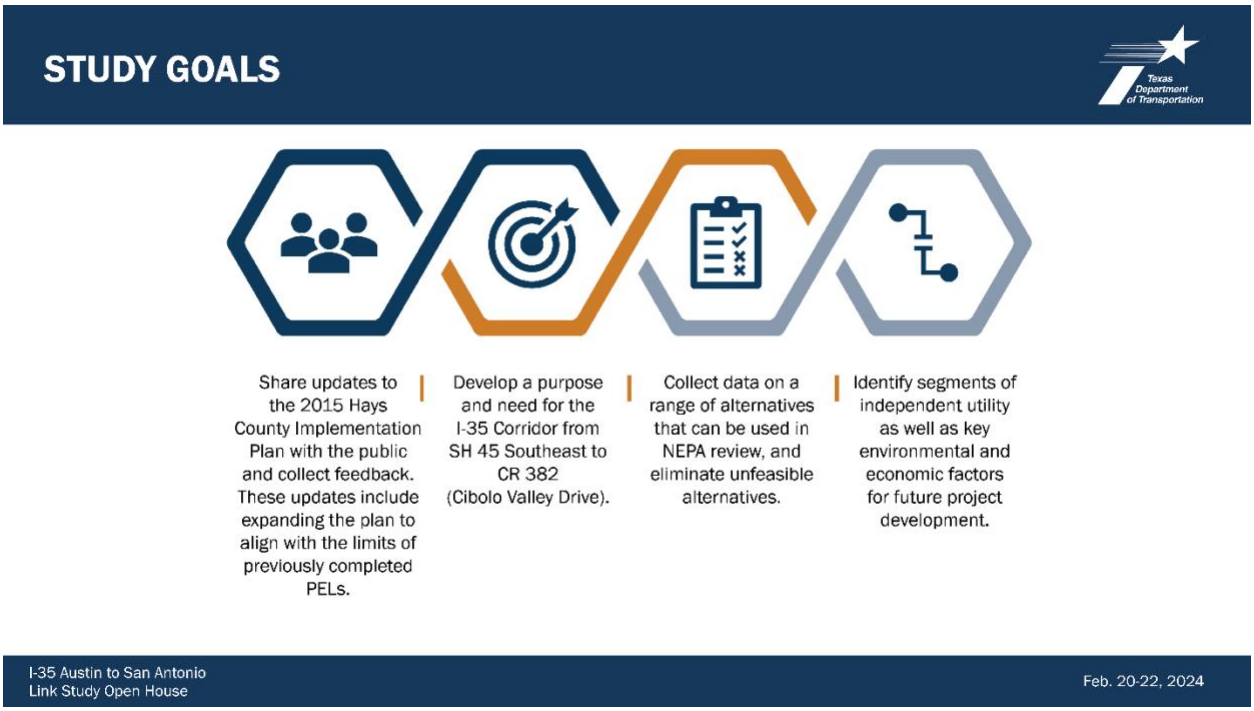
To the south, this study will consider how to connect to the I-35 Northeast Expansion or NEX projects generally from FM 1103 in Schertz to I-410 in San Antonio. Again, these projects are broken into 3 sections.

The northern portion of the NEX project will add one non-tolled HOV lane and one general purpose lane in each direction from FM 3009 to FM 1103. NEX North is anticipated to go out for bid in 2027.

The central portion of the NEX project will add two non-tolled lanes in each direction, in addition to other safety and mobility improvements along I-35 from I-410 to FM 3009. Construction on NEX Central began in 2021 and is anticipated to be completed in late 2024.

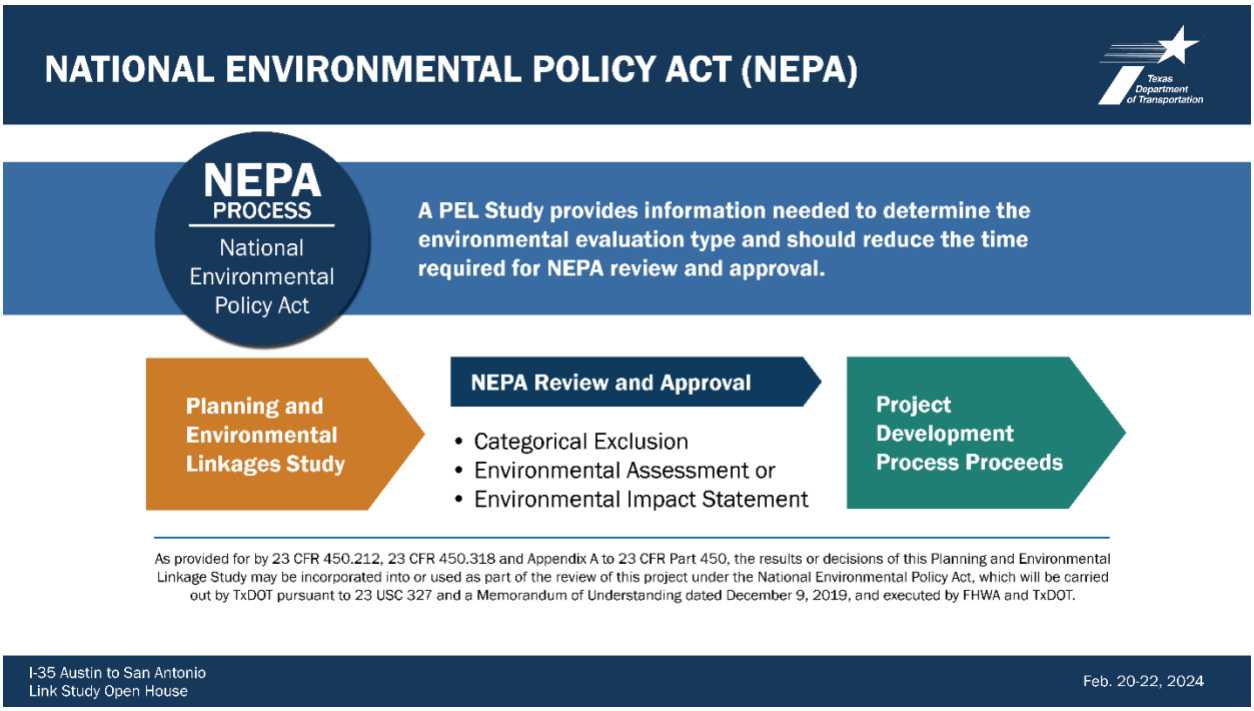
The southern portion of the NEX project will add two non-tolled lanes on elevated bridges in each direction from I-410 South to I-410 North. NEX South is anticipated to let in 2024.

The I-35 Austin to San Antonio Link Study will consider how to best connect the study area with the northern limit of the NEX North project.



There are four goals identified for the study which include:

- Sharing updates to the 2015 Hays County Implementation Plan with the public and collecting feedback. These updates include recommended and identified need for a Future Transportation Corridor with one additional lane on I-35 in each direction. The PEL will update this plan, extending the study area to include Travis, Comal and Guadalupe Counties to align with the limits of previously completed PEL studies.
- Developing a purpose and need for the I-35 Corridor within the study limits, which will be explained in more detail on the following slide.
- Collecting data on a range of alternatives that can be used in future NEPA review, as well as eliminating unfeasible alternatives.
- And identifying segments of independent utility and key environmental and economic factors for future project development.

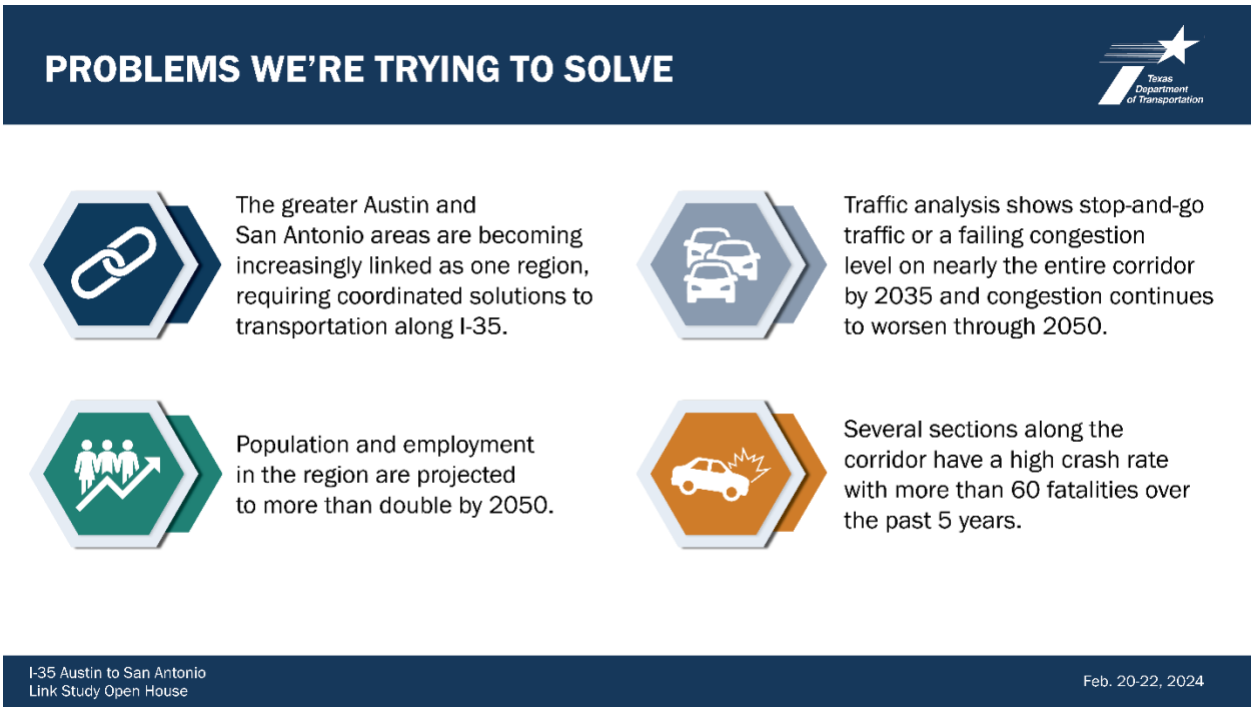


NEPA, or the National Environmental Policy Act, is a federal law that outlines the process federal agencies must follow to determine the impacts of their actions on the human and natural environment. The NEPA process is followed for projects that will use federal funding or require federal approval, including transportation projects.

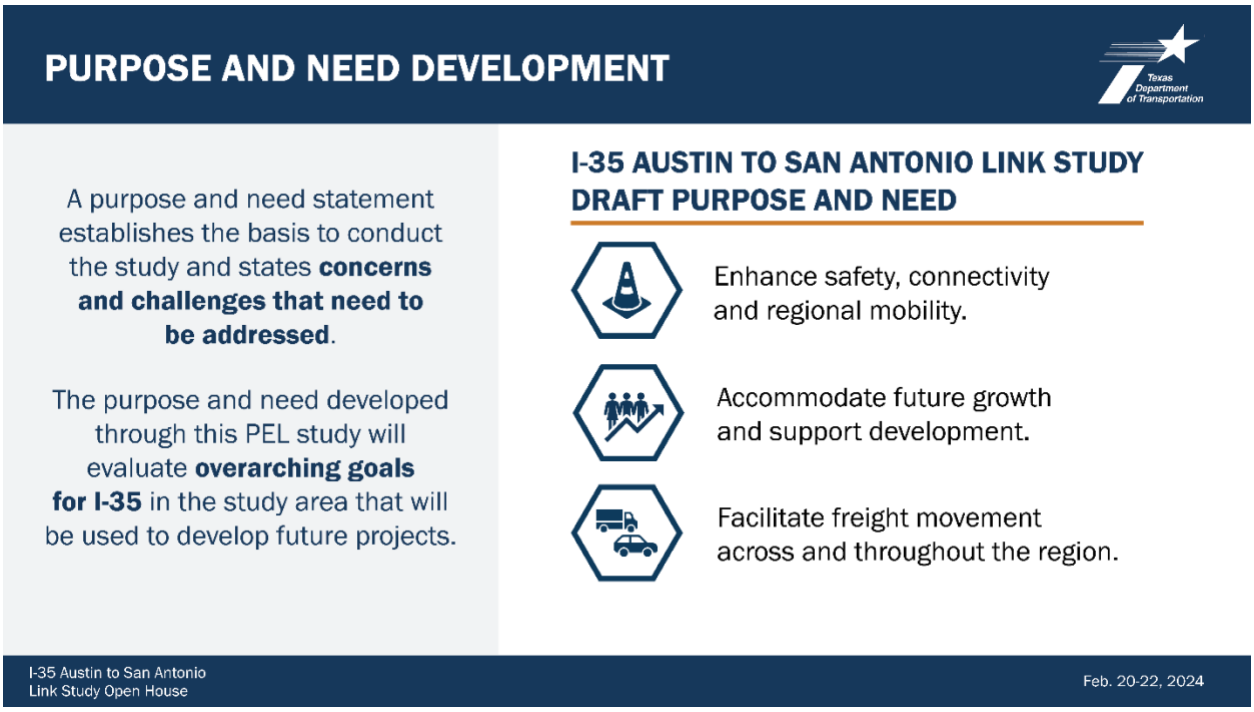
A PEL study provides information needed to determine the environmental evaluation type. Ranked from least to most detailed review these types include:

- Categorical Exclusion
- Environmental Assessment
- or an Environmental Impact Statement

This should reduce the time required for NEPA review and approval.



Looking at the study area, we would like to highlight the problems we are trying to solve.
The greater Austin and San Antonio areas are becoming increasingly linked as one region, requiring coordinated solutions to transportation along I-35.
Population and employment in the region are projected to more than double by 2050.
Traffic analysis shows stop-and-go traffic or heavy congestion on nearly the entire corridor by 2035 and congestion continues to worsen through 2050.
Additionally, several sections along the corridor have increased crash rates with more than 60 fatalities over the past 5 years.



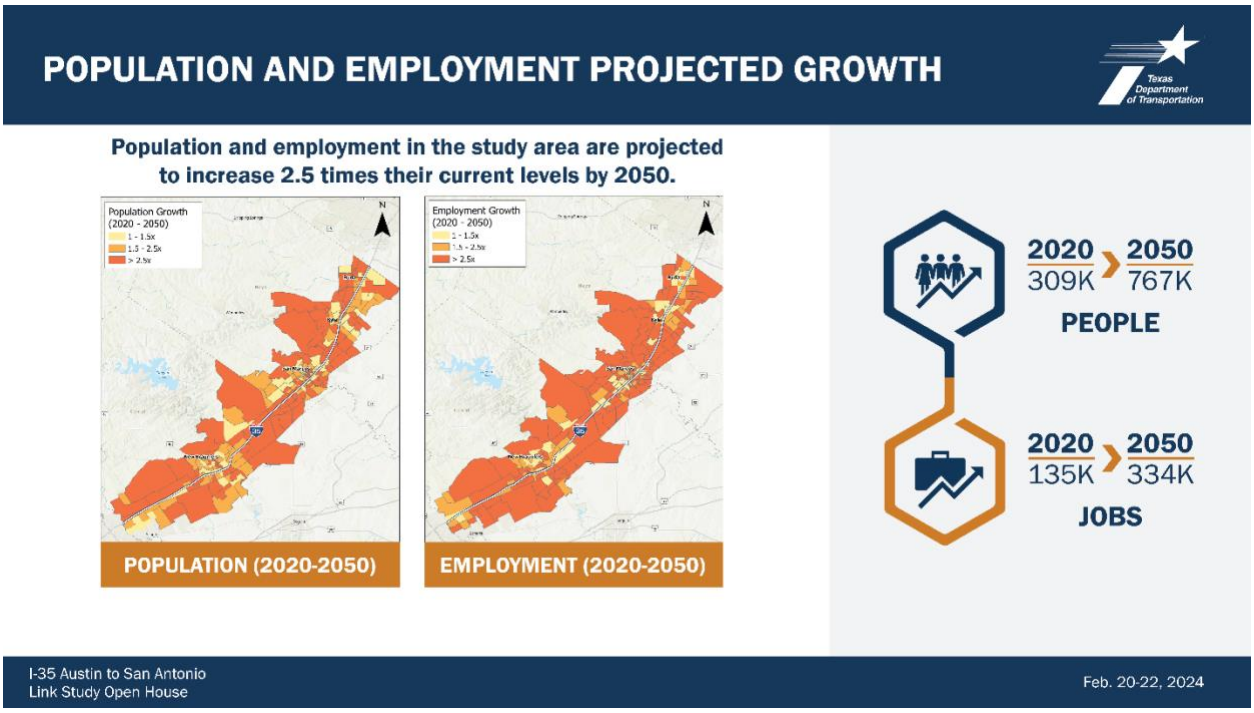
A purpose and need statement will be developed to address the problems along I-35 in the study area. A purpose and need statement establishes the basis to conduct the study and states concerns and challenges that need to be addressed.

The purpose and need developed through this PEL study will evaluate overarching goals for I-35 in the study area that will be used to develop future projects.

The statement explains why TxDOT is developing a project and provides the basis for the evaluation of alternatives. Following NEPA guidance, the purpose and need should focus on the following elements: safety, system linkage, roadway deficiencies, and capacity.

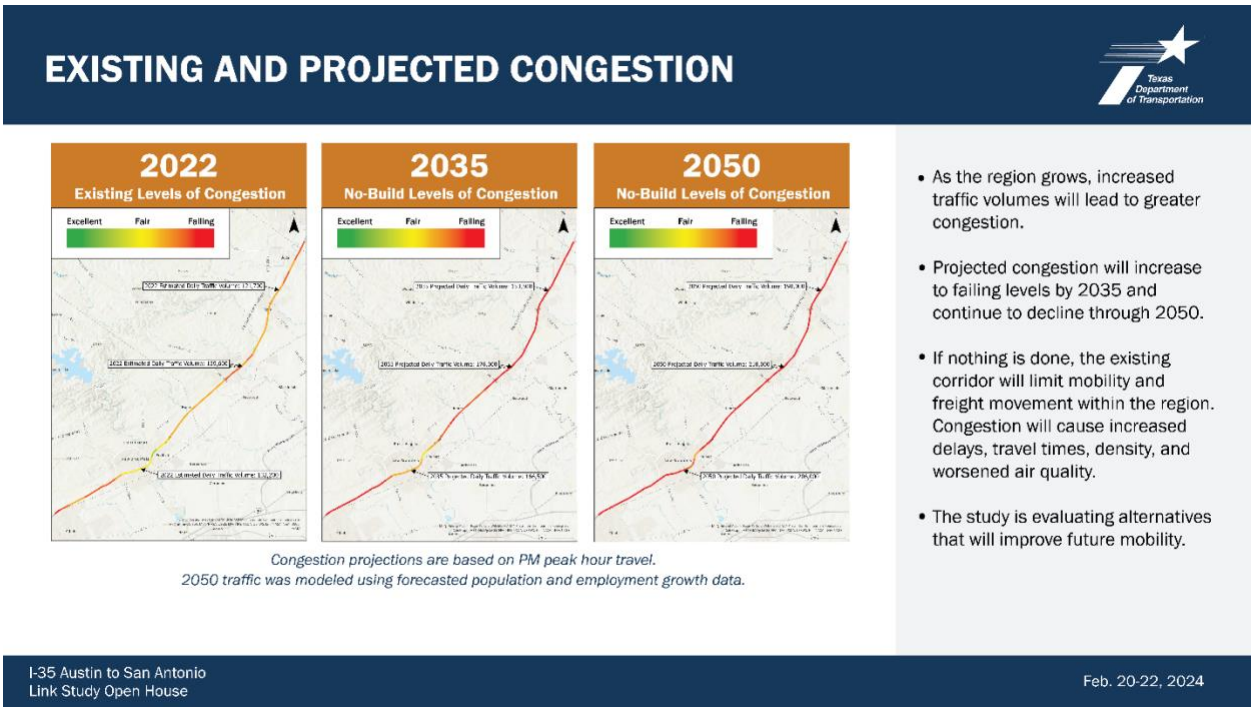
The draft purpose and need for the I-35 Austin to San Antonio Link Study are to:

- Enhance safety, connectivity and regional mobility,
- Accommodate future growth and support development,
- And to facilitate freight movement across and throughout the region.



Next, I will share more information on the conditions in the study area starting with projected growth.

Significant population and employment growth are anticipated along the corridor over the coming decades, with a projected increase of 2.5 times their current levels by 2050. The population within the study area is anticipated to grow from 309,000 to 767,000 by 2050, with job growth projected to increase from 135,000 to 334,000 within the same timeframe.



As the region grows, increased traffic volumes will lead to greater congestion. To evaluate this, a traffic analysis was conducted to evaluate congestion levels ranging from excellent or free flowing, identified as green on the maps, to failing or forced flow with frequent stops, in red on the maps.

Several segments along the corridor currently experience severe congestion including:

- north and south of Buda,
- most of San Marcos and continuing south to New Braunfels,
- and the southern end of the study area near Schertz and Cibolo.

Results of traffic analysis show severe congestion on nearly the entire corridor by 2035, with the exception of a short segment that has four general purpose lanes near New Braunfels, as compared to the remainder of the study area with three. Conditions would continue to worsen through 2050. If nothing is done, the existing corridor will limit mobility and freight movement within the region. Congestion will cause increased delays, travel times, density, and worsened air quality.

The study is evaluating alternatives that will improve future mobility.

SAFETY ANALYSIS

2019-2023 CRASH DATA

10,158 Total Crashes

58 Fatal Crashes

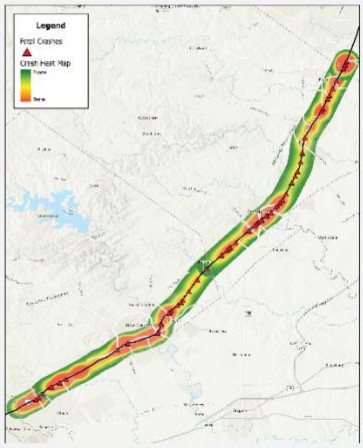
64 Fatalities

Segments of this corridor are experiencing crash rates more than **10%** higher than the statewide average on interstates.

TOP 5 CRASH FACTORS 2019-2023

- Failure to control speed
- Driver inattention
- Unsafe lane change
- Followed too closely
- Faulty evasive action

CRASH HOT SPOTS



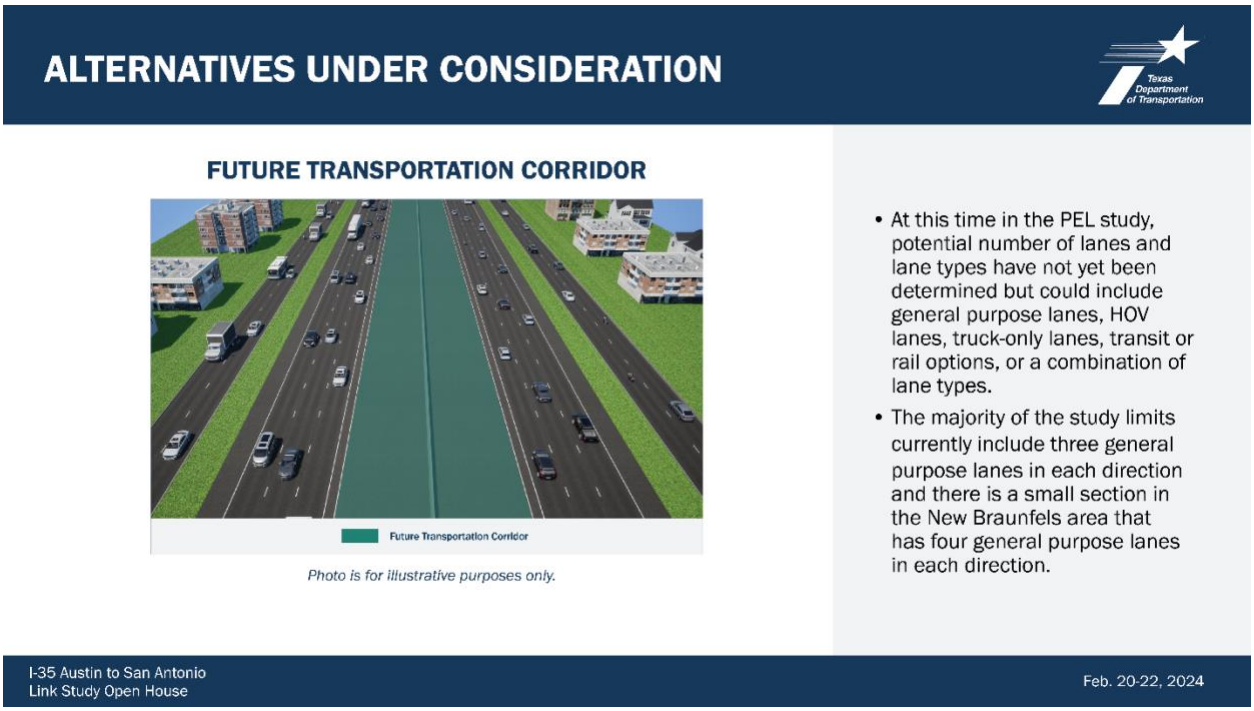
Source: TxDOT Crash Records Information System, 2019-2023

I-35 Austin to San Antonio
Link Study Open House

Feb. 20-22, 2024

Safety considerations were also evaluated for this study. In a 5-year period, between 2019 and 2023, there were a total of 10,158 crashes along the I-35 study limits. 58 of these crashes were fatal resulting in 64 fatalities. Segments of this corridor are experiencing crash rates more than 10% higher than the statewide average.

The leading factors contributing to crashes include failure to control speed, driver inattention, unsafe lane change, followed too closely, and faulty evasive action. This map of the crash hot spots shows the locations of crashes.

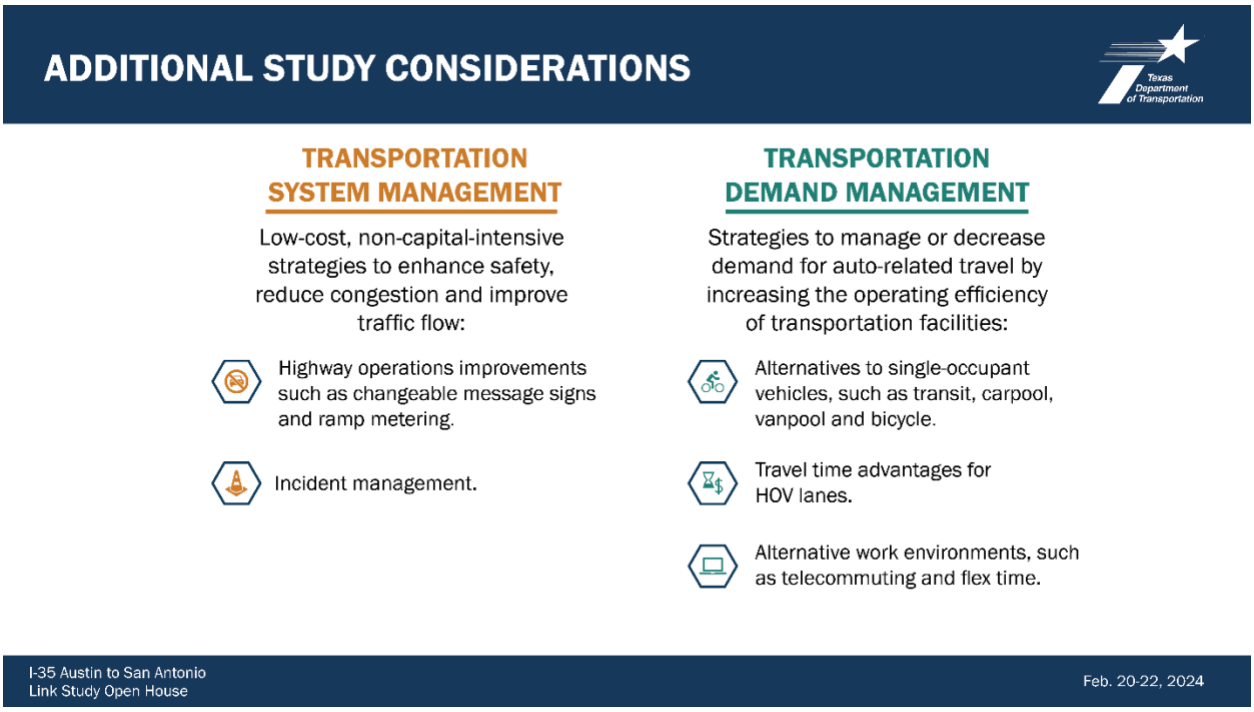


TxDOT is considering a range of alternatives for the future transportation corridor.

At this time in the PEL study, potential number of lanes and lane types have not yet been determined but could include general purpose lanes, HOV lanes, truck-only lanes, transit or rail options, or a combination of lane types.

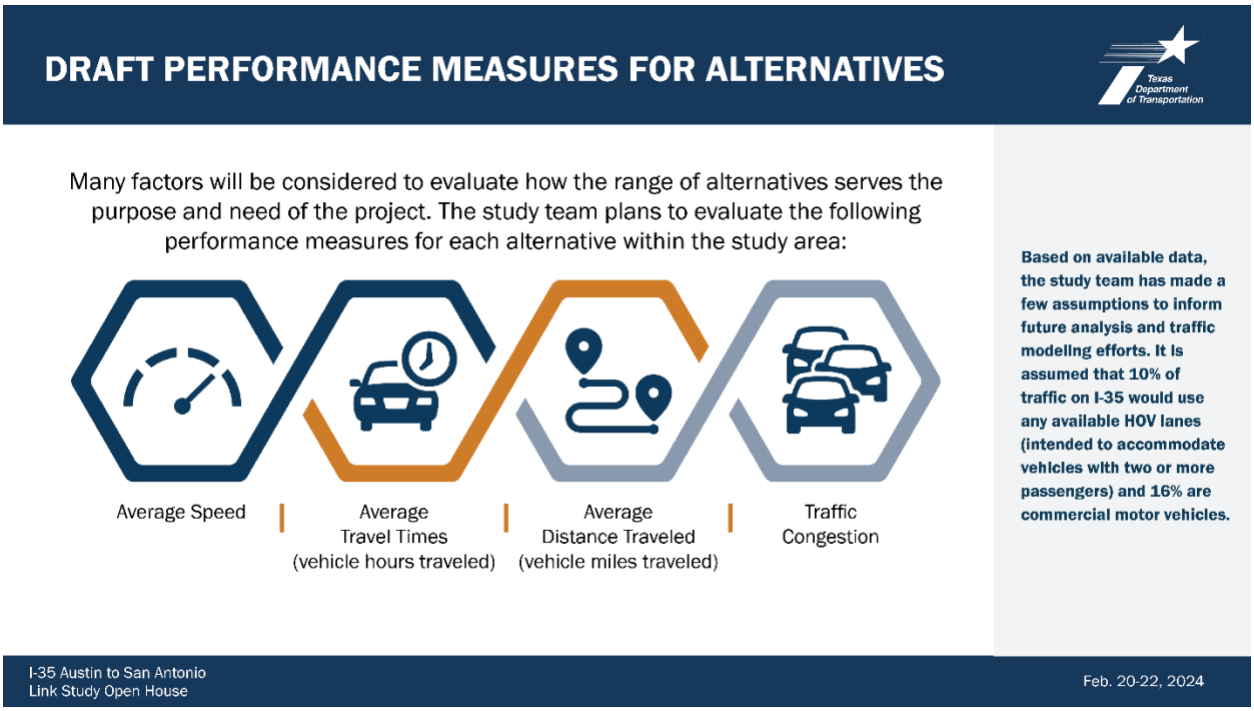
The majority of the study limits currently include three general purpose lanes in each direction and there is a small section in the New Braunfels area that has four general purpose lanes in each direction.

Please note that this photo is for illustrative purposes only.



Additional considerations for the study include:

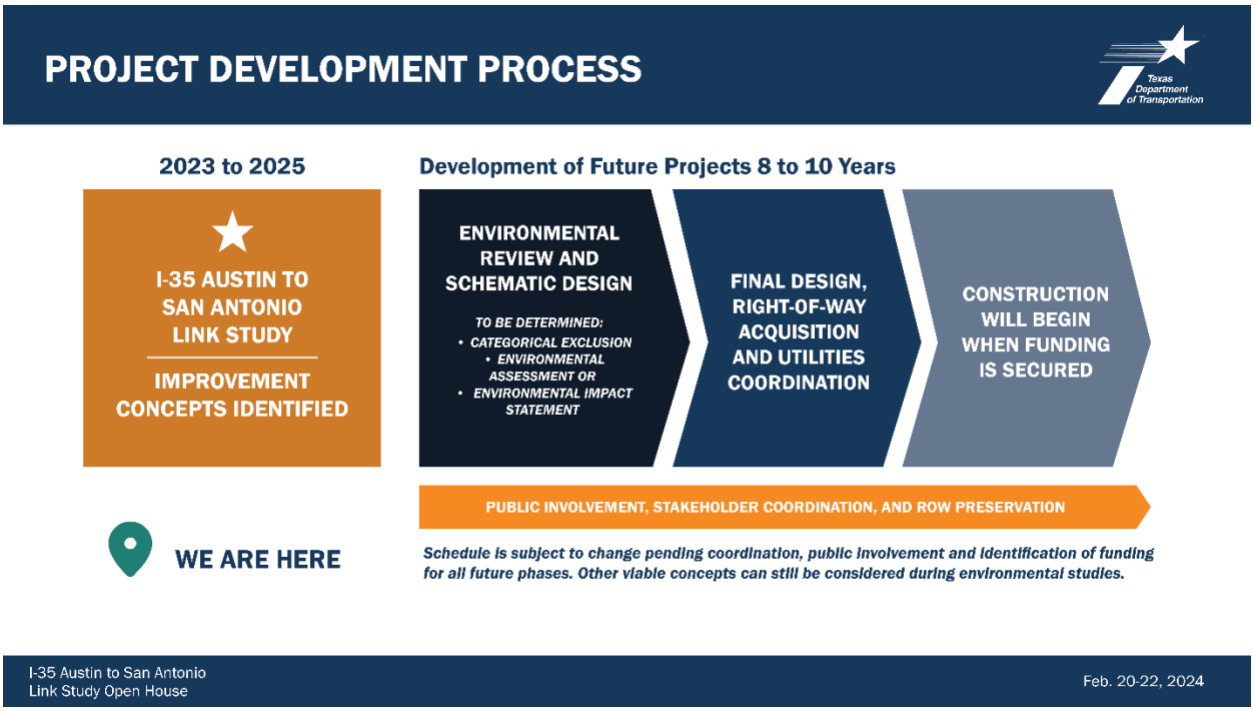
- Transportation System Management, which includes low-cost, non-capital-intensive strategies to enhance safety, reduce congestion and improve traffic flow including:
    - Highway operations improvements, such as changeable message signs and ramp metering, and
    - Incident management.
- Transportation Demand Management, which is the use of strategies to manage or decrease demand for auto-related travel by increasing the operating efficiency of transportation facilities including:
    - Alternatives to single-occupant vehicles, such as transit, carpool, vanpool, and bicycle,
    - Travel time advantages for HOV lanes, and
    - Alternative work environments, such as telecommuting and flex time.



Many factors will be considered to evaluate how the range of alternatives serves the purpose and need of the project. The study team plans to evaluate the following performance measures for each alternative within the study area:

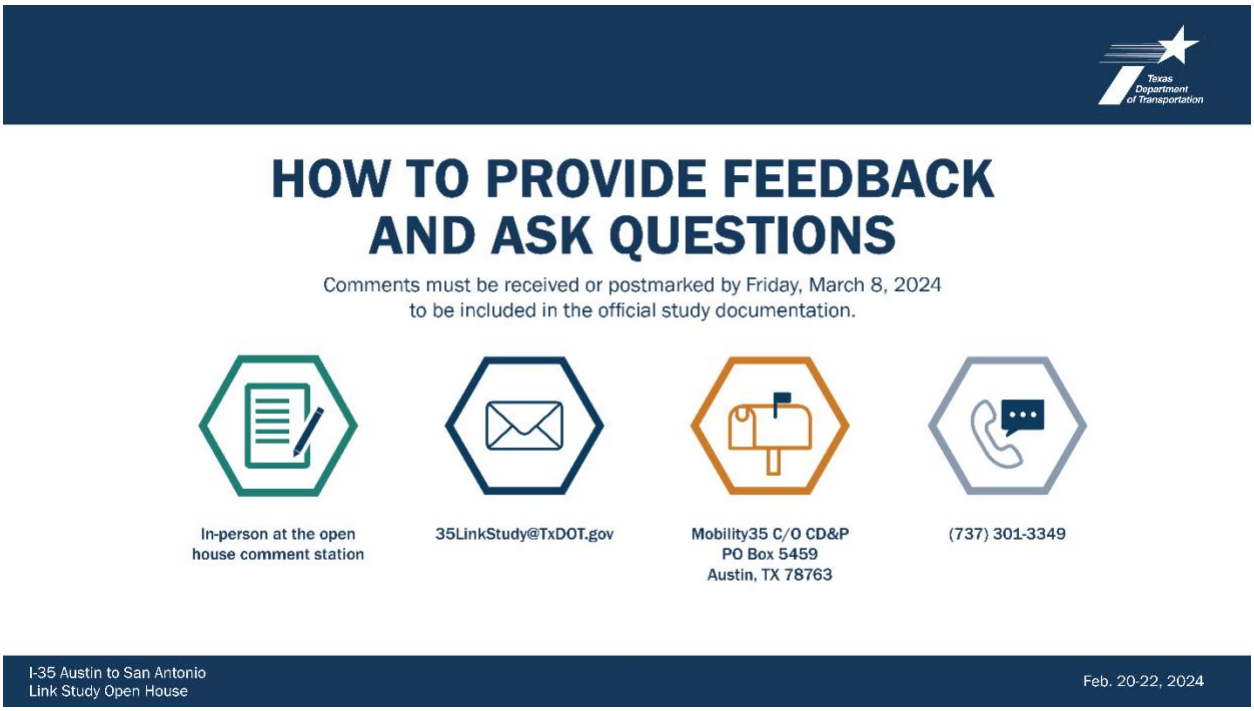
- Average speed,
- Average travel times (measured by vehicle hours traveled),
- Average distance traveled (measured by vehicle miles traveled), and
- Traffic congestion.

Based on available data, the study team has made a few assumptions to inform future analysis and traffic modeling efforts. It is assumed that 10% of traffic on I-35 would use any available high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes (intended to accommodate vehicles with two or more passengers) and commercial motor vehicles represent 16% of traffic.



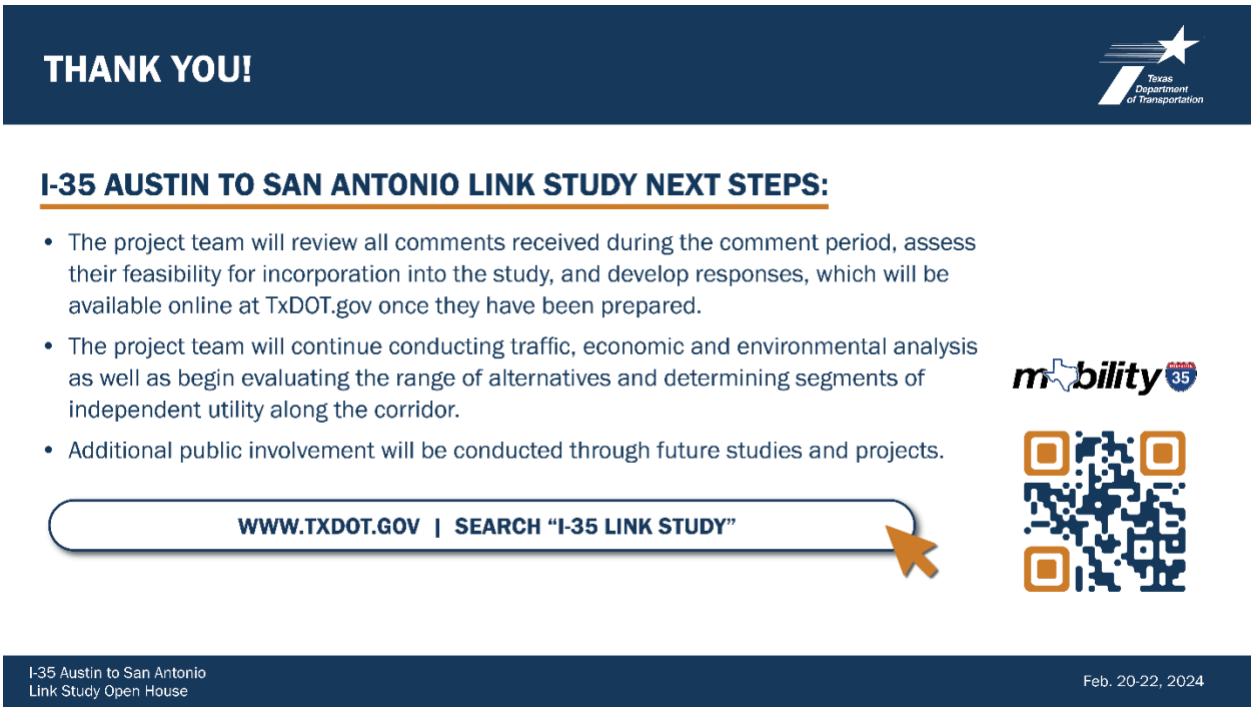
The I-35 Austin to San Antonio Link Study is anticipated to be complete in 2025. After this study is complete, the environmental review process (NEPA) and schematic design will be required to implement recommended improvement projects. The timeline for improvements is dependent on coordination, public involvement, and funding, but generally would take 8-to-10 years.

Included here are links for more information on other projects near the corridor.



Your feedback is an important component of this study and TxDOT wants to hear from you. All comments must be received or postmarked by Friday, March 8, 2024, to be included in the official study documentation. Comments may be provided:

- In-person at one of the three open house meetings
- By email sent to 35LinkStudy@TxDOT.gov
- By mail sent to Mobility35 C/O CD&P, PO Box 5459, Austin, TX 78763
- Or by phone at 737-301-3349



Following the public open houses and comment period, the study team will review all comments received during the comment period, assess their feasibility for incorporation into the study, and develop responses, which will be available online at TxDOT.gov once they have been prepared.

The study team will continue conducting traffic, economic and environmental analysis as well as begin evaluating the range of alternatives and determining segments of independent utility along the corridor.

Thank you for your interest in the I-35 Austin to San Antonio Link Study. For more information, please visit TxDOT.gov and search "I-35 Link Study".