

MOPAC IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

April 2012 e-Newsletter 5

Public hearing on draft environmental assessment scheduled for May 23

The MoPac Improvement Project has reached an important milestone: the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has reviewed the project's draft environmental assessment (EA) and has found it satisfactory for further processing. As a result, the project team will hold a public hearing to get a final round of public comment on the draft EA.

The public hearing will be Wednesday, May 23rd at O. Henry Middle School. Doors will open to the public at 6 pm. The draft EA and the schematic featuring the preferred alternative will be available for viewing between 6 pm and 6:30 pm. The public hearing will begin at 6:30 pm with a presentation, followed by a public comment period. Following the public hearing, the team will revise the draft EA to include the latest public input and submit it to FHWA for a final decision on whether or not the project can proceed to construction or if additional study is required.

After careful consideration of multiple alternatives, the draft EA recommends using existing right of way to add one express lane in each direction on MoPac between Parmer Lane (FM 734) and Cesar Chavez Street. The draft EA identifies more than seven miles of planned sound walls. The project team followed federal and state guidelines to analyze noise in the corridor and determine where walls were reasonable and feasible. A subsequent vote by adjacent property owners led to a decision regarding where sound walls should be constructed. The Express Lane alternative requires no property acquisition.

Public Hearing

Wednesday, May 23rd, 6 pm to 6:30 pm -

Open House:

Environmental Assessment and Schematic of preferred alternative available for viewing

6:30 pm - Presentation and official public comment period

O. Henry Middle School Cafeteria

2610 West 10th Street

Austin, Texas

Project Timeline



Draft Environmental Assessment available

The draft EA is available for public review online at www.MoPacExpress.com, at the TxDOT Austin District Office at 7901 North IH 35 and at the Faulk Central Library, 800 Guadalupe Street.

Copies (paper or CD) of the MoPac Improvement Project draft EA can be obtained for the actual cost of reproduction and shipping. To order copies, call TxDOT project planners at 512-832-7218.

Verbal and written comments from the public regarding the proposed project are requested. Comments will be accepted at the public hearing or may be submitted in writing before or after the hearing.

To be included in the official record of the MoPac Improvement Project Draft EA, comments must be submitted or postmarked by June 4th. Comments may be submitted in writing at www.MoPacExpress.com, the hearing, to a court reporter at the hearing, or mailed to the following address:

TxDOT Austin District
Environmental Coordinator
P.O. Drawer 15426
Austin, TX 78761-5426



Hundreds attend open house meetings

More than 370 citizens turned out at two open house meetings in early March to ask questions and provide input regarding the proposed MoPac Improvement Project.

Attendees were able to view concept videos and learn about plans to spend \$20 million on sound walls, \$5 million on bicycle and pedestrian improvements, and \$3 million to beautify the corridor.

The open house meetings were held March 1 at O. Henry Middle School and March 6 at Dell Jewish Community Campus.



City concurs on sound wall locations

The Austin City Council has passed a resolution supporting the construction of sound walls along the MoPac corridor as part of the MoPac Improvement Project.

The sound walls would lessen road noise and create a buffer between homes and the roadway.

Sound walls were originally determined to be reasonable and feasible at 22 locations along the corridor. Following a vote by adjacent property owners in summer 2011, all but three locations were approved. More than seven miles of sound walls are planned if FHWA ultimately approves the project.

The city resolution will specifically allow for the construction of Sound Wall #3 on City of Austin right-of-way between Great Northern Blvd and the Union Pacific Railroad in the area north of RM 2222. The northern terminus for this wall will be just south of Far West Boulevard.

Prior to consideration by the City Council, the sound wall issue was reviewed by Austin's Urban Transportation Commission, and City staff recommended approval of the resolution.



Graphics are conceptual in nature. Final design elements may differ due to construction techniques.



MoPac team addresses cycling priorities

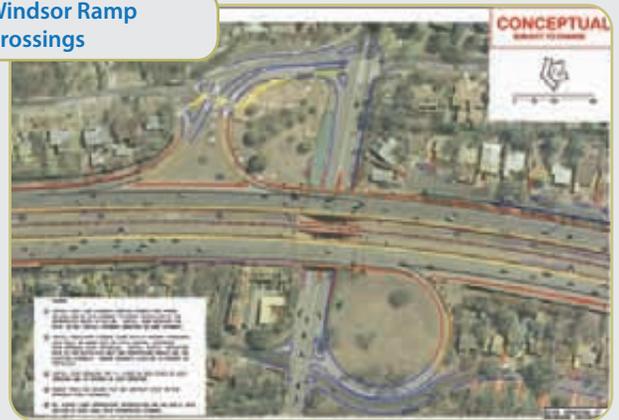
The project team met with various cycling groups and City of Austin representatives over the last 18 months to identify the highest priority bicycle and pedestrian needs of the corridor. A proposal to build an 11-mile Shared Use Path along MoPac was considered, but was ruled out given the high cost and other issues. Instead the team focused on connecting existing facilities, filling in gaps, and supplementing access to parallel connections. Approximately \$5 million in bicycle and pedestrian improvements are proposed:

- A 2-mile Shared Use Path for bicyclists and pedestrians west of the southbound frontage road between Walnut Creek Trail and Capital of Texas Highway (Loop 360);
- A Shared Use Path through the MoPac-U.S. 183 interchange from Shoal Creek Blvd. to Neils Thompson Drive;
- Improved east/west connectivity for bicyclists and pedestrians at 13 cross streets between Park Bend Drive and Enfield Road; and
- Closing 4-miles of gaps in the sidewalks along the MoPac frontage roads between Parmer Lane and Anderson Lane, including curb ramps and pedestrian signal heads.

The proposed improvements are included in the preferred alternative of the draft environmental assessment.

Details regarding bicycle and pedestrian improvements will be available at the public hearing on May 23. (See page 1 for details regarding the public hearing.)

Windsor Ramp Crossings



MoPac north of U.S. 183

*A Shared Use Path is in yellow and the proposed locations to fill in sidewalk gaps are in red.



Project Facts

- **The proposed MoPac Improvement Project is more than just a restriping project**

The team expects to spend nearly \$200 million to construct the project. The work will include widening bridges and adding up to 17 feet of new pavement, all within the existing right-of-way.

- **Travel lanes and roadway shoulders will be narrower than normal in some places on MoPac**

Due to space constraints, some portions of the MoPac Improvement Project will have travel lanes and shoulders that are narrower than those found on newer highways. Narrower lanes and shoulders are not uncommon on older highways. In fact, there are already a number of areas on MoPac that do not conform to modern design standards. Most new highways have 12 foot wide travel lanes. FHWA has given the project team approval to use 11 foot lanes on some portions of MoPac south of RM 2222.

- **Emergency response plans are already being developed for the MoPac Project**

The project team intends to install a traffic monitoring system on MoPac that will be used to dispatch tow trucks or emergency vehicles immediately following detection of any incident. Emergency vehicles will be able to use the Express Lanes to get to incidents fast. The team expects to use plastic delineator pylons to separate the Express Lanes from the regular lanes. If an incident occurs in the Express Lanes, rescue vehicles will be able drive back and forth across the delineator pylons as necessary. Also, if an incident occurs in the Express Lanes, law enforcement can allow drivers to exit the Express Lanes by slowly and safely driving across the delineator pylons and into the regular travel lanes.

- **What are Express Lanes?**

Express Lanes are special buffer-separated lanes that give people the ability to bypass congestion when they really need to.

Express Lanes are toll-exempt for Capital Metro buses, registered vanpools, emergency and military vehicles.

Remaining Express Lane capacity is available to toll paying customers.

Three existing non-toll lanes will remain.

YOU SET THE RATE

To ensure the Express Lanes remain free flowing, variable tolls are used to manage the number of vehicles using the lanes at any given time.

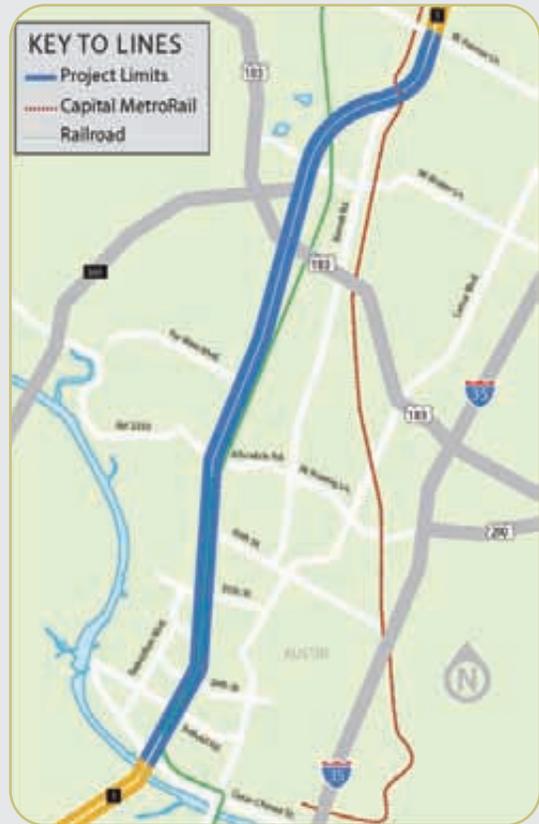
- When traffic is heavy and demand for the Express Lanes is high, toll rates increase. When demand is low, toll rates go down.
- Changeable electronic signs display the current rates in real time, so drivers know the price before deciding whether to enter the lanes.
- Initial toll rates should range from 25 cents to \$4.00 per trip but could be higher if demand is greater than projected.
- Tolls paid by users will be the source of funds to repay the money borrowed to pay for the Project, including the sound walls and bicycle/pedestrian improvements.

We Want to Hear from You

The route to greater mobility in the MoPac corridor is driven by strong public involvement in the planning process. People traveling, working or living in the MoPac corridor can participate in the MoPac Improvement Project by reviewing information, asking questions and providing input. In fact, since the project was reinitiated in June 2010, more than 500 comments have been received and analyzed. Public input is a vital component to the draft environmental assessment, which is now available for public review and comment (see page 1 regarding the draft EA).

Comments on the project may be submitted in the following ways:

- At the May 23 public hearing
- Online: www.MoPacExpress.com/contact
- By mail to: TxDOT Austin District
Environmental Coordinator
P.O. Drawer 15426
Austin, Texas 78761-5426



Contact Us

We encourage you to contact us with questions or to request a meeting or presentation. MoPac Improvement Project team members are available to speak to your neighborhood or other organization at your request. To contact project planners or staff, visit our website:

www.MoPacExpress.com/contact/
or call us at: 512.996.9778.

