Sound Wall Vote

Property owners immediately adjacent to MoPac have indicated they want sound walls built along many segments of the highway to lessen road noise, according to a vote undertaken as part of the planning process for the MoPac Improvement Project.

Three of the 22 sound walls were voted down by adjacent property owners (generally the first row of residential properties along MoPac); the three segments voted down are on the east side of the corridor:

- Sound Wall #2, along Great North Blvd. between Pinecrest Drive and Foster Lane;
- Sound Wall #19, just north of 10th Street., and;
- Sound Wall #20a, closest to Cesar Chavez Street. on the south end of the study area.

To view the location of the sound wall segments, go to: www.MoPacExpress.com/environmental/soundwalls.php

Less than 51 percent of the ballots were received on six other sound wall segments (1, 8, 10, 14, 15 and 22) despite a second re-polling effort in September. Rules for noise abatement direct the Texas Department of Transportation to make the final decision on whether a wall gets built in cases where a majority vote is not received after a second re-polling effort. TxDOT, in coordination with the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (Mobility Authority) and the City of Austin, has decided to include these walls in the project.

The City will also consider if Sound Wall #3, which stretches more than a mile along Great Northern Blvd. between Far West Blvd. to RM 2222, may be built in city right-of-way. If the Austin City Council does not approve the wall within city right-of-way, it will not be built as part of improvements to MoPac.

Construction of sound walls along MoPac is anticipated to occur in 2013/2014 and is contingent upon approval of the project by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The sound walls, if constructed, would be built as part of the proposed MoPac Improvement Project (between Parmer Lane and Cesar Chavez Street).

More than 200 citizens attended seven workshops held this summer along the MoPac improvement corridor to learn how noise from the highway could be buffered by new sound walls built in public right-of-way.

MoPac Aesthetic Concept: Developed, Backed by Citizens

A preliminary aesthetic design concept for the MoPac Improvement Project has been selected following a collaborative design effort to ensure that any improvements made within the MoPac corridor support community desires to maintain the visual quality of the corridor.

Building on a MoPac aesthetic advisory effort from 2007, a context sensitive design committee was formed this spring with representatives from MoNAC (the MoPac Neighborhood Associations Coalition), several neighborhood associations, the Northwest Austin Civic Association, the City of Austin and the Texas Historical Commission. The 12-member committee focused on aesthetic components that were constructible, maintainable and cost-effective for the MoPac corridor.

The committee identified specific features such as the intersection treatments, the shape of retaining walls, the scale and light mass of the columns, along with the warm color of the surface treatments.

During a May 26th open house meeting, two designs were presented and attendees validated the design concept preferred by the citizen advisory committee. The selected concept includes aesthetic features for sound walls, bridge structures, retaining walls, sign structures and landscaping that would be incorporated into the project if a "build" alternative is ultimately selected. Project planners/designers are developing the project's aesthetic guidelines based on the selected concept.

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

Context Sensitive Design Committee Members

Members include representatives from:

- *MoNAC Neighborhood Association*
- *Deep Eddy Neighborhood Association*
- *Old Enfield Neighborhood Association*
- *Allandale Neighborhood Association*
- *Old West Austin Neighborhood Association*
- *Bryker Woods Neighborhood Association*
- *Balcones West Neighborhood Association*
- *Highland Park West Balconies Area Neigborhood Association*
- *Northwest Austin Civic Association*
- *City of Austin, Historic Preservation Officer*
- *Texas Historical Commission*

Public Input, Analysis Narrows in on Preferred Alternative for MoPac

Potential ways to deal with traffic congestion on MoPac – one of Austin's busiest highways – are being narrowed down with the goal of having a single "preferred alternative" by spring.

The study – a combined effort of TxDOT, the Mobility Authority, the City of Austin, Capital Metro and the public – is focused on an 11-mile section of MoPac between Parmer Lane and Cesar Chavez Street.

Nearly 176,000 cars and trucks travel MoPac each day. As the metropolitan area grows, transportation officials say traffic congestion will increase on MoPac, a key route to downtown Austin and beyond.

Project Need

- *Correct unreliable operations caused by increasing congestion*

Project Purpose

- *Improve mobility*
- *Manage congestion*
- *Provide a reliable transit route to reduce travel times*
- *Improve emergency response*
- *Maximize use of the facility*

To be eligible for federal transportation funds, the study – officially called an environmental assessment – must be done in accordance with federal and state regulations. Transportation officials reinitiated the study in June, 2010 and anticipate holding a public hearing to present study findings and a preferred alternative next spring.

Initially, 10 possible solutions were considered and outlined at public open houses last fall. Five alternatives were eliminated based on their failure to meet the project's need and purpose. Efforts since the public open houses have tentatively narrowed the field of possible solutions to two: a build alternative and the no-build alternative (which is federally required to be carried forward).

The no-build alternative would leave MoPac as it currently exists. No capacity would be added, and no funds or energy would be expended to construct the project.

The build alternative, which has been identified as the "recommended" solution by the Project Team, consists of adding one tolled express lane in each direction within existing right-of-way. The express lane alternative is being recommended by the Project Team because of (1) its ability to meet the Need and Purpose of the project (including reliability and mobility advantages), and (2) the level of environmental, community and historic impacts relative to the other build alternatives. The express lane alternative also has a greater potential for successful delivery because the collection of tolls would provide the revenue stream needed to fund the final design, construction, operations, and maintenance of the project.

Alternatives without a tolling component lack the revenue stream needed, and other traditional funding sources are not currently available. When formulating its recommendation, the Project Team considered public input received during the fall open houses.

Two alternatives identified for further evaluation in the Environmental Assessment, based on public input and detailed analysis by the Project Team:

***Adding one express lane in each direction** – Built within existing right-of-way, the objective of this alternative is to improve operating conditions for transit, registered vanpools, and first responders on MoPac. Some motorists not using transit or vanpools could also choose to pay to use the Express Lanes, thus reducing demand on the existing non-tolled general purpose lanes. Toll charges would vary, depending on traffic conditions.*

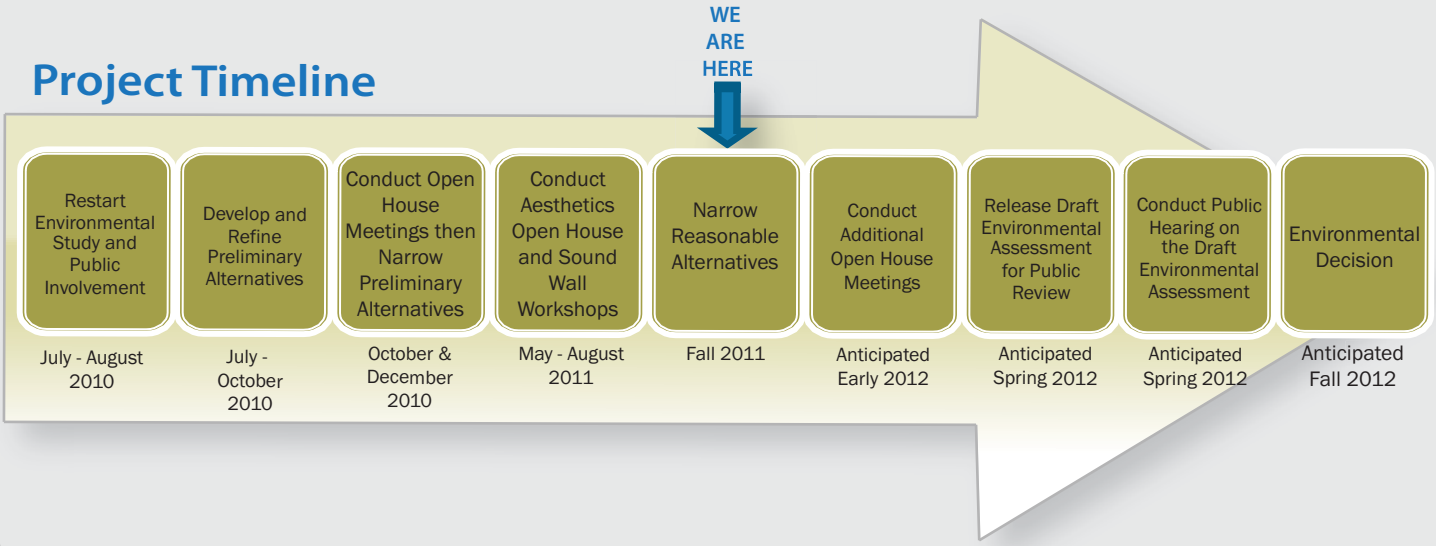
***A "no-build" alternative** – This would leave MoPac as it exists now with no additional capacity. Although a "no-build" alternative would not meet the project's need and purpose, it is carried forward for additional study to comply with federal and state requirements.*

Currently, the FHWA is reviewing the draft environmental assessment and the Project Team's recommendation. If FHWA concurs with the recommendation, it will become the "preferred alternative." The preferred alternative and the findings of the environmental assessment will be presented for public review and comment at a public hearing – tentatively scheduled to be held in the spring of 2012.

The FHWA will thoroughly consider the findings of the environmental assessment as well as public hearing input when deciding whether the project moves forward to construction or if additional study is required.

Public comment can be made at: www.MopacExpress.com/contact.

Project Timeline



Bicyclist & Pedestrian Needs Considered

Partners of the MoPac Improvement Project met with the Austin Bicycle Advisory Council on September 15th to continue coordination efforts aimed at addressing bicyclist and pedestrian needs in the MoPac corridor.

The meeting was part of an ongoing dialogue to identify gaps in the existing bicycle network and evaluate locations and priorities where additional bicycle/pedestrian facilities are desired along the corridor.

Options being proposed include:

- A Shared Use Path for bicyclists and pedestrians west of the southbound frontage road between Walnut Creek and Capital of Texas Highway (Loop 360);
- A Shared Use Path northbound through the MoPac-U.S. 183 interchange (see graphic);
- Improved east/west connectivity for bicyclists and pedestrians at 13 cross streets between Park Bend Drive and Enfield Road; and
- Closing gaps in the sidewalks along the MoPac frontage roads between Parmer Lane and Anderson Lane.

Planners are currently forming recommendations for inclusion in the ongoing environmental assessment for the MoPac Improvement Project area (between Parmer Lane and Cesar Chavez Street). Their recommendations will balance mobility needs with the ability to finance the project.

Bicycle/Pedestrian: SUP Highlights

Northbound through US 183 interchange Shoal Creek Blvd to Neils Thompson Drive, use detention pond site

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

Bicycle/Pedestrian: East/West Highlights

Far West Blvd bicycle refuge area

Bicycle/Pedestrian: East/West Highlights

Connection to 34th Street

Your Opinion Matters

Public input is critical to the success of the MoPac Improvement Project. As solutions to the traffic congestion on MoPac are considered, your opinion matters. Users of the MoPac corridor, neighborhood organizations, businesses and others are joining the process to find an alternative that is an effective and responsible solution and meets the project's Need and Purpose. In fact, since the project was reinitiated in June 2010, over 450 comments have been received and analyzed. These comments and the environmental analysis are being used to develop a preferred alternative.

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

- In person at open houses or workshops
- 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.