



CENTRAL TEXAS REGIONAL  
**MOBILITY AUTHORITY**

December 20, 2017

The Honorable Roxanne McKee  
Mayor  
City of Rollingwood  
403 Nixon Drive  
Rollingwood, TX 78746

RE: MoPac South Environmental Study

Dear Mayor McKee:

Thank you for your inquiries regarding the MoPac South Environmental Study. We look forward to continuing our conversation with you about this critical mobility improvement project. It is our mission to implement innovative, multi-modal transportation solutions that reduce congestion and enhance quality of life and economic vitality in Central Texas.

The MoPac corridor south of Cesar Chavez Street is the 24<sup>th</sup> most congested roadway in the state. If we do nothing to address congestion, drivers will spend an additional 35 minutes traveling the corridor by 2035. The Mobility Authority is driven to provide a viable solution that meets the mobility needs and aligns with community values.

### **The NEPA process**

I would like to briefly walk through where we've been and where we're headed as per the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The NEPA process is required by federal and state law; it is procedural, public, thorough, and ensures informed decisions.

In February 2016, Save Our Springs Alliance and other plaintiffs filed a suit to stop this study and two other projects; as a result, virtually all work was halted. This past August, the US District Court ruled in favor of the process as previously implemented. With this now behind us, we are beginning to re-engage.

As you know, and as presented to the public, the Express Lane(s) alternative is the Recommended Build Alternative for MoPac South. Express Lanes are a viable congestion management tool for increasing reliability for both drivers and transit. Congestion along the MoPac corridor comes at a high cost to travelers—in terms of time lost, diminished quality of life, and fuel consumption. Not to be overlooked is the impact to our environment – in terms of impact on emissions, water quality, and noise pollution. Increasing demand for MoPac, an already overburdened and congested corridor, requires the smartest long term solution possible. This increase in demand along the South MoPac corridor will undoubtedly impact not just MoPac, but the neighboring network of cross streets such as Bee Caves Rd.

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Following the initial public roll out of the Express Lane(s) Alternative as envisioned by CAMPO, we developed six different potential operational configurations for the vicinity of Lady Bird Lake. These operational configurations were presented to the public for comment at the last open house in November 2015. Each configuration is still being considered and refined. No recommendation has been made to date. Each are receiving the same level of analysis and will be compared against the same criteria. Per the NEPA process, the No Build, or “do nothing”, alternative is always on the table and will be carried forward to completion of the environmental document.

Also per the NEPA process, we will continue evaluation of the proposed schematic design for the Express Lane(s) Alternative in order to ensure that this recommended mobility solution works within current and future conditions. This will include a review of intersection operations along the entire corridor to ensure that ingress and egress will function properly with any proposed improvements. Stakeholder input is important at this stage of the process.

Community outreach efforts in 2018 will include the fifth open house for the project and provide the ample, required time for the official comment period. We will review further comments from the City at that time in concurrence with the other many and varied stakeholder interests and comments.

Following this outreach, and as part of the Draft Environmental Assessment (the environmental document for the study), the project team will thoroughly analyze the Build Alternative and No Build Alternative for potential impacts to the natural and human environment. Per the NEPA process, the draft of the document will be presented at a public hearing for public and agency review. Once comments are received and addressed, a final Environmental Assessment will be prepared for the TxDOT Environmental Division. They will provide the final decision on whether the Build Alternative moves forward or the No Build Alternative is selected. We anticipate a decision in 2019.

### **City of Rollingwood Priority Issues**

We have reviewed your priority issues sent to us this November. It is our understanding these issues include:

- That the MoPac South study process and schematic ensures that the operation of the RM 2244/Bee Cave Road intersection functions as efficiently as possible and can be improved in its existing configuration in the future without eliminating movements (Section I of the November letter).
- That the development of options to relieve congestion on MoPac South include below grade level alternatives (Sections II, III, IV of the November letter).
- That the MoPac South study process provide revisions, available for public comment, to all configurations that clearly identify how the project will connect to the recently completed MoPac North Project and the TxDOT Slaughter Lane and La Crosse Ave intersections project (Sections IV and V of the November letter).
- That the MoPac South design provides consistent, direct access to and from downtown Austin, including for pedestrians and cyclists (Section VI of the November letter).

Review of some of your recommendations is already in progress:

- The Mobility Authority recognizes the importance of the interchange of MoPac and RM 2244/Bee Cave Road. We developed multiple options to improve the efficiency of the

interchange in response to the City's concerns and presented concepts to City representatives on July 31, 2017. Each of these options works toward not only optimizing intersection performance but also reducing elevation of the MoPac corridor through the area. We remain engaged in refining those options for further consideration and will continue to look at efforts to preserve flexibility for future intersection improvements at this location.

- In reference to the underpasses for the northern MoPac Express Lane project, these were an alternative design recommended by the contractor, CH2M Hill. Although the contractor presented this concept to us as a project benefit, the contractor incurred significant cost overruns and schedule delays that significantly extended the projected schedule of the project and caused prolonged construction disruption.
- The Alternatives and configurations for the project maintain pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to and from downtown Austin. The Mobility Authority is committed to multi-modal transportation and as such over eight miles of shared use path are proposed for pedestrians and bicyclists from Slaughter Lane to Lady Bird Lake.

Thank you again for taking the time to provide us your comments. We at the Mobility Authority believe that communities make projects better and welcome the opportunity to enhance the resident and commuter experience. The study team will be relaunching the broader community outreach efforts in 2018. As mentioned earlier, this will include the fifth open house for the project and ample time for the official comment period.

Also importantly, we all need to recognize that this project comes to us at the recommendation of the local MPO and the approval of the Texas Transportation Commission. Our project menu is directly outlined by their process and as such must be followed in the development of alternatives. If at any time CAMPO should change course on this project or any others we are scheduled to develop, we would be obligated to respond and adapt accordingly.

I can assure you the Mobility Authority Board and staff are committed to listening to all of our stakeholders and providing thoughtful consideration to all public comments.

Please look for future updates in the coming months.

Sincerely,



Mike Heiligenstein  
Executive Director

cc: Senator Kirk Watson  
Mr. Ray Wilkerson, Chairman, Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority  
Mr. David B. Armbrust, Board Member, Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority  
Mr. Al Alonzi, Federal Highway Administration  
Mr. Terry G. McCoy, PE, Texas Department of Transportation  
Mr. Ashby Johnson, Executive Director, Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization