

AGENDA ITEM 4 – SUMMARY SHEET

MoPac Improvement Project Report General Briefing

Department: Engineering

Associated Costs: None

Funding Source: None

Board Action Required: No

Description of Matter:

The report is an account of the activities on the MoPac Improvement Project from October, 2010 through February, 2011.

Attached documentation for reference:

GEC Quarterly Activities Report

Contact for further information:

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INTRODUCTION

The MoPac Improvement Project is a combined effort of the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (Mobility Authority), the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the City of Austin and Capital Metro (CapMetro) to improve mobility along an 11-mile stretch of MoPac between Parmer Lane and Cesar Chavez Street. Any improvements would require approval from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). TxDOT and the Mobility Authority are currently working together to ensure that the FHWA environmental study process follows the requirements set by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (also known as “NEPA”).

This report documents and describes the status of the MoPac Improvement Project from the summer of 2010 to February 28, 2011.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

MoPac is one of Austin's most important arteries, serving as a key route to downtown and points beyond. The primary alternative to Interstate 35, more than 180,000 cars and trucks travel through downtown a day. At the urging of local and state leaders, the project partners have teamed together to develop a reasonable proposal to the mobility problem that takes into account the needs of drivers, transit riders and the concerns of surrounding neighbors. An environmental study is currently underway to determine the best options for improving mobility on MoPac. The environmental phase is scheduled to be completed by in the summer of 2012.

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



**Figure 1:
Project Location**

ACTIVITIES

The following Activities have been accomplished since the MoPac Improvement Project was re-launched in July 2010:

JULY 2010

- Staff from Mobility Authority and TxDOT coordinated roles and responsibilities for project development.
- A press conference was held on July 7 to officially kick off the project re-initiation.

AUGUST 2010

- TxDOT and Mobility Authority finalized the Market Valuation agreement and Terms and Conditions.
- Mobility Authority met with the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) on August 25.
- The Mobility Authority collaborated with FHWA and the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) on an Express Lane Peer Industry Workshop. The workshop's goal was to gain insight from lessons learned by peer agencies, and review specific and relevant aspects of other express lane projects for applicability to the MoPac project. Over 35 people from the City, County, CAMPO, TxDOT, consultants, the Mobility Authority, and FHWA attended the workshop on August 25 and 26.
- TxDOT re-initiated development of an Environmental Assessment with an environmental kickoff meeting with the Mobility Authority, FHWA, TxDOT Austin District, and TxDOT Environmental Division (ENV) personnel on August 30.

SEPTEMBER 2010

- Market Valuation Agreement and Terms and Conditions were presented to the CAMPO Finance Committee on September 10 and were approved by the CAMPO Policy Board on September 13.
- The project website (MoPacExpress.com) went live on September 16.
- TxDOT initiated the Environmental Technical Working Group (TWG) process to aid in the development of the Environmental Assessment. TWG meetings include representatives of the Mobility Authority, FHWA, TxDOT Austin District, and TxDOT ENV. Three TWGs were held in September.
- Resolution to exercise primacy was approved at the September 29 Mobility Authority Board meeting. By exercising primacy, the Mobility Authority officially announces its intent to develop the project.

OCTOBER 2010

- 179 people attended the first round of Open Houses on October 6 and 7 and reviewed information on 10 possible alternatives. Feedback from the meetings was used to help

reduce the number of alternatives down to five (four build alternatives and the no build alternative).

- In addition to these meetings, team members made presentations to MONAC (a coalition of neighborhood associations along the project corridor) on October 19 and the West Austin Neighborhood Group on October 4. The neighborhoods are closely monitoring the project.
- The development of the Environmental Assessment continued and two TWGs were held in October.
- *Traffic Modeling*- Approximately 57,000 postcards were sent to MoPac users on October 18. These cards were sent to people who were identified as using the MoPac corridor requesting participation in the Origin and Destination (O&D) Survey if they haven't already participated. The revised CAMPO traffic model, which will be the basis of the project's model, was received and new modeling commenced.

NOVEMBER 2010

- Environmental Assessment TWG meetings continued. Prior month's alternatives analysis narrowed the ten preliminary alternatives to five reasonable alternatives. These five alternatives are evaluated further for impacts to resources and communities. An e-Newsletter was distributed on November 15.
- *Traffic Modeling*- Stated Preference (SP) and O&D Survey draft reports were initiated. As an incentive for participation, prize awards were mailed to the randomly selected people who participated in the survey.

DECEMBER 2010

- A second round of Open Houses was held on December 1 and 2 to gather additional input from the public on the project and the remaining alternatives. 187 people participated in the second round of Open Houses with many contributing feedback that will help the study team as it analyzes the remaining alternatives and identifies a recommended alternative. Comments received at the open houses and responses can be found at: <http://www.mopacexpress.com/environmental/public-input.php>.

JANUARY 2011

- Finalization of the draft Environmental Assessment commenced and is scheduled to be submitted to TxDOT on February 28.
- Staff continued to coordinate with the City of Austin on a wide range of issues including the downtown connections, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, aesthetics and sound walls. The MoPac Improvement Team also met with bicycle advocacy groups to better understand their priorities in regard to bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Draft O&D Studies were completed for the corridor. Operational traffic modeling continued.

FEBRUARY 2011

- The second in a series of e-Newsletters was distributed on February 2 to update stakeholders on project progress.

- TxDOT and the Mobility Authority executed a Financial Assistance Agreement for TxDOT to provide \$5.4 million of assistance in connection with the development of the MoPac Improvement Project on February 9.
- The draft Environmental Assessment and draft Schematic Design were submitted to the TxDOT Austin District and Mobility Authority for review on February 28.
- The analysis of traffic operations continued to be refined and results were incorporated into the draft Environmental Assessment.
- The operations model will be utilized in the preliminary Level 2 Traffic and Revenue Study, which is anticipated to be completed by the end of March 2011.

SCHEDULE

| Milestone | Date | Status |
|--|-------------------|---------------|
| Restart Environmental Study and Public Involvement | Summer 2010 | Complete |
| Market Valuation / Exercise Primacy | Fall 2010 | Complete |
| Develop and Refine Preliminary Alternatives | Fall 2010 | Complete |
| Conduct Open House Meetings | Fall 2010 | Complete |
| Reasonable Alternatives Refinement | Winter 2010/ 2011 | Complete |
| Draft Environmental Assessment and Schematic Complete - Initiate Review Process | February 2011 | On Schedule |
| Restart Aesthetics Committee | Spring 2011 | On Schedule |
| Complete Level 2 Traffic and Revenue (T&R) | Spring 2011 | On Schedule |
| Conduct Noise Workshops | Summer 2011 | |
| “Satisfactory for Further Processing” from FHWA | Winter 2011/2012 | |
| Start Design/Build Procurement | Winter 2011/2012 | |
| Conduct Public Hearings on the Draft Environmental Assessment | Spring 2012 | |
| Submittal of Final Environmental Assessment to TxDOT/FHWA | Spring 2012 | |
| Anticipated “Finding of No Significant Impact” from FHWA | Fall 2012 | |
| Complete Investment Grade T&R | Fall 2012 | |
| Complete Design/Build Procurement | Winter 2012/2013 | |
| Bond Sale; Groundbreaking | Spring 2013 | |