

Texas Transportation Institute

Interstate 35 Citizens' Advisory Committee Public Outreach:

Focus Group Results

Work performed under TxDOT RMC 0-6581, Task 11

Tina Geiselbrecht, Richard Baker, and Heather Ford
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Interstate 35 (I-35) Citizens' Advisory Committee is charged to “study the impact of corridor-wide issues, including economic, political, societal, demographic, population trends, use of existing/new/upgraded facilities, multimodal solutions and finance options; make recommendations on corridor planning, development and public involvement; and enhance participation and input between the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and affected communities, governmental entities and interested parties.” As part of that effort, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) was tasked with gathering public input of current and future needs of the I-35 corridor. To achieve this goal TTI conducted 12 focus groups and/or listening sessions throughout the corridor. Focus groups and listening sessions were conducted in each of the four segments of the corridor. Focus groups with the general public were conducted in rural and urban areas and listening sessions with the business community were conducted in the urban areas. Table ES 1 indicates the dates and locations.

Table ES 1. Focus Group Session Distribution.

		Location	Urban/Rural	Number of Participants	
		General Public Groups	Segment One	Dallas – TTI Dallas Office	Urban
Fort Worth – Tarrant County Agri-Life Extension Office	Urban			7	
Gainesville – Cooke County Public Library	Rural			8	
Segment Two	Waxahachie – Ellis County Extension Office		Rural	6	
	Waco/Temple/Belton		Urban	6	
Segment Three	Jarrell – Jarrell City Council Chambers		Rural	12	
	Austin – TTI Austin Office		Urban	10	
Segment Four	Laredo – Laredo Development Foundation		Urban	10	
Business Listening Sessions	Segment One		Dallas/Fort Worth – North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) offices		8
	Segment Three		Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce		13
		San Antonio Chamber of Commerce		13	
	Segment Four	Laredo Chamber of Commerce		9	

Key Observations

Comments from each of the focus groups were similar in many ways. All participants had seen traffic increasing on I-35 over the past several years. Participants in segments one, three and four specifically mentioned the increase in truck traffic. All the participants, rural or urban, recognized the need to proactively plan for solutions. All participants agreed that Texas will continue to grow and to remain economically competitive a suitable transportation network must be provided. Most participants recognized that solutions need to be both short-term “quick fixes” and long-term. Suggestions for short-term solutions included:

- **Provide more traveler information** – Several people mentioned the need to have more information about route choices. They suggested installing and/or using changeable message signs that provided travel time comparisons with alternate routes. Participants in Central Texas were particularly interested in this. They implied that more people would use the State Highway (SH) 130 bypass if they were aware of the traffic conditions on I-35 through downtown.
- **Provide more education** – Similar to the comment above, people felt they needed more information about how to use the transportation system. This applied to all modes. For instance, people in the Austin area wanted more information about the toll roads – where they went, how to use them, how much they cost, etc. People in the Metroplex wanted more information about the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes and transit options.
- **Encourage flexible schedules and telecommuting** – Many participants felt the department should do more to encourage commuting in the off-peak hours or not at all. They felt that TxDOT should work with local businesses and do targeted studies to show people what options were available to them.
- **Address the truck issue** – 18-wheeler traffic on I-35 was an issue for all groups but it was especially true from Waco south to Laredo. Everyone felt that the trucks must be addressed. In the short term, most people were in favor of the truck lane restrictions.
- **Fix design problems** – Many participants felt that TxDOT should first address things such as short ramps or ramps with curves. Many felt acceleration/deceleration lanes would help. In the Metroplex area, several people specifically mentioned the horizontal and vertical curves on I-35 and the left and right exits.
- **Begin education about transportation funding** – In every group no one had any knowledge of how transportation projects are funded. No one, except one person, knew what he or she paid in fuel tax. However, everyone indicated this information was important to the discussion of how to pay for fixes. They also suggested providing more information about how much potential solutions would cost so that the average person could do a “cost/benefit” analysis to make a better informed decision.

It was more difficult to get participants to focus on longer term solutions. It is often more difficult for people to think twenty or thirty years into the future. It is first necessary to have them accept that actual solutions will be needed. In this instance, many people suggested that technology would have solved all of the problems in twenty to thirty years. However, there were long-term solutions offered. These included:

- **Add capacity to I-35** – While this seems obvious, by far the preferred consensus for doing this was to double-deck (over or under) I-35. However, what differed was that most people felt that this option should be reserved for truly through traffic. They envisioned that this would be for people driving long distances. The groups differed on the amount of access that should be available, but in general, all agreed that it should be access that is more limited. While some people supported double-decking the entire length of I-35 others thought that where right-of-way was easily available I-35 should be widened. Where this is not possible, they preferred the double-decking idea.

- **Encourage/provide alternate modes** – Each of the groups, including the rural groups, encouraged the use of alternate modes. Participants were very supportive of HOV and even high occupancy toll (HOT) concepts. Many made suggestions for adding commuter rail or intercity rail but most did not believe this would reduce congestion on I-35. Some people suggested moving more freight by rail but quickly dismissed the idea as unfeasible.

Other parts of the discussion focused on transportation funding. As noted earlier, there was very little to no understanding of how transportation is funded and this is true at all levels. After being given some brief, basic information, all of the participants saw the I-35 problem as much more serious than they had originally believed. The majority reluctantly supported increasing the gas tax. There was also support for toll roads, primarily in the urban areas. Most participants were shocked at the diversions that occur related to the gas tax. They also realized that it would be very difficult to stop the diversions. Therefore, while they were supportive of a gas tax increase they were adamant that it go only to transportation.

There was some consensus among the groups that TxDOT must use the money wisely. For the most part, participants felt that TxDOT was doing a good job but they want more transparency and accountability. The department lacks credibility and much more education should be done to combat the misperceptions that are perpetuated. There was also a recognition that this is a “very fine line that TxDOT must walk” so as not to be seen as advocating for any particular solution. While it was not brought up by the moderator, the Trans Texas Corridor (TTC) is still very fresh in the minds of some.

Without exception, every person in each group expressed appreciation for having had the opportunity to provide their input. They saw this as a positive move on TxDOT’s part to actively seek the public’s opinion and it strengthened TxDOT’s credibility. Additionally, nearly everyone indicated they had learned something and they were glad for having learned it. They thought that providing more information would be the key to success.

INTRODUCTION

Focus groups are an excellent method to delve into complicated issues and uncover what the public is thinking, why they think that and how they react to additional information or alternative scenarios. The Texas Transportation Institute conducted a series of focus groups in March and April in several Texas cities designed to investigate issues related to meeting the mobility and economic viability needs of the I-35 corridor — both in the near term and the long term. This research was undertaken as part of a larger citizen-driven effort to discuss the issues related to travel on I-35 for both the general public and businesses. This citizens' group was charged with developing a plan for I-35 that reflects the citizens' perspective. The findings from the groups are not a statistical sample of public opinion but rather provide a broad overview of the issues that are affecting businesses and the traveling public.

A total of 12 focus groups and/or listening sessions were held within the four segments of the I-35 corridor with input from the Citizens' Advisory Committee. Table 1 identifies the type of group and the location. The original intent of the research effort was to hold one group with an urban population of each segment, one group with a rural population of each segment and at least one business listening session in each segment. However, lack of available participants precluded having a focus group in Pearsall and a business listening session in the Waco/Temple/Belton area.

Table 1. Focus Group Session Distribution.

		Location	Urban/Rural	Number of Participants	
General Public Groups	Segment One	Dallas – TTI Dallas Office	Urban	6	
		Fort Worth – Tarrant County Agri-Life Extension Office	Urban	7	
		Gainesville – Cooke County Public Library	Rural	8	
	Segment Two	Waxahachie – Ellis County Extension Office	Rural	6	
		Waco/Temple/Belton	Urban	6	
	Segment Three	Jarrell – Jarrell City Council Chambers	Rural	12	
		Austin – TTI Austin Office	Urban	10	
	Segment Four	Laredo – Laredo Development Foundation	Urban	10	
	Business Listening Sessions	Segment One	Dallas/Fort Worth – NCTCOG offices		8
		Segment Three	Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce		13
San Antonio Chamber of Commerce				13	
Segment Four		Laredo Chamber of Commerce		9	

RECRUITMENT

Participants were recruited for nine general population sessions and five sessions oriented toward owner/managers of businesses that would be impacted by changes to the I-35 corridor. Recruitment tools included:

- flyers (see Figures 1 and 2) posted in public areas,
- past participant lists (participants used less than nine months prior were not contacted),
- online advertising such as Craigslist and EBay Classifieds (formerly Kijiji.com),

- newspaper advertisements (see Figure 3), and
- posts to Facebook groups.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Please Join Us for a **FOCUS GROUP**

5:30 P.M. to 7:30 P.M.
Date
Location
Address

The Texas Transportation Institute is seeking twelve individuals to participate in a focus group session discussing the Texas Department of Transportation and priorities for transportation planning along the IH 35 corridor. Eligible participants should be regular drivers over 18. The focus group will take approximately two hours and participants will be paid \$ 50.00 for their time.

**For more information or to register, interested individuals should contact:
Heather Ford at (512) 467-0946 or h-ford@ttimail.tamu.edu
You must be registered to participate.**

 **Texas
Transportation
Institute**

Figure 1. Sample Flyer Used for Recruitment of Participants for General Population Focus Groups.

Jarrell General Population

The first focus group session was a general population session located in rural Williamson County. The emphasis for the rural communities was to recruit individuals who were not commuting into the larger cities via I-35, but rather individuals that were using it for their day-to-day activities. An ad was placed in the local biweekly newspaper, the *Main Street News*. The recruiter also sent a flyer to Jarrell City Hall and an email to Florence Chamber of Commerce for them to post the flyer on their website. The recruiter also attempted to attract participants from other rural communities in northern Williamson County. A flyer was faxed to a business in Schwertner, Texas, and an attempt was made to contact businesses in Bartlett, TX, to post the flyer.

As part of the process, the recruiter posted a notice on Craigslist, but no useable respondents were recruited from that notice. All respondents to that ad were commuters into the Austin metro area (including Round Rock and Georgetown). An effort was made to recruit locals via Facebook, with an email exchange asking the moderator of the “Jarrell People” group to post the flyer information. No participants were gained from this effort. Eventually, 11 participants were recruited, at least one each from the newspaper ad, the Florence Chamber of Commerce website listing, and the flyers posted in Florence and Jarrell.

Austin General Population

The recruiter had access to a number of potential contacts from previous surveys and focus groups, but was unable to fill the session with just these contacts. Several people who responded to the Jarrell recruitment ad on Craigslist, but who actually lived in Austin, were recruited to participate in the Austin session.

Austin Listening Session

The recruiter worked with a representative of the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce to recruit individual business stakeholders for the session, which was held in the Chamber’s board room. To get a representative a cross-section of businesses within Segment Three of the I-35 corridor, the recruiter also contacted Chambers of Commerce for other cities along the corridor. Georgetown and Round Rock agreed to send the information to their members. Pflugerville and San Marcos would not send out the flyer, but told the recruiter that TTI could individually contact members in their online directory. In those cases, flyers were sent to those members that appeared to have businesses that would involve regular travel on the interstate. Special invitations were sent to representatives from H-E-B and Wal-Mart, the two largest businesses in the area that use I-35 on a regular basis.

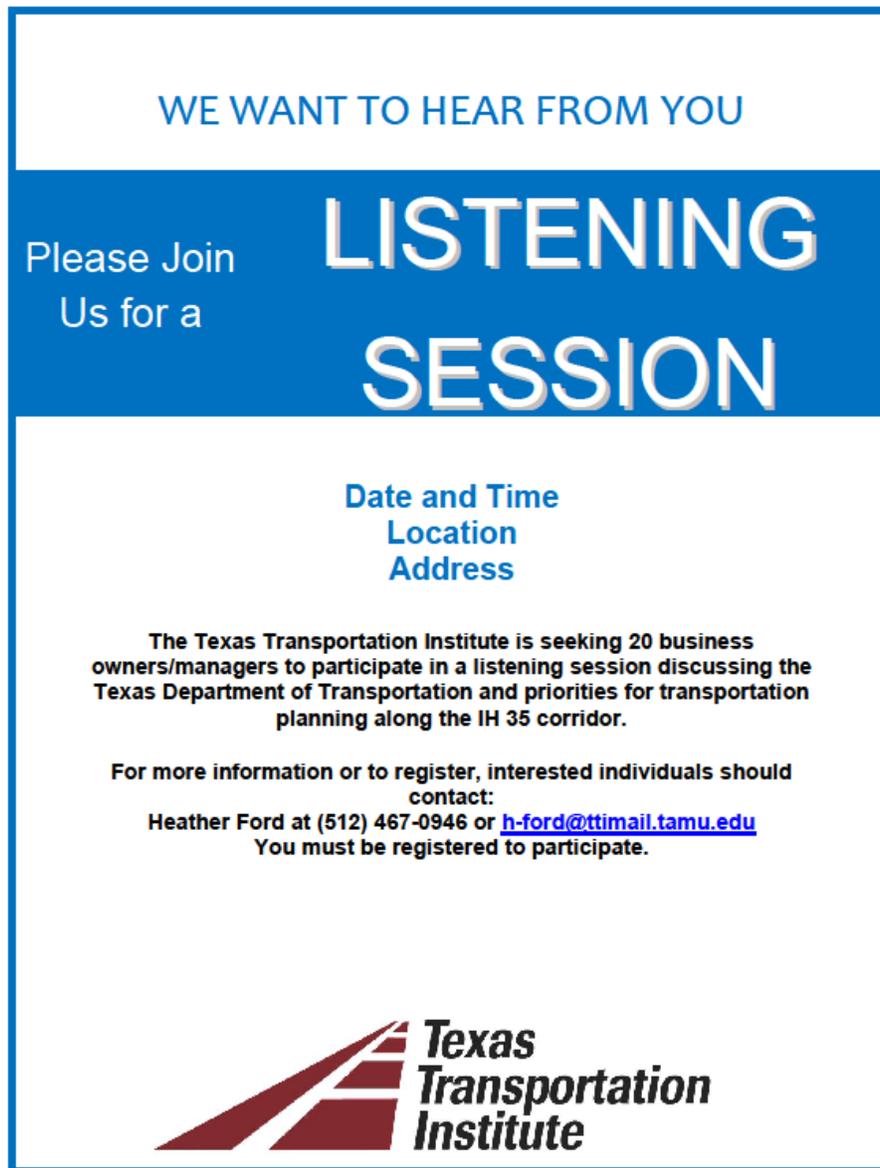


Figure 2. Sample Flyer Used for Recruitment of Participants for Business Listening Sessions.

Laredo General Population

The recruiter had access to a list of participants from a 2006 focus group session who had indicated a willingness to participate in future research. Those individuals were contacted by email, but only two responded. An ad for the focus group was placed on Craigslist, which garnered one additional participant, and on EBay Classifieds. Most participants were recruited via an ad in the *Laredo Morning Times*, and a flyer posted on the Texas A&M International

University campus. The flyer was also sent to several civic organizations, the City of Laredo, and the Laredo Development Foundation for distribution, but those efforts met with minimal success.



Figure 3. Sample Newspaper Advertisements.

Laredo Listening Session

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce was contacted to host this listening session, and they agreed to put the listening session notice in their twice-weekly email distribution list. The recruiter also contacted the Laredo Development Foundation and Cotulla Chamber of Commerce asking them to forward the flyer to their members; at least seven individuals responded from these efforts. Due to lack of response from the Laredo Chamber posting, the recruiter also made use of an online yellow pages to contact Laredo service industry businesses that would likely make use of the interstate during day-to-day business, but received no response from this effort.

Dallas General Population

The recruiter initially contacted past survey and focus group participants in the area, as well as several people who were not selected for a previous session, attracting several potential participants for the session. A posting on Craigslist garnered approximately four dozen responses in a three-day period, filling the session.

Dallas/Fort Worth Listening Session

For the listening session in the Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area, the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) was contacted for meeting space and help recruiting. NCTCOG mailed out dozens of flyers to their contact lists. Also contacted were various other agencies, including the North Texas Commission, the Tarrant Regional Transportation Coalition, the Dallas Regional Mobility Coalition, and the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce (the Workforce Development and Local Business Development groups). Several respondents indicated that they were contacted by the Farmer's Branch Chamber of Commerce, which TTI did not contact, but which was likely contacted by NCTCOG. TTI directly contacted the

Carrollton, Duncanville, DeSoto, Lancaster, Lewisville, and Irving Chambers of Commerce. Also contacted were the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, Dallas Asian-American Chamber of Commerce, Dallas Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, and Fort Worth Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Most attendees were last minute additions that learned about the session from the flyers sent by NCTCOG or from the suburban Chambers of Commerce.

Fort Worth General Population

The recruiter had recently used a list of past participants in the Tarrant County area for another project, so recruited new participants for this focus group via Craigslist. Because there was a separate session for the Dallas side of the metropolitan area, it was necessary for the recruiter to eliminate a number of potential participants that lived outside of Tarrant County. All participants were recruited via this Craigslist posting.

Waxahachie General Population

To attract participants in Waxahachie and the surrounding rural communities, an advertisement was placed in the April 11th edition of the *Waxahachie Daily Light*. This ad had the desired effect and received several responses from both within and around the city. In addition, the recruiter also advertised on the Dallas-Fort Worth area Craigslist page, emphasizing the rural communities in Ellis and Johnson Counties. Only one response was received from a resident of Ellis County, but several inquiries were made by Dallas and DeSoto residents, again prompting the recruiter to eliminate a number of potential participants. The flyer was also posted as an ad on EBay Classifieds, and the recruiter linked that ad to a Facebook page. Additional recruiting was attempted by contacting the cities of Waxahachie, Midlothian, Red Oak, Italy, Oak Leaf, and Ovilla. Two or three potential participants were recruited from those flyers. The Downtown Waxahachie Association and Nicholas P. Sims Library were also contacted about posting flyers, but no participants came from this effort.

Belton Listening Session

The McLane Company was initially contacted for meeting space and help in recruiting, but they were unable to assist with the location due to a scheduling conflict. After making arrangements to use the Bell County Agri-Life Extension office for the listening session, a flyer was sent to the Belton, Temple, Salado, and Troy Chambers of Commerce. The recruiter also contacted the Killeen and Harker Heights Chambers of Commerce, and the City of Nolanville. The Temple Economic Development Foundation agreed to also forward the flyer to businesses on its contact list. Unbeknownst to the recruiter and researchers, another gathering of the area business community was scheduled for the same day, and only three individuals, representing one business in Salado and the Killeen Chamber of Commerce, registered for the listening session. Researchers decided to cancel this session due to the low response.

Belton General Population

Past participants in the Killeen-Temple area had recently been used in a focus group for another project, so the recruiter attempted to find new potential participants by placing an advertisement in the April 11th edition of the *Temple Daily Telegram*. Response from the newspaper ad was very good, providing at least as many applicants as there were spaces available. In addition, the recruiter also advertised the session on Craigslist, receiving one response from that effort.

Pearsall General Population

To recruit participants in Pearsall and the surrounding rural Frio County area, an advertisement was placed in the Thursday, April 22nd, *Frio-Nueces Current*. No responses were obtained from this effort. Because there was no past participant list to work from for this area, the recruiter posted an ad on both EBay Classifieds and the San Antonio area Craigslist, specifying Frio County as the area of interest. Only one response was received, and it was from a person who lived in San Antonio who did not qualify. The recruiter also emailed and called several businesses and asked them to post the flyer in their public areas and break rooms. Flyers were faxed to several businesses that were called. After only receiving one call from a resident of Dilley, Texas, who wished to participate, the session was cancelled.

Gainesville General Population

An advertisement was placed in the April 25th edition of the *Gainesville Daily Register*, which attracted several potential participants. An ad was posted on Craigslist, but most potential participants were actually residents of Denton County who did not habitually travel in Gainesville or Cooke County. Flyers were emailed to:

- North Central Texas College (NCTC),
- the Cooke County Library (the focus group location),
- the City of Gainesville, and several other local organizations.

All the remaining participants were recruited from the flyers at NCTC.

San Antonio Listening Session

The recruiter contacted the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce for assistance with both meeting space and recruiting. The Chamber agreed to both host the session and to send out the flyer. When they sent out the flyer, it was received by the San Antonio Metropolitan Planning Organization, and they forwarded the information to their members. As a result, there were a number of individuals representing governments, neighborhood associations and advocacy groups that attempted to register for the session. The recruiter also contacted Holt CAT and Toyota to specifically invite representatives from their businesses to attend the session.

No response was received from Toyota. The Chambers of New Braunfels, San Marcos, Schertz, and other cities with businesses that regularly use I-35 were also contacted and asked to send a representative and to post the flyer.

FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS

The statistics associated with the counties in the following charts (Bell, Cooke, Dallas, Ellis, Tarrant, Travis, Webb, and Williamson) were taken from the 2006-2008, American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The statistics for towns and cities listed in the figures (Belton, Gainesville, Dallas, Waxahachie, Ft. Worth, Austin, Laredo, and Jarrell) were the statistics gathered by researchers in recruiting participants for the focus groups conducted as the main goal of this research effort.

These statistics were collected as part of TTI's screening process. For the most part, potential participants were not denied participation in the sessions. However, if researchers found that there was a great deal of interest in participating on the part of the general public, then this information was used to construct a focus group that most resembled the demographics of the area in which the focus group was being conducted.

Gender Demographics

In terms of gender, the I-35 focus groups were somewhat reflective of the respective county's demographics (Figure 4). Belton and Jarrell had slightly more males in attendance, while Waxahachie, Gainesville, and Austin had slightly more females in attendance.

Gender	Male	Female
Bell County	49%	51%
Belton	67%	33%
Cooke County	49%	51%
Gainesville	38%	63%
Dallas County	50%	50%
Dallas	50%	50%
Ellis County	49%	51%
Waxahachie	40%	60%
Tarrant County	49%	51%
Ft. Worth	43%	57%
Travis County	52%	48%
Austin	40%	60%
Webb County	47%	53%
Laredo	50%	50%
Williamson County	49%	51%
Jarrell	67%	33%

Figure 4. Gender of Focus Groups’ Participants and Associated Counties.

Source: ACS Demographic and Housing Characteristics: 2006-2008, American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, US Census Bureau.

In terms of age, the focus groups were also generally representative of the respective counties (Figure 5). The main exception to this was the Waxahachie focus group, which had a larger number of younger (18-19 years old) and older (over 60 years old) participants than what might be expected in Ellis County when compared to the age demographics. It should be noted that the breakdown in age categories presented here was done so due to the fact that the Census Bureau and the TTI researchers on this research effort, collected ages within different ranges. For example, the Census Bureau collects ages in the ranges of 25 to 34, 35 to 44, and 45 to 54, while TTI researchers collected ages in the ranges of 20 to 29, 30 to 39, 40 to 49, etc. Therefore, the ranges presented below were the only possible way to compare census level data with the data collected by the researchers.

Age	18 - 19 years	20 to 59 years	Over 60 years	No Answer /Unknown
Bell County	4%	78%	18%	0%
Belton	0%	83%	17%	0%
Cooke County	4%	69%	27%	0%
Gainesville	0%	75%	25%	0%
Dallas County	4%	79%	17%	0%
Dallas	0%	83%	17%	0%
Ellis County	4%	77%	19%	0%
Waxahachie	20%	40%	40%	0%
Tarrant County	4%	79%	17%	0%
Ft. Worth	0%	86%	14%	0%
Travis County	4%	82%	14%	0%
Austin	0%	90%	0%	10%
Webb County	5%	76%	19%	0%
Laredo	0%	80%	20%	0%
Williamson County	3%	80%	17%	0%
Jarrell	8%	75%	17%	0%

Figure 5. Age of Focus Groups' Participants and Associated Counties.

Source: ACS Demographic and Housing Characteristics: 2006-2008, American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, US Census Bureau.

The Laredo focus group most represented its associated county in terms of racial and ethnic composition (Figure 63). It was attended predominately by Hispanics with a small Caucasian representation. The Gainesville and Fort Worth focus groups were also generally representative of their associated counties. The following focus groups were not representative of the general county population for the following reasons:

- The Belton focus group did not have any African American participants, which account for approximately 20 percent of the Bell County population. Caucasians and Hispanics were slightly over represented.
- The Dallas focus group did not have any Hispanic participants, which account for 38 percent of the Dallas County population. Caucasians and African Americans were over represented.
- There were no African Americans or Hispanics in attendance at the Waxahachie focus group, which account for almost 10 percent and over 20 percent of the Ellis County population, respectively.
- The Jarrell focus group did not have any Hispanic participants. Hispanics account for about 20 percent of the Williamson County population. The Jarrell focus group was disproportionately attended by Caucasian participants.

- The Austin focus group was attended by 50 percent African Americans, which only account for about 8 percent of the county population. Hispanics, Asians, and Caucasians were all underrepresented.

Race/ Ethnicity	Caucasian	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	Mixed	Other	Unknown
Bell County	54%	20%	19%	3%	1%	3%	1%	0%
Belton	67%	0%	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Cooke County	80%	3%	14%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Gainesville	63%	0%	13%	0%	13%	13%	0%	0%
Dallas County	36%	20%	38%	4%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Dallas	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Ellis County	66%	9%	22%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Waxahachie	80%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%
Tarrant County	55%	13%	25%	4%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Ft. Worth	43%	29%	14%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Travis County	52%	8%	32%	5%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Austin	40%	50%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Webb County	4%	0%	94%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Laredo	9%	0%	82%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%
Williamson County	67%	6%	21%	4%	0%	2%	0%	0%
Jarrell	92%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%

Figure 6. Race and Ethnicity of Focus Groups’ Participants and Associated Counties.

Source: ACS Demographic and Housing Characteristics: 2006-2008, American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, US Census Bureau.

Social Characteristics

Figure 7 shows a comparison of the educational attainment of focus group participants and the general population of their county. In general, focus group participants were slightly more educated than their respective county population.

Educational Attainment	Less than High School	Some High School	High School or vocational school	Some college or associates degree	College Degree	Post Graduate Degree
Bell County	5%	7%	29%	38%	15%	7%
Belton	0%	17%	0%	33%	50%	0%
Cooke County	8%	9%	32%	31%	15%	5%
Gainesville	0%	0%	0%	38%	25%	38%
Dallas County	13%	12%	24%	24%	17%	9%
Dallas	0%	0%	33%	67%	0%	0%
Ellis County	7%	11%	31%	31%	15%	5%
Waxahachie	0%	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%
Tarrant County	8%	9%	25%	30%	20%	8%
Ft. Worth	0%	0%	14%	29%	43%	14%
Travis County	8%	7%	18%	25%	27%	16%
Austin	0%	0%	30%	10%	30%	30%
Webb County	24%	14%	22%	23%	12%	5%
Laredo	0%	0%	40%	20%	30%	10%
Williamson County	5%	5%	22%	32%	25%	10%
Jarrell	0%	0%	33%	33%	25%	8%

Figure 7. Educational Attainment of Focus Groups’ Participants and Associated Counties.

Source: *Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: 2006-2008, American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, US Census Bureau.*

Economic Characteristics

The comparison of income for focus group participants and their respective counties was problematic for the same reason that comparison of age was problematic: income was reported to the US Census Bureau in different ranges than it was reported to the researchers.

As Figure 8 shows, the I-35 focus groups were generally more likely to have lower income than their respective counties. Waxahachie and Fort Worth, in particular, had lower income levels than what would be expected based on Census Bureau data.

Income	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000 to \$99,999	\$100,000 or more	No Answer Provided
Bell County	51%	34%	15%	0%
Belton	67%	33%	0%	0%
Cooke County	50%	35%	16%	0%
Gainesville	75%	0%	0%	25%
Dallas County	52%	29%	19%	0%
Dallas	83%	17%	0%	0%
Ellis County	41%	36%	23%	0%
Waxahachie	100%	0%	0%	0%
Tarrant County	45%	32%	23%	0%
Ft. Worth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Travis County	45%	30%	25%	0%
Austin	56%	22%	0%	22%
Webb County	64%	25%	11%	0%
Laredo	45%	45%	0%	9%
Williamson County	33%	40%	27%	0%
Jarrell	50%	25%	8%	17%

Figure 8: Household Income of Focus Groups' Participants and Associated Counties.

Source: *Selected Economic Characteristics in the United States: 2006-2008, American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, US. Census Bureau.*

GENERAL PUBLIC FINDINGS

Austin

There were 10 participants in the Austin focus group. Participants had all been in the Austin area for some time and indicated that congestion on I-35 had worsened. Many people refused to use I-35 unless they absolutely had to. Others expressed that certain times, such as peak hours, were worse than others. None of the focus group participants carpooled or used transit. When queried about their response to using transit, most indicated it was “not reliable,” “took too long,” “not convenient,” or other reasons. One participant said that, “if you carpool you’re still stuck in the same traffic,” indicating he would rather be stuck in traffic alone.

Participants indicated that the biggest problem with I-35 was the sheer volume; although trucks were also discussed as an issue. Most people in the group were in favor of the truck lane restrictions, but all would prefer if trucks were eliminated entirely from driving on I-35. All participants inquired as to why more trucks did not use the SH 130 bypass. They expressed frustration in that they were told the road would alleviate traffic on I-35, but this had not happened.

When participants were provided information about future growth projects for this portion of the I-35 corridor many were shocked. There was an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. Many participants were unable to fathom how I-35 could be expanded to meet these future needs. They realized that congestion was already severe and they also recognized that more people would not only impact congestion on I-35 but also on the alternate routes they already use today. They also understood that this meant truck traffic would increase too.

When pressed for solutions, many in the group expressed solutions in terms of operational fixes. These suggestions included:

- Meaningful changeable message signs that offered travelers choices. For instance, in Georgetown, there should be a sign that indicates the travel time for taking SH 130 versus taking I-35 through Austin. Other suggestions included showing alternate routes. There was frustration voiced for the changeable message signs that only show missing persons information.
- Expanded use of Global Positioning System (GPS) technologies to show traffic incidents and provide alternate routes.
- Radio updates.

Interestingly, many of the above solutions focus on alternate routes but many in the group indicated that this was a fundamental problem. They said there were not many viable alternate routes to I-35. This was doubly frustrating in regard to SH 130. Many felt they had been led to believe that building SH 130 would ease traffic on I-35. This does not seem to be the case to them. As one person put it, “the toll road doesn’t get me from Slaughter to downtown.”

Several participants expressed the need for alternate modes. They acknowledged that rail is expensive and controversial and they questioned its ability to impact traffic on I-35. Moreover, no one indicated they would use a rail alternative when traveling to other cities within Texas; e.g., Austin to San Antonio or Dallas. They all said they would need a vehicle when they reached their destination.

Some participants indicated a more meaningful short-term solution would be for the Texas Department of Transportation to engage in a “sincere” public education campaign that explained the situation and offered solutions, including current solutions such as the toll road. Many felt that more people would use the toll road if they were educated about it. A few people also felt that TxDOT should do targeted studies whereby they would collect origin-destination information and design alternatives for people. These alternatives should include routes, bus information, and carpool information. Along these same lines, many felt the state as a whole should do more to help. The state could offer incentive programs for people who carpool or use transit. The state should also consider moving state offices out of the downtown area. Some indicated a need for better coordination and planning among agencies. They felt would result in more businesses locating out of the downtown area and perhaps directed to areas around SH 130.

With regard to physically expanding I-35 many expressed doubt that it could be done, although several pointed to projects in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area that had done the “seemingly impossible” such as the North Central Expressway. Some suggested adding lanes to the elevated section. Others suggested adding HOV lanes. Many felt that this was a prudent idea because it still promoted alternate modes while providing for more capacity. One person suggested charging a toll to enter downtown. Everyone liked the idea of managed lanes whereby if a person were willing to pay a toll that option was available to them. However, the group, as a whole, did not have many ideas for expanding I-35.

When questioned about transportation funding, most participants were unaware of how or how much gas tax was collected. Although there was initial reluctance to any form of increased taxation or toll payments, by the end of the discussion all recognized the need for additional funding and were willing to pay a small increased gas tax. They also offered several other ideas for generating revenue, including:

- charging a fee for new residents;
- assessing impact fees for new development, rated depending on location;
- charging fees for entering downtown;
- paying for fixes through taxes;
- raising the gas tax;

- imposing sin taxes;
- charging taxes for rental cars and hotels;
- increasing payroll taxes for businesses located in the downtown area; and
- raising registration fees.

Jarrell

There were 12 participants in the Jarrell focus group. Most of these people had been in this area for several years. Most considered their lifestyle to be very rural. The people in this group perceived the problems on I-35 to be north of Round Rock through the Austin area. Like the urban Austin group, this group tended to avoid travel on I-35, particularly at certain times of the day; i.e., peak periods. However, many noted that traffic on the weekend could be just as bad as peak travel times.

Several people in this group expressed concern over the expanding urban areas and the threat this poses to a rural lifestyle. There was considerable discussion of a “suburbanization” of rural areas. Many felt that the “taking” of agricultural lands out of production would cause long-term problems. They expressed a desire for more coordinated control over development.

Many participants offered short-term solutions for addressing congestion on I-35 and most felt that these issues should be addressed before planning for new and/or expanded corridors. These included:

- Increasing law enforcement.
- Adding HOV lanes.
- Encouraging alternative work schedules and telecommuting.
- Moving more freight by rail.
- Instituting more truck restrictions such as limiting travel to nighttime hours.
- Fixing bottlenecks in Round Rock/Austin.
- Extending acceleration/deceleration lanes.
- Installing changeable message signs that indicate travel times on alternate routes, especially comparing SH 130 to I-35. This would allow travelers to make informed decisions about taking the toll road.

This group had no knowledge of transportation funding or how roads are funded. There were several misperceptions of the toll roads in operation in the Austin area. All 12 people in the group were under the impression that these toll roads were owned by foreign, private companies. When this misperception was clarified, responses included, “well, if I had known that, I might use them.” This points to the need for more education.

When information was provided to the group about current transportation funding there was some discussion regarding “wasteful” spending and the ability to “streamline” processes to use the money more efficiently. One person indicated that he knew people that worked at TxDOT and he did not believe there was much “slack” at the department.

When prompted for solutions to increase transportation funding, some responses included:

- assessing fees for new residents;
- raising local taxes and fees;
- streamlining agencies, better management of existing resources – remove pork;
- stopping diversions;
- increasing gas tax and directing it only to transportation; and
- stopping outsourcing and hold TxDOT accountable.

There was no clear consensus in the group on how to provide for the funding shortfall. There was skepticism that money was being used appropriately. This group was more supportive of raising the gas tax and directing it only to transportation than building additional toll roads.

Laredo

Ten people participated in the Laredo focus group. All expressed concern, but mostly the biggest issues were outside of Laredo and dealt with traveling along the I-35 corridor into Austin. By far, the largest issue in the Laredo area was the amount of truck traffic. Many expressed a desire to get trucks off of I-35, although no one offered a solution on how to accomplish this. A few thought that Loop 20 was supposed to keep truck traffic moving around town but it does not seem to have done that. Several people suggested moving more freight by rail but others complained that the train traffic was already too bad and caused vehicular traffic to become congested.

There was a strong sentiment in this group that the Laredo area and south Texas were not getting “their fair share” of highway funding. They recognized that other larger cities get more

money because they have a larger population but they also expressed frustration that population was the only criterion used to distribute funding. Many thought that truck percentages should also be factored into that calculation.

By and large this group had a harder time imagining how congested I-35 might become in the future. They recognized that the area was growing and would continue to grow but they were not currently experiencing severe or even bad congestion. Their biggest concern was providing more law enforcement and incident management. Some people had issues with signage, suggesting that signage be in both English and Spanish. Others expressed concern over design issues.

When pressed for solutions to I-35 most expressed them from a point of view as if traveling across the state. There was considerable support for developing a “super-duper” highway that goes around or over cities – straight from Laredo to past the Metroplex. There was also support for establishing separate facilities for trucks, but many did not know how this could be accomplished. There was minimal support for establishing intercity rail. Some thought it would be a good idea for tourists but wondered about the need for transportation at the ends of the route.

As with the other focus groups there was little to no knowledge of transportation funding or financing. Most people thought the gas tax was a percentage of the purchase price. Possible solutions for additional funding included:

- charging tolls for bypass roads;
- increasing vehicle registration fees;
- cost-cutting by TxDOT, “putting the little bricks and fancy decorations on overpasses seems like a waste and are not needed”; and
- charging developers more for transportation impacts.

There was considerable discussion regarding an increase in the gas tax. Most people would be supportive of a gas tax increase but were fearful that the money would be diverted to other parts of the state. The moderator then asked about a local option gas tax. The participants were very much in favor of this option. There was also surprise expressed at the diversions that occur and many suggested that TxDOT get this money back. They expressed frustration by saying there were told the lottery was paying for education yet there is a diversion of fuel taxes to the Permanent School Fund.

Waxahachie

Six people participated in the focus group held in Waxahachie. Most of the participants had been in the area for several years. When queried about their travel on I-35 most indicated that they have seen traffic getting worse over the years. A majority did or currently do travel on I-35 to the Metroplex area for work or school. One person specifically mentioned that traffic was worse in the peak periods, but two others indicated that weekend travel could be just as bad. They have appreciated the expansion that had occurred but lamented the construction headaches it caused. A few also expressed concern for displaced businesses.

This group's first and most agreed upon solution for the I-35 corridor was to build HOV lanes, but it later became apparent that they meant express lanes because they did not feel there should be an occupancy requirement. Rather, they wanted a lane or lanes that were truly for people that were going through the area. They suggested severely limiting the access. Some expressed that that was the purpose of the left lane of the interstate.

When pressed to discuss the biggest problem with I-35 the group said that it was both traffic congestion and truck traffic because the trucks contributed to the congestion.

When the projected growth information sheets were distributed most people initially expressed shock at the population projects but then gradually accepted that the projections were probably accurate. Once again the issue of trucks was raised because people asked how goods would be transported for all the people. Most did not think rail was being very widely used nor did they think it was a viable alternative because, "tracks don't always go right behind the warehouse, especially in this area; it's so rural." A few people expressed concern over "big-box" stores and their need for just-in-time-inventory.

There was strong support for having an intercity passenger rail. Most people felt they would use this option when traveling throughout the state for recreational purposes. They also felt passenger rail would alleviate traffic congestion on I-35. They suggested the need for having "local" and "express" service where the local service would stop at most of the little towns along the way and the express service would only stop at major cities.

When the group was pressed for solutions to solve traffic congestion on I-35 most agreed that additional roadway capacity was necessary. However, there was disagreement on how this would be accomplished. Some preferred building a bypass while others preferred a double-decking alternative. Still others suggested that no alterations could be made to I-35. Overall, there was very little consensus. Most of the participants liked the idea of having a bypass for through traffic, including trucks; they were just unsure of whether that should be added to I-35 or on a new location. In both cases they recognized that a solution would be very expensive.

Regarding transportation funding, one person in the group knew that fuel taxes pay for the bulk of the transportation improvements. This person also brought up the issue of the other large counties in the area – Dallas, Denton, Collin, and Tarrant – and the air quality issues facing

the entire Metroplex. She informed the others that it would be very difficult to get funding in Waxahachie if they were competing with these other counties.

No one knew the last time the gas tax was raised but when they were told it had been almost 20 years one person reasoned that it was because gas prices were already so high. After discussion, all of the participants agreed that raising the gas tax a few pennies per gallon would be acceptable to raise revenue. The group also supported toll roads and was especially supportive of a high occupancy toll (HOT) concept. They thought that would be a reasonable way to pay for a bypass or double-deck through the Metroplex.

Waco/Temple/Belton

There were six participants in this focus group that was held in Belton, Texas. The people in this group stated that they have seen traffic congestion increasing over the past several years but the biggest concern with I-35 currently was related to the design. All the people lamented the lack of acceleration/deceleration lanes in most of the areas between Salado and Waco. They did appreciate the new construction underway in the Temple area. Many also saw truck traffic as a major issue, stating that it had increased substantially. However, while they indicated that traffic congestion was increasing, they felt that at this point in time it was still moving. Several people compared it to traffic in Austin or Dallas that they said was “just horrible” all the time.

When the moderator presented the future conditions information, there was considerable discussion about how the numbers were calculated and if they were accurate. After the discussion the participants all agreed that the information seemed reasonable. There were question as to why the level of service (LOS) in Segment Two did not change much over the 20-year period. The moderator explained that the analysis included many planned projects. Eventually, all agreed there was a need to accommodate future growth and traffic on I-35.

The moderator asked the participants for their potential solutions to meet future needs. A few people had a preference for high speed rail (HSR) that would run parallel to I-35 from Dallas to San Antonio. Most of the other participants disagreed with this approach stating this would not relieve commuting traffic on I-35 between Waco and Austin. However, they said it could possibly be used for business travel instead of flying. One person suggested a “ferry” style rail where you could load your car and take it with you. Everyone supported this idea. With regard to trucks, some people said they should use rail but others questioned the time required to do that, stating concerns about perishable goods. One person mentioned having a separate highway for trucks; others mentioned separate lanes for trucks.

After more discussion everyone agreed that more lanes need to be added and a rail option developed. When asked if the lanes should be on I-35 or on a separate facility, most participants indicated that lanes should be added to I-35. However, they also suggested building a new

facility — a double decking of I-35. HOV/HOT lanes were not a viable option for this group. Other possible solutions included:

- allowing longer combination trucks (double 48s and triple 48s),
- separating truck traffic from other traffic,
- improved incident management, and
- using changeable message signs that alert drivers of accidents and also having travel time comparisons between I-35 and toll roads.

No one in the group had any knowledge of transportation funding. No one knew the amount of gas tax that was charged. They immediately began accusing big oil companies of making more profits and suggested that any shortfall be paid by the oil companies. After more discussion, everyone agreed that more money is needed but they also felt that they were not getting their “fair share.” They believed that more money was going to the big cities even with the projects that were currently under construction in the Waco/Temple area. When pressed for other funding options, possible solutions included:

- instituting income tax on new residents,
- raising the gas tax,
- getting oil companies and car companies to pay more, and
- building toll lanes for through traffic.

In the closing discussion most participants acknowledged that there is no one single answer but that there needs to be several solutions. There was a strong sentiment that the government (TxDOT was not singled out) needs to fix itself before it could be trusted to fix anything else – like transportation finance. Some felt the government was wasteful and not doing what was necessary to address these issues in a timely manner.

Fort Worth

Of the seven participants in the Ft. Worth focus group, all but one indicated that traffic congestion on I-35 was bad and that it was getting worse. Many commented that it had increased substantially in the last 10 years. Several people indicated that I-35W was becoming increasingly congested and that it should be expanded very soon. There was considerable discussion over signage in and around the downtown Dallas area. People indicated that the right and left exits were confusing and dangerous. The biggest issue for the group was travel time reliability rather than congestion. Everyone in the group traveled in single occupant vehicles. However, many participants expressed a desire to carpool but said it was not a workable solution

for them. Most said the transit system was unreliable in both Dallas and Ft. Worth but they enjoyed the light rail in Dallas.

This group had several complaints about the maintenance of the roads they traveled on daily, like I-35 and I-820. Many expressed concern with potholes that go unrepaired and bad pavement. The group agreed that trucks were also a big issue, especially on I-35W. Everyone agreed that it was because the entire Metroplex area was growing. Some expressed concerns that it seemed as if “everything has been under construction since 1969.”

Everyone in the group agreed with the population projects over the next 25 years. When prompted for possible solutions, their answers included:

- fixing existing geometric problems; e.g., smoothing out bumps, fixing horizontal and vertical curves so that average speeds increase; and taking out left exits;
- adding lanes;
- offering incentives for carpooling and public transportation;
- instituting disincentives for driving such as road taxes, higher fuel costs, or tolls;
- adding HOV lanes in the Ft. Worth area;
- encouraging telecommuting;
- making ridesharing more accessible through social networking;
- charging a fee to enter downtown Dallas; and
- applying technology solutions such as automated driving that would allow more cars on the roadway.

There was concern with adding lanes in already developed portions of the community because in many instances the housing that would be displaced was low-income housing. Everyone in the group was supportive of the HOT lane concept, especially pointing out the convenience of having a choice.

After much discussion of adding lanes versus building an alternate facility, the group came to a consensus that it would make sense to build an alternate facility for truly through traffic. It would be a very limited access facility yet still be in close proximity to I-35, perhaps even a double-decking scenario.

This group was slightly more knowledgeable about transportation funding than the other groups but there were still many misperceptions. Everyone was surprised that the state gas tax

had not been raised in almost 20 years. There was also shock at the diversion to the Permanent School Fund. After considerable discussion about the gas taxes and what they pay for everyone agreed that there is a need for increased funding.

This group was very forward thinking and realized fairly quickly that even with a gas tax increase this would not be sustainable into the future, although it would be helpful in the short term. They suggested a different taxing structure, something like an energy tax. The moderator suggested doing away with a tax altogether and asked for the group's opinions on a fee based on miles driven. There were a lot of questions about how it would be calculated or enforced. Several recognized that this could get people to change their driving habits. Overall, the group was supportive of this idea. Other mechanisms for providing funding included:

- highway sponsorships,
- index the gas tax,
- base the amount you pay on the number of cars you have,
- institute another fee based on income, and
- HOT lanes.

At the conclusion of the group session, every person mentioned how much they had learned and had a sincere appreciation for being able to provide input. Many commented that it had completely changed their way of thinking about roads and transportation in general.

Dallas

All six participants in the Dallas focus group had similar experiences to the Ft. Worth group on their travels on I-35. They had several comments about the accidents that occur and all expressed frustration with lanes changing from three or four to two or three. They also expressed unhappiness with the signage, lane markings and the varying exits – left or right. Many said they try to avoid traveling in the peak period, or they use alternate routes to avoid I-35. No one in the group carpoled and two people had used transit very infrequently. Some people also commented on the poor pavement condition. There were mixed reactions on whether or not trucks were a big issue on I-35. Some people indicated they saw a lot of trucks while others said they were more prevalent on other interstates in the area.

When the projection information was conveyed, no one was surprised with the population growth predicted. A few people indicated that the rail system was helpful in removing cars from I-35, although no one in the group used it. The group also felt like the park and ride lots were useful to commuters.

To accommodate the projected growth, the first idea posited by the group was to double-deck I-35 or US 75, going both north and south from downtown. However, then they thought that the first solution would be to make the number of lanes consistent on I-35 throughout the Metroplex. After more discussion, the group decided they liked the double-deck idea the best because they said they already have three loops around the area and they do not work. One person raised the question of what the double-deck would actually be used for. All agreed that it should be used for through traffic. However, this group suggested interchanges at major highways. This group was also supportive of adding intercity rail lines, but they also recognized this would not alleviate commuter traffic.

When prompted for ideas on financing their potential solutions, several people mentioned legalizing gambling. The entire group was supportive of making the double-deck a tolled expressway. They wanted to see the diversions ended but did not think that was very likely. They reluctantly agreed that a small gas tax increase was acceptable but only if the money were dedicated to transportation. This group was not supportive of any type of congestion and/or variable pricing.

Gainesville

There were eight participants in the Gainesville focus group. Their biggest concern on I-35 was traveling into the Metroplex area and most avoided this if at all possible or traveled during the off-peak period. One participant leaves his home at 3:30 in the morning to get to the other side of Ft. Worth before rush hour and then stops at a rest area and naps before going to work. Most thought the problems with I-35 were as you approached Ft. Worth on I-35W. There was also concern about the “crooks” in the entrance and exit ramps. This group also complained about right and left exits and poor signage.

The participants all agreed that traffic congestion was increasing and many refused to travel back into the Metroplex for evening events because “it isn’t worth the effort.” All agreed that I-35 should have already been expanded. They especially pointed out increased traffic to the casinos in Oklahoma. Two people in this group regularly carpool. One person takes a bus to Las Colinas. Most people felt that improved transit would relieve congestion on I-35. Several people were very complimentary of the bus service offered by the University of North Texas and felt this was doing a good job of keeping cars off of I-35.

Most of the participants agreed with the population projections and pointed to Denton as a perfect example. When the moderator asked for potential solutions some stated ideas included:

- giving subsidies for smart cars as they take up less roadway space and travel at slower speeds,
- double-decking I-35,

- building more toll roads, and
- improving acceleration/deceleration lanes and ramps.

By far the most agreed upon solution was double-decking I-35 because they thought no additional right-of-way would be needed. A few suggested having trucks use the upper deck and commuters the lower portion. Like the majority of the other groups, this group suggested using the double decked portion as a throughway facility with very limited access. Some even suggested including facilities such as service stations on the facility itself and pointed to New Jersey and Kansas turnpikes as examples. Others supported the idea of a bypass facility but they were concerned that it would not be useful for commuters. They heard this was the problem with the toll road in Austin – that it was too far out of the way.

When pressed for the preferred solution, the group confirmed that they preferred adding lanes to the existing I-35 corridor whether that was “up or down or out.” They did not want anything that would require the taking of land like the Trans Texas Corridor.

Most of the group was supportive of toll roads for funding improvements. One person knew that transportation was funded primarily with the gas tax. This same person also knew that one quarter of the amount collected went to the Permanent School Fund. One person questioned the cost of improvements they were considering. He indicated he needed that information in order to make an informed decision.

One person suggested a road improvement tax or a “privilege tax” whereby new people moving into the state would pay a substantial fee to register their vehicle. Another person indicated that this would be bad for the car sales industry. Most people in the group liked tolling. A few people acknowledged the affect that traffic congestion could have on the economies of large cities. They said that other solutions such as transit options are needed there.

In general, this group also indicated there would not be one solution but that it would take a combination of things to improve conditions and accommodate future growth. Transit options were especially important. The bottom line was that they recognized that something must be done sooner rather than later and they were willing to do whatever it takes to finance it.

CONCLUSIONS

After conducting the eight general public focus groups, a few things become very apparent and several common themes were found. People in urban areas see I-35 as more congested than the people in the rural areas. Nevertheless, the people in the rural areas recognized that as more cities become more congested more people will be moving to more rural areas and this would impact their travel on I-35 as well. For the most part, most participants had firsthand knowledge of traffic congestion getting worse on I-35 over the last several years.

There was considerable concern over what people noted as an “out-dated” facility. This included:

- lack of acceleration/deceleration lanes,
- short entrance and exits,
- bad geometric design with too many vertical and horizontal curves (primarily in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area), and
- lane markings and signage.

Participants were aware of and appreciated that Texas and cities within Texas will continue to grow. In fact, several groups noted that even with the economic downturn Texas is still thriving compared to other states. There was an acknowledgement that I-35 is vital to the state as a mobility and economic corridor and that problems must be addressed. Many felt that problems should have been addressed long before now.

Trucks were an issue for all of the groups but they were of particular concern to the groups from the Waco area south. These areas have seen steady increases in truck traffic. At the same time, nearly everyone was supportive of truck lane restrictions. The only exception to this was the few truck drivers that were in the groups. They neither supported nor disagreed with the restrictions. Many people were supportive of separate lanes or entire facilities for truck traffic.

The solutions for meeting the future needs of I-35 by the group could be categorized into short-term (operational) and long-term improvements. Interestingly, nearly every group questioned why TxDOT did not provide more traveler information. Many people expressed a desire to have more information about travel choices whether they were route choices or mode choices. These ideas ranged from:

- providing travel time information comparing travel on I-35 to toll roads;
- providing information about lane closures and accidents;
- providing more information on transit options
- providing more information on how to use HOV lanes; and
- providing more information on routes, rates, and how to use toll roads.

Other short-term solutions included an educational campaign that focused on TxDOT – what the department does, what they are responsible for, how they are funded, and information about the gas tax. Essentially, all the focus group participants were misinformed about one aspect or another of the department and its responsibilities and funding. They appreciated

receiving this information and all felt that others would benefit from knowing this information. The Austin group in particular, however, recognized the sensitivity with which this information would have to be imparted. TxDOT must “walk a very fine line” so as to not be seen as advocating for a particular solution, “like they did with toll roads and the Trans Texas Corridor.” However, nearly everyone felt that it was the department’s responsibility to educate. They also felt that the education must extend beyond highways and that more multimodal solutions and information should be part of an educational campaign.

The more long-term solutions included expanding highway capacity. The most popular way to do this amongst every group was to double-deck I-35; although the participants in the Austin focus group did not think this would be possible. Some went as far as to say the entire interstate from Laredo to Oklahoma should be double-decked. Others suggested double-decking (either over or under) where the highway could not be widened. Almost all the participants wanted this alternate route to be reserved for vehicles that were traveling long distances — in essence a true throughway. The groups varied in how limited the access should be with the folks in more rural areas and in Laredo suggesting more limited access. Perhaps this response is because they are used to traveling longer distances.

With regard to rail alternatives, while most people supported rail of all types not many people thought it would be effective at relieving day-to-day congestion on the I-35 corridor for both commuters and moving freight. They were more supportive of intercity commuter rail that would allow them to travel from Dallas to San Antonio, but primarily for recreational purposes. Most participants questioned the ability to get around once they reached their ultimate destination. They did not believe that the terminal cities had adequate public transportation to meet their needs.

Moreover, most people did not feel that rail could meet the needs of good movement throughout the state. They felt that there were not enough rail lines to accommodate the amount of goods that needed to be moved. They also questioned what would happen when freight got to a destination, stating that it would “still have to be moved to the stores” and they thought that intermodal shipments would increase the cost of goods.

Several participants in the urban groups brought up the high cost of rail. People in the Metroplex thought that the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) had done a good job in building its rail system and that it was somewhat effective in relieving congestion. People in the I-35W corridor wished they had a rail option and indicated that they would use it. However, in Austin, people complained that rail in this area did nothing to relieve congestion on I-35 and that it was too expensive.

Without question, in every focus group there was little to no understanding of transportation finance. All agreed that more education must be provided. Especially in the

urban areas, the participants wanted to be able to make more informed decisions. In order to do this they wanted to know the relative cost of potential solutions and how the current funding could accomplish this. In effect, they wanted to know, for instance, the cost of double-decking I-35 through Fort Worth and the time it would take to do this based on the different types of financing used.

Without exception, every group voiced their appreciation for being able to provide an opinion. Additionally, every group suggested they had learned a lot by participating. Many mentioned the trust and credibility that must be rebuilt in order for the public to have faith and confidence in the department's ability to deliver projects. All felt that this effort went a long way to improving the public's confidence.

APPENDIX A: GENERAL PUBLIC FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

I-35 Citizens' Advisory Committee Public Opinion Research

Part 1 – Sign Consent Forms (prior to beginning of focus group) – 5 minutes

Participants will be asked to read and sign a consent form that has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. Participants will also be invited to enjoy beverages and snacks.

Part 2 – Welcome and Introductions – 15 minutes

Welcome to the focus group today. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to talk with us. I'd like to begin by telling you about how the group will work and then we'll get down to the specifics of our topic for the day.

How many of you have participated in a focus group before? What do you think the purpose of the focus group is?

The success of the group depends quite a bit on how willing you are to share with us what you think. So, I'm asking you right up front to be open and forthcoming, and not to worry about what I might think, or what others in the group might think about what you say, or even if you are giving a viewpoint that disagrees with someone else's. We're not really talking today about matters that would be considered very sensitive, but the topic is one that we would expect people to have differing opinions on, so I do want to encourage lots of dialogue. Don't worry about the tape recorder. We will keep the tape to ourselves and just use it to help us with our notes. Try to forget that it's there. Let me assure you that we will always keep everything you say anonymous.

Having said that, I want you to relax and enjoy the conversation. But I do have to ask that you talk one at a time, that you not have any side conversations, and you speak loudly so that everyone can hear what each person has to say. I don't expect our discussion to last more than about an hour and a half or so. If you need to get more refreshments or use the facilities around the hall, please feel free to get up at any time.

First, I'd like us to have some brief introductions. I'll start with us...

Now, let's go around the room and say your first name only (because we're keeping this anonymous), and a little bit about who you are, how long you have lived in the area, and what you do for a living.

OK, now we're ready to get on with the topic at hand. TTI is working with the Department of Transportation to get your input on issues related to I-35. This effort is part of a larger citizen-based effort to discuss the issues related to travel on I-35 for both the general public and businesses. This citizen's group is charged with developing a plan for I-35 that reflects the citizens' perspective. They and TxDOT want to know what you think.

Part 3 – Current Perceptions – 30 minutes

I want to spend just a few minutes asking you about your travel on I-35.

How often do you travel on I-35?

How would you describe this experience?
Has it gotten better or worse over the last 5-10 years? How so?

How many miles do you spend commuting?
How much time does this take you?

Do you travel by yourself in a car or do you travel by other modes such as bus, train, carpool, or vanpool?

If other modes were available to you, would you use them? How so?

What modes are of interest to you?

What do you think is the biggest problem with I-35 today?

Prompt for truck issues if needed.

I have some handouts that I'd like to share with you about expected growth in this area (**handout population and demographic information sheets for each segment**).

What do you think about these projections? Do you agree with them? If not, what do you disagree with?

Does anything about them surprise you?

Part 4 – Future – 40 minutes

Assuming that you do agree with the expected population projections, I want to talk now about how we can accommodate this growth.

What do you think should be done to solve the problems of I-35 in your area?

Prompt if needed.

Would you add lanes? If so, where, how?

Would you create an alternative or parallel facility? If so, where would it be located? What would it look like?

What about solutions that help move people and cars more efficiently? (HOV/managed lanes, ramp metering) Other strategies?

Would you consider rail? What kind (intercity passenger, commuter/regional rail, light rail, freight rail)? We won't explain the different kinds of rail at first. We'll see if the participants know the difference.

Some people have suggested building new freight rail lines that could be grade separated and move more freight by rail instead of by trucks on I-35. That could make existing rail lines going into the cities available for passenger service between cities along I-35. Would you be supportive of something like that?

How would these fixes be paid for? *Talk a little about the current funding and the estimated needs (from 2030 report).*

What would you be most supportive of? *(increase in gas tax, local option gas tax, increase in general taxes for transportation, local option sales tax for transportation, VMT fee, toll roads; increase in vehicle registration and inspection fees; increase in auto rental tax; surcharge on tires, batteries and other road use items; auto maintenance/repair surcharge such as oil changes and vehicle repair, etc.).*

Part 5 – Implementation (Time Permitting)

Who or what agency do you think handles projects like this?

Who or what agency funds these projects?

Is your local government involved in any way?

If so, who?

If you wanted to support or oppose these efforts how would you go about it?

How do you get the public involved?

Do you think anything will ever really be done?

If not, why not?

If so, when?

What is the basis of your time frame?

Part 6 – Final Remarks – 5 minutes

Again, I want to thank you for your time and participation. I want to give everyone a chance to say any final comments.

Part 7 – Have participants sign payment sheet and distribute \$50.00/person.

APPENDIX B: GENERAL POPULATION FOCUS GROUP SESSION NOTES

March 8, 2010, Jarrell, TX

Moderator: How do you use I-35?

- One participant stated that they often traveled south on I-35 to San Antonio to visit family. This person noted that I-35 south of Austin was amazing and that it was generally “smooth sailing” to San Antonio after Austin.
- Another participant agreed that the main problem in the area is in Austin.
- Another participant stated that problems generally begin north of Round Rock and continue into Austin.
- One participant stated that they traveled into Austin about 3 times a week but that they were generally traveling in the opposite direction of major traffic.
- Another participant stated that traffic in Austin is so bad that they generally tell their drivers to use the toll road.
- Another participant stated that they like to use the toll road to get around Austin and that on Friday it is the only way to get around Austin without traffic. This person noted that they have observed accidents on I-35 on numerous occasions and have often sat in traffic for upwards of 45 minutes. This person also stated that weekend travel on I-35 through Austin is also unreliable.
- Another participant stated that they have encountered congestion on I-35 through Austin at 3 AM.
- One participant stated that the three lanes north of Round Rock on I-35 are really nice to have.
- Another participant stated that construction along the I-35 corridor does not appear to be “coherent.” This person stated that exits are generally too short (although they noted that they are getting better). This person also stated that the two way frontage roads, particularly in Salado, are very dangerous.
- Another participant echoed this sentiment by stating that the entrance ramps at FM 2222 and Oltorf in Austin are very bad for trucks. This person stated that they work in the trucking industry hauling pavement materials and have worked along I-35 from Waco to San Antonio, and that traffic never seems to get any better.
- Another participant inquired as to why development in the I-35 corridor (in terms of road construction) has occurred at such a slow pace, while the area toll roads were constructed very quickly. (The moderator stated that was due mainly to toll financing on the tolled facilities that allowed them to be built relatively quickly.)
- Another participant, who was a retired truck driver of 33 years, stated that they had driven all across the US and Canada and they did not believe that restricting truck traffic from driving in the left lane did not help traffic flow. This person stated that oftentimes

passenger cars merge onto the interstate and drive for only a few miles before exiting, and that trucks should be allowed use of the left lane so as to avoid these vehicles completely. Responses to these statements included the following:

- One participant stated that they favored speed limits for large trucks, as they are more dangerous due to their weight.
- Another participant stated that the danger comes from passenger vehicles not respecting the “physics” of large trucks.
- A participant stated that they were under the impression that trucks could use the SH 130 toll road, but that they never saw any truck traffic.
 - In response to this, another participant stated that the road has not been completed to Seguin, and that there may be more use by trucks when that section is completed.
- One participant noted that the Jarrell area on I-35 is one of the most dangerous stretches of road in terms of accidents on a per-capita basis. This was attributed to poor law enforcement coverage. This participant stated that safety is one of the biggest issues in the area. For example, they stated that a new on-ramp is needed before “Texas Star” because emergency vehicles often have to travel too far down the highway and turn around to reach certain areas.
- One participant stated that their company can only use the toll road if it is a financially viable option, and that given the bad economy, that is not often. This participant suspected that this is the same for other transportation based companies in the area.

The moderator asked the group if they viewed trucks as one of the biggest problems in the area. A few participants indicated that it was, but several others disagreed.

- One participant stated that there are not enough lanes in the area, while another stated that the lack of mass transit and other travel options are the biggest problems in the area.
- One participant stated that in the 1970s, the Austin City Council had a zero-growth stance, which resulted in the current situation with regard to regional bottlenecks. This participant stated that they hate toll roads, as they have “already been paid for,” and that they feel like it is a “slap in the face” every time they see one. This participant stated that they have taken an area toll road once, and it was only because Burnet Road came to a dead end at one.
 - Another participant stated that they, too, do not ever use the area’s toll facilities.
- Another participant agreed that there was never a plan to keep up with growth.
- One participant stated that it is very difficult and expensive to acquire right of way (ROW) in the I-35 corridor’s problem areas, especially through the downtown Austin area.

- Another participant stated that they do not like the way area development is proceeding and noted that facilities like Ronald Reagan Boulevard are cutting off access to land for area ranchers and farmers. This participant stated that they are “sick and tired of people turning land into cities” and profiting from it.
 - Another participant stated that to these “people” that type of development is progress. This same participant argued, however, that landowners need to quit selling their land to developers. The problem, they went on to state, is that without “big bucks” there is nothing that anyone in the area can do about development.

The moderator next asked if any of the participants carpool or use mass transit.

- A few participants indicated that they occasionally carpool and one stated that they use transit in Leander. This same person stated that high speed rail may be the answer and that HSR moves a lot of people and light rail does not. This person stated that they would like to have a line running from their area to Austin and San Antonio similar to Amtrak.
- Another participant stated that rail like that is good if it is going where you are.
- The participant who advocated for HSR stated that Cap metro has done a poor job of planning, as their son has to travel all the way downtown from Leander to catch a bus to Austin Community College’s North campus.
- One of the participants stated that they were from Phoenix, and that the city there has built too many freeways without planning for growth. They stated that Phoenix is now looking to further develop their transit options but due to poor highway planning the buses are not “mixing well” with general purpose traffic. This participant stated that the area here “is heaven” compared to Phoenix.
- Another participant agreed that the Central Texas area does not have the problems of larger urban areas such as Los Angeles but that things are getting worse in the area. They noted that it used to be “smooth sailing” through Round Rock, but not anymore.

The moderator asked the group if there was a viable alternative would the group members use it.

- The majority of participants said yes.
- One participant stated that the problem with transit is “getting around once you are there.”
- Another stated that some transit systems are not safe and are dirty, and that any area mass transit system would need to be in good condition for them to use it.
- Another participant stated that they have noticed a trend in the Austin area toward building residential developments near commercial areas, such as the Domain, and that that should perhaps be a focus of regional planning.

- Another participant stated that such planning is fine for urban areas, but that new development in rural areas should be required to have a mass transit element included.
- One participant stated that “government mandates” scare them, and that they do not see things getting any better.
- Another participant inquired if there have ever been any commuting studies in the Jarrell area aimed at determining where in the Austin area residents are traveling to. This person also stated that keeping the left lane open to through traffic might help congestion, to which another participant stated that HOV lanes may be helpful to that end.
- There was general agreement among the group as to the benefit of HOV lanes, and no participants voiced any opposition to the concept.
- One participant stated that they recently traveled to Laredo on I-35 pulling a large trailer. At one point the road went down to two lanes and narrowed, and this participant suddenly felt unsafe pulling the trailer as it was taking up a good portion of the lane, which seemed dangerous.

The moderator at this point passed out an information sheet to the group regarding area trends.

- In response to the information one participant stated that there used to be no numbers attached to improvement.
- Another stated that urban sprawl takes away ranch land, which drives up land prices, and another stated that it also threatens “food security.”
- One participant stated that while they agree somewhat with restricting trucks from the left lane, that they in the past had worked with the American Automobile Association (AAA) on safety issues, and that in general “big blames small and small blames big.” This person estimated that 80 percent of traffic merging onto a highway goes immediately to the left and then exits a few miles on down the road. This person stated that they do like HOV lanes.

The moderator asked the group if anything on the information sheet surprised them.

- No participants indicated they were surprised by this information.
- One participant did note, however, that their area was not as bad compared to others.

The moderator pointed out that average daily traffic has increased, as has population, and inquired what should be done in the future.

- One participant stated that there needs to be increased law enforcement coverage between the Jarrell area and San Antonio.
 - A second participant agreed.

- Another stated that more cameras along the roadway might help, as they seem to be effective in Europe. The participant from Phoenix agreed that they helped in that region.

At this point the moderator noted that the group seemed to be focused on measures meant to address speeding, and inquired as to how there could be a problem with speeding in the I-35 corridor if congestion is such a big problem.

- One participant stated that drivers trying to “squeeze” through congested areas were a major problem.

The moderator next asked the group how they would like to see issues in their area, namely north of Round Rock, addressed.

- One participant stated that they regularly telecommute for their work and that the technology to facilitate this on a larger scale exists and should be better utilized.
- Another participant added that most are unaware of these types of opportunities, while another pointed out that Dell has transitioned to this type of work environment well.
- One participant stated that they had friends who worked for Dell that worked from home an average of three days out of the week. This participant went on to state that their spouse also works from home on occasion, but noted that it is only effective if you have the type of job that will allow for it.

The moderator next mentioned truck only lanes as one possible solution for the area and inquired as to the group’s opinions on this.

- To this suggestion one participant noted that even with this type of facility there would still be problems in Austin.
- Another stated that lanes could be added in the Jarrell area and that similar expansion has worked near Salado. This participant stated that they have noticed room for such expansion near area exits.
- Another participant stated that lanes should be expanded between Belton and Jarrell now while there is an opportunity. However, this person still believed that Austin will be the biggest problem in the area.
- Another participant noted that there needs to be better coordination in planning for expansion, or else “choke points” will develop.
- A participant stated that rail should be considered as an alternative to long distance shipping of freight. This person also stated that building new lanes will only attract “new traffic.”
- Another participant stated that parallel routes should be developed for truck traffic, while another inquired whether a restriction on trucks traveling during the day (in other words, restricting them to driving at night) would work.

- In response to that, a participant stated that that had been tried before and that it did not work.

In response to the ongoing discussion about alternative routes for trucks, the moderator inquired as to how such a system would work for smaller roads that go through small towns, such as Highway 95.

- To this question, one participant replied that trucks could just “go around” them.
- Another stated that they like the idea of developing alternate routes, but noted that it would require taking people’s land.
- Yet another participant stated that such facilities would be beneficial if main routes get shut down, such as what might occur in the event of a hazardous materials spill.
- One participant stated that this talk of alternate routes was basically about toll roads.
 - In response, one participant stated that the 130 toll road had not done “what it was supposed to.”
 - Another participant stated that a Spanish company gets all of the profits from the road.

The moderator asked the group for their opinions regarding “foreign ownership” of toll facilities.

- Eleven of the twelve participants stated that they disagree with such arrangements, and that they would likely use the 130 toll road if it was not owned by a foreign company.
- One participant (the participant from Phoenix) did not have a problem with toll roads or foreign involvement in them.
- One participant stated that the state’s major highways, I-35, I-10, and I-44, are “horrible,” and that they did not see why money should be spent on improving traffic flow when these facilities are “falling apart.”

The moderator asked the group to summarize their preferred options for addressing needs in the area. They were:

- rail,
- HOV lanes.
- better planning,
- telecommuting, and
- addressing truck issues.

The moderator next turned discussion to how transportation should be funded. The moderator first asked if anyone in the group knew how transportation was funded. None of the participants raised their hands in response. However, a few ventured guesses.

- One participant stated that the federal government pays for it, while another said that the federal government pays for some of it.
- Another stated that they would normally say transportation is funded by gas taxes, but that they were no longer sure of that.
- Another stated that property taxes fund transportation programs at the local level.

The moderator asked the group what a “federal” highway was.

- One participant responded that it was a road with “one of those federal signs”; one that resembles an interstate highway sign. This participant noted that the interstate highway system was “sold” to the public on the basis of national defense, and observed that we are “past that now.”

The moderator next provided the group with some information on gas taxes and transportation funding in general. The moderator also introduced the concept of Texas being a “donor” state with regard to federal fuel taxes. The moderator noted that fuel consumption is expected to decline and, in response, one participant stated that fuel tax revenues would then decrease. The moderator also pointed out that the regional population will continue to grow.

- A participant responded that new residents should be charged a fee.
 - The participant who was originally from Phoenix noted that they had been charged a \$100 new Texas resident fee when they obtained their driver’s license.
- One participant inquired as to whether money could be saved by “streamlining” procedures among state agencies so that money “goes where it is intended.”
- Another stated that raising local fees, such as road and bridge funds, might be beneficial.

The moderator noted that there is a growing trend in counties stepping up to pay more for transportation development, due in large part to a lack of funding on TxDOT’s part. The moderator inquired as to whether some new form of revenue should be explored.

- In response, one participant stated that there needs to be better management of existing revenues. For example, people are paid to “count cars” when cameras can be used, and that in general there is government waste of this sort.

The moderator asked if the group agreed with this sentiment but there was no clear consensus.

- One participant stated that they were not sure, because they had a friend who worked in TxDOT’s bridge inspection program, and that in that person’s view there was not a lot of “slack” in their division’s operations. This participant did not rule out, however, waste occurring in other areas of TxDOT’s operations. For example, this participant believed that there was potential waste in TxDOT’s contracting practices and cited their personal experience with work that occurred in Round Rock in the past. This participant went on to state that the state’s needs could not be met by removing “pork” from the process and that new revenue would likely be needed.

- There was one participant that agreed with this statement.

The moderator asked if there was consensus among the group that in the future “pork” should be trimmed from the transportation funding process and certain fees, such as driver’s license fees, should be increased.

- There was general agreement but no clear consensus.
- One participant asked how much revenue the gas tax brings in, to which the moderator replied that it was more than other revenue sources that fund transportation.

The moderator went on to ask whether the group would favor an increase in fuel taxes as opposed to more tolling.

- The majority of participants indicated that they would prefer this option, with one participant noting that the gas tax places the burden of maintaining the state’s roadway system on those who use the roads.
- One participant suggested a weight based tax as opposed to fuel taxes, as heavier vehicles place more of a burden on the highway system.

The moderator next asked the group about their opinions on a local option fuel tax, where revenues would be dedicated specifically to transportation.

- One participant noted that this would require an increase in property taxes, since less money would be going to transportation.
- Another participant observed that fuel taxes paid for most of the county courthouses in the state, which was not a good use of funds. Education, this participant stated, should operate better and the Robin Hood system should “go away.”
- This participant also stated that there are a lot of things the state could do, to which the moderator asked for examples. None were provided.
- One participant stated that the state should perhaps consider instituting an income tax, but there was little to no agreement from the rest of the group on this suggestion.
- Another participant stated that there should be “no new taxes” and that problems in the transportation sector are a “symptom of government doing too much.” This participant admitted that roadways are something that government should be providing, but that in general government spends too much on things it should not.

The moderator turned the discussion next to TxDOT specifically.

- One participant stated that people do not see any benefits, and that if there were benefits then government might be able to get more revenue.
- Another participant stated that TxDOT is currently outsourcing its maintenance operations, and another stated that the contracts are going to “foreign companies.”

- Another participant stated that outsourcing may not be the answer to the state’s transportation funding issues due to the fact that while there may be cost savings, there is a potential for reduction in quality and loss of control.
- This participant recommended “capping the allocation” of fuel tax revenues to education and increasing fuel taxes, with the revenues from the increase being dedicated directly to transportation.
- Another participant stated that the legislature takes too much money “for other uses.”

The moderator again brought up the notion of a local option tax and explained how it might work. The moderator also asked the group how they would feel about changing the fuel tax so it is assessed on the purchase price of fuel, like a sales tax.

- One participant stated that this would put fuel tax revenues on “a sliding scale with profiteers.”
- Another stated that this would result in a loss of regional planning coordination.

The moderator asked the group if its preferred option for future transportation funding is to raise the gas tax.

- All but two participants indicated yes.
- One of these participants indicated that they would support an increase in the fuel tax so long as the new revenues were dedicated to transportation.
 - Two other participants echoed this opinion.
- One participant added that the new revenues should be dedicated more specifically to road repair, and that no new revenue should go to “human resources”-type uses.
- Another participant stated that TxDOT should be held more accountable, citing the 1.7 million accounting error from 2009 as evidence of this. (No participants corrected this individual as to the correct amount of the accounting error.)

The moderator noted that the group seemed to support fuel taxes based on a “user-pays” premise, yet the group seemed very opposed to toll roads, which are even more user-based.

- One participant clarified that they supported toll roads.
- Several participants indicated that they would support the area’s system of toll roads but that the money is going to “foreign companies.”
- One participant inquired as to why education is getting such a large percentage of fuel tax revenues.
- Another pointed out that the state’s lottery was supposed to support education.

- Another participant asked if there was a figure for TxDOT's "bureaucracy" cost.
- Another stated that there needed to be more control over increasing costs.

The moderator asked the group if anyone believed that anything will be done on I-35 within the next 20 years.

- One participant responded that while some things could be done, they are not likely to happen.
- Another stated that until the bottlenecks in Austin are remedied there will always be problems in the Jarrell area.
- One participant recommended an elevated roadway along I-35 all the way through Austin as one potential solution.
- One participant stated that everything in the area is "OK" for now.
- Another noted that "road age" and conditions were a problem.
- One participant stated that thinking ahead for 20 years requires "outside of the box" thinking and improvements to existing infrastructure. This person stated that addressing commuting issues and rail, as well as figuring out how to do more with less, would be key.
 - Another concurred that there is no one way to address future problems.
- Another participant stated that in the future there will be many more drivers, and that the question moving forward is how to reduce driving.
- One participant replied that people would use mass transit but it is not available.
 - The participant who made the statement regarding reducing overall driving responded that they would rather drive than take a bus.
 - Another participant countered that other areas have solved similar problems with the use of mass transit, such as Washington, DC.
- A participant stated that the 130 toll facility is "worth it," but that the profits are going to the wrong place.
 - In response to this comment regarding the 130 facility, one participant stated that they would really like to see more travel information with regard to I-35, as there are often times that they would use the 130 facility if they were aware of how bad traffic was on I-35.
- Another participant stated that the DC Metro is "great," as they used to live there, and that they would use a similar transit facility if it was available in the area.

- Another participant stated that they travel a lot for their business, and they love the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system in San Francisco.
- Another participant stated that they like the freedom that car travel affords them, and that they do not want to rely on transit. This person noted, however, that they do not have a daily commute. This person also stated that transit development leads to “massive growth at the end of the line.”
 - Another participant stated that Leander and Georgetown are already large.

The moderator closed the focus group meeting and provided participants with an opportunity to make a closing comment.

- One participant stated that they love driving the roads in the area. They stated that the two-way freeway access roads took some getting used to. This person stated that they liked living north of Austin but that older, more scenic rural roads are “going under” to accommodate growth. This participant likes things the way they are but noted that they are better off than where they came from. This participant also stated that people in the Central Texas area don’t know how to drive in bad weather.
- Another participant stated that safety is the most important thing to consider in the future. This person stated that “we all have to get on I-35,” and that residents should be able to reasonably expect that “we will not die.” This person stated that they had a new driver in the household but that they (the new driver) were not in a hurry to start driving. This is a trend that the participant has noticed is more and more common.

March 9, 2010, Austin, TX

How do you use I-35?

- Use I-35 to get to work, but flex schedule long hours, state employee.
- Use I-35 by avoiding.
- Use I-35 for work to Capitol – state employee.
- Been here whole life, watched the city grow, use frontage roads mostly.
- Gotta get on I-35 by 3:00 or you will be in a traffic jam.
- Coming from Manor, mostly use 290.
- Use a part of 35 everywhere I go, I hate the bottom deck, won’t go during back traffic hours.
- Minimal time on I-35, prefer one bathroom in the house to commuting on 35, will use only if it’s the direct route, use it to go to Dallas, San Marcos, etc., it’s crowded all the time.
- Avoid it if possible; do not need to use it for work.
- Two commute to work on I-35, some use alternate routes to 35, two commute but not using I-35 corridor.
- Driving on I-35 is not pleasant, but can be during non-crowded times.
- But you never know when there will be an accident.

- 40 years ago, you could easily travel on I-35.
- As population has grown it makes it more difficult.
- Traffic has changed dramatically in last 5-10 years.
- Jobs are here, so people are here.
- Downtown is a place with lots of jobs, new buildings.
- I-35 is the artery to get places.
- When the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) passed, heard that new lanes for the whole length would be needed.
- That would have been better than the toll roads, which just takes money.
- Toll roads are not convenient to me (lives central Austin).

For commuters on I-35, how many miles do you drive, and what is the length of time of your commute?

- For one participant, from Round Rock, 19 miles one way, takes 20 minutes between 6 and 6:30 AM; Evening, 6:30 is the same unless there's an accident.
- Another commutes 25 miles one way, and takes 30 minutes...depends on weather conditions, rubberneckers, and whether the University of Texas (UT) is in session (summer is better); in evening, 35 minutes if leave at 4:30; could take 45-hour at 5:00.

Do you notice the difference when UT is in session?

- Equate it more with school being in session, holiday, and summer.

Do you carpool? The bus?

- The bus "will take 2-3 days," and it's not any quicker because sitting in the same traffic.

What if there was a lane for the bus?

- Depends on number of stops the bus makes. From central Austin, the bus is more pleasant.
- Where would an HOV lane go? There's no room left. In Dallas, there's a ribbon barrier that uses a lane. But other than that, TxDOT would have to get more ROW or elevate, and that would be costly and an environmental issue. Don't know about other solutions. Metrorail is a good start, but there may be safety issues. Other cities elevate their trains. I would use a train if it was more convenient and cheaper.
- I think an HOV lane would help. The ones in Houston need more than one person.
- I use the HOV lane driving to Dallas, but it isn't on the older roads and can't get through Dallas since there's no place to put it.
- Would have to go underground, which isn't going to happen.
- The Dallas ribbon barrier takes a lane.
- People don't want to give up their car to share a ride or get on the bus; there should be some incentives to give up your vehicle and get on the bus. The bus schedule isn't convenient. We need some creative methods to get people out of their cars. Going to alternate work schedules and working from home is being allowed in my work place. I would ride with other folks if there was a means to get home in emergency.
- Vanpool options in Utah.

- Give everyone a smart car.

What is the biggest problem with I-35?

- Too congested.
- Not enough alternate relief routes if there's an accident.
- Not enough space to expand.

What about trucks?

- At the Bell County lane, when the trucks actually stay out of the left lane, it helps. Someone driving a u-haul didn't think it applied to them.
- If we could re-route the trucks then it would create some space; mandate that trucks get off of I-35.
- Are trucks using the bypass?
- I don't think the trucks are using because of the cost.
- I would go on the bypass if I was driving from San Antonio to Dallas, because it would be faster and more pleasant.
- Are the trucks really that big a problem? I don't think they are as big a problem as the sheer number of cars.
- One participant thought trucks should have their own lanes.

The moderator distributed the handout, and asked if anything was surprising?

- Percentage of trucks looks small, but it is a large number of cars.
- Higher truck numbers both north and south of Austin.
- But the percentage is of a (?)
- "What are we going to do about this?"

Is this believable?

- Yes.
- It seems overwhelming.
- "Where are we going to put 300,000 people and all their cars?"
- Truck traffic will increase and have a greater impact on conditions, and greater importance to divert.

How are we going to solve this problem?

- We need more alternate routes; concentric relief routes in other cities, why don't we have more? You need to acquire homes before the homes are there; the toll road is a good start. Some may think it's cost prohibitive but it's helping.
- I don't believe the toll road is helping. It's still bad after it was built, so who did it benefit?
- I think the toll road is supporting a lot of the growth, and relieving traffic, not the current routes but the ones coming in.
- I-35 is serving the employment in Austin. If you build more businesses outside of I-35 that would help.
- But if you disperse the employment locations then you reduce the options for transit.

- Trains, buses, carpools – massive campaigns, we have to have discussions to convince folks this is an alternative to free up I-35; it used to be okay in the past, but because of all of the businesses, there is a greater reliance on I-35 to get to work or school. I-35 is not going to continue to support. Must look at creative solutions through education to get people out of their cars. Trucks: they are the equivalent of 4 cars in length, so get the trucks on alternative routes. They won't like it because of the high taxes they pay. Have you ever seen a tractor trailer on the toll road?
- I think trucks will use the toll roads once they get more used to them. The toll roads were built for the future; I-35 has surpassed its life.
- East-west arterial in Austin has been talked about a long time.

Can you do anything to I-35 now?

- Dallas did North Central expressway and depressed it.
- The inconvenience of the construction.

Is the consensus that you cannot expand?

- Yes.
- Can build on top. Go up.
- It would be costly.
- Toll road was a bad use of money.
- If the toll road was cheaper it would be used more.
- Still have to get downtown.
- The toll road isn't going to solve this problem to get into town.
- Getting people into central Austin.
- Like the idea of reducing tolls to get traffic off of I-35.
- Use signs to display travel time to show that it's an alternative.
- Move businesses to the toll road.

Operational strategies?

- Radio updates every 5 minutes to say where accidents are.
- GPS is used to identify accidents and give alternate routes (my daughter's boyfriend uses it).
- Use the toll road to get to the airport, more miles, takes a few minutes longer, is reliable, no congestion. But there's a cost factor.
- Use toll as credit for bus/or train (using the toll road to get to the station).
- Use signs to display travel time to show that it's an alternative.

What is a sincere campaign?

- Tell people the benefits of the toll road; studies, video, and examples.
- Identify where people live and work, then devise a personalized travel approach (targeted outreach to people); events, day of the week, time of the day should be considered.
- No one reads the newspaper anymore.
- More education is needed.
- I don't know where the toll road goes or where to take it.

- Encourage affordable high-density housing centrally located to make it more affordable to live in town so people aren't forced to commute.

If TxDOT were to educate you on the toll road would you see it as them trying to push you onto the toll road?

- Still doesn't solve the Slaughter to 12th street problem.

Rail?

- It's been controversial, and expensive.
- The current system will take cars off 183, not I-35.
- There's been discussion of rail from Georgetown, but it's very costly.
- To Dallas? I would want a car once I got there. I would still have to get around if I got there. And I would be going to Lewisville, so that doesn't help.
- I've lived in other cities where it was convenient and a car wasn't needed. I took the train to Ft. Worth and it took 6 hours. But a convenient train makes sense.
- Moving freight by rail is a good idea, but in Chicago it takes 2-3 days to get freight across the city because no one wants the rail placed in their backyard.
- Good for moving freight by rail from the border to Oklahoma, it becomes more cost effective.
- I don't think trucks are the biggest problem; get a grip on the regular traffic.
- If tolls were cheaper for trucks, then more would take 130.

How to pay?

- The toll road provides an option, and you can pay for what you use.
- You can pay for use or pay through gas taxes.
- The people moving here should pay a fee.
- Impact fees from new development.
- London – fee to get into the central city.
- I don't like that idea.
- Even if there are alternates, there's no assurance that people will get off I-35; 130 case in point.
- I take the toll road in Houston, because 1. It's cheaper, and 2. It is convenient; the toll road here doesn't get you there.
- A lot of employees that are downtown are state employees, why don't they mandate a move from downtown or force people to commute differently.
- The state moves to new offices on I-35.
- Poor planning.
- The big problem, according to the data, there's prosperity, jobs, and tremendous growth, and people are going to drive their nice cars by themselves and won't get out of them; so need alternative routes (which they won't use), and do an incentive program:
 - People can carpool, and pay them \$100 per month to not drive your vehicle.
 - Get the State of Texas on board.
 - Vanpooling.
 - Staggered work hours, flexibility.
 - Building new roads and rail is fine, but we need to do the easy fix now.

- Need shuttle service – smaller bus or vans that are more convenient.
- Ban people from coming to Austin.
- Offer incentives for people to move outside I-35 corridor.
- A toll road that gets people downtown.
- Pay for fixes through taxes.
- Raise the gas price because people will change.
- That's how conservation works.
- There will be opposition – no one wants the roads, no one wants them in their backyards, no one wants to pay.
- We have to change the mindset.
- Education, people don't know what it costs.
- I-35 through downtown – add lanes to the elevated section.
- Convert a general-purpose lane to HOV lane during peak periods.
- Difficult to put a toll on an existing road.
- Combination of tolls and taxes.
- Sin taxes.
- Austin has the money and can do it if they want to, but they would rather pay for jails.
- Charge a tax for rental cars, hotel taxes.
- Commuter taxes have been used in other places.
- Can't raise property tax; that isn't right.
- Payroll taxes for businesses, businesses outside would pay lower rate.
- Relocate state employees to one complex; property is worth more.
- Housing downtown.
- Raise registration fees.

What is your solution and how would you pay?

- Expand I-35 with money we have.
- Move businesses away from I-35.
- Move state offices.
- Incentives of all kinds, businesses, get people out of cars; payroll taxes with sliding scale.
- Fuel tax increase and tolls.
- Fuel tax is a minor expense now.
- Convert general-purpose (GP) lane to HOV lane, offer incentive with campaign for getting out of car, alternate work schedules.
- Downtown state and county agency issues, getting employees to and from work, provide bus/shuttle services for employees.
- Build government offices outside downtown.
- Expand upward on I-35, building other highways, paid with fuel taxes.
- Encourage future growth out of I-35 corridor for 2035 projections.
- Give incentive to businesses to move out; not fuel taxes but luxury taxes (alcohol, cigarette).
- Toll road express to downtown.
- Encourage trucks and other vehicles to take the toll road.

April 6, 2010, Laredo, TX

How do you use I-35?

Participant 2 – I have a son in Denton and things get very hectic during the holidays. I would like to have a “super duper” highway that goes around or over cities that you are not going to be stopping in. I have used 281 in the past and it is OK, but it is almost a nine hour drive. So I would like a “super highway” but it does not have to be parallel or even within the I-35 right of way. Austin is especially bad and I have to time my trips and leave at around 3 AM in order to avoid Austin and San Antonio traffic. I would think about taking the 130 toll road if it also bypassed San Antonio.

Participant 6 – Each town along the corridor should look for solutions and find ways of getting local traffic off of I-35 so that through traffic can use the facility.

Participant 4 – I was on the board of the Texas Economic Development (commission?) and had to attend meetings in Austin. We would meet at around 9 AM and I would stay the night before and sometimes even skip meetings so as to avoid San Antonio congestion. My daughter from Plano takes 281 to avoid congestion. The corridor between San Antonio and Austin is “super congested” and it seems like the construction never ends.

Participant 2 – I go to Fort Worth and there always seems to be construction.

Participant 5 – Local traffic is fine here except for around Loop 20.

Participant 2 – I heard that there were many problems and scandals that cause construction of the loop to take forever. People are afraid to use it because of the tractor trailers.

Participant 5 – It is supposed to be for commercial vehicles only.

Participant 4 – I have a ranch around Encinala. I never have any problems until I reach San Antonio.

Participant 2 – I would like better and more rest areas. Trucks are taking over what is there. The rest stop that is on 281 between Freer and the Valley is nice.

Participant 3 – I take I-35 everyday and there are no signs in Spanish. There are a lot of people making money off of the locals and Spanish speakers but a lot of people can't even understand the yield signs. It is very dangerous.

Participant 8 – People around here need to learn English.

Participant 3 – Things are bad... “Horrible” at Del Mar near the Golden Corral.

Participant 2 – Yes. It is bad there at that location. I drive there every day.

Participant 3 – There are accidents all the time. In Mexico there is no real test for you to get a driver’s license.

Participant 4 – At exits on 35 where side streets converge there should be a yellow line before hand, because people are trying to beat exiting vehicles to get to the light. I agree about the need for Spanish signs. We make money off of these people.

Participant 6 – People get impatient and try to get on the freeway. TxDOT seems to be trying to develop alternatives to I-35, which is good.

Participant 4 – Halfway down between Del Mar and Mann road is bad.

Participant 7 – Segment Four needs a “facelift.” It is horrible. It is never smooth and the lanes are uneven. We are far behind compared to other segments. Toll roads are one option and I understand that there is a funding issue but nothing has been satisfactory.

Moderator – Why do you think things are so bad?

Participant 7 – Del Mar and Mann are the worst. I don’t know why it is permitted for that area to be like that.

Participant 1 – It is very dangerous.

Participant 2 – I always have to hurry over to make it to the exit on that stretch.

Participant 1 – As far as us being behind, TxDOT allocates based on population. That is why it all goes to Dallas and Fort Worth and Houston. However, we have a large population and it is going to get bigger.

Participant 4 – Our customs agency collects more in duties than any other state. Why is it that there are barriers being built in the median between here and San Antonio? How many deaths have occurred to warrant that?

Participant 3 – When accidents occur there is not much warning to other cars down the road. If the accident is not cleared in time then there are often other accidents that occur because of it.

Participant 2 – There was a bad accident a while back and people were going in reverse on the highway to go around. There was no law enforcement presence.

Participant 3 – The police often direct traffic at the scene of the accident but do nothing along the approach to the accident.

Participant 6 – What about passenger rail for people traveling to San Antonio.

Moderator – Would this be a good idea? Would you use passenger rail?

Participant 6 – Yes.

Participant 9 – I would take it to avoid trucks. Also, the lighting on I-35 is bad. It’s too dark at night.

Moderator – Is truck traffic a problem?

Participant 9 – Yes. I try to avoid trucks whenever I can.

Participant 8 – I agree.

Participant 9 – A separate lane for trucks would be good.

Participant 2 – I like the lane restrictions they have around Austin.

Participant 4 – Trucks here stick to the right lane. It shouldn't be a problem here.

Moderator – Would enough people here use rail?

Participant 6 – Yes.

Participant 9 – No. The mentality here is just not open enough.

Participant 2 – But it would be good for tourists.

Participant 5 – We already have rail. There is a shuttle to San Antonio and then you can take Amtrak to Chicago and beyond. People will have to take public transportation once they get there, though.

Participant 1 – It's a cultural thing here in Texas. Light rail didn't happen in Austin so it definitely won't happen here in South Texas.

Participant 2 – But it might be good for “winter Texans” and students.

Moderator – What about moving freight by rail?

Participant 2 – We already do that. There are a lot of trains running in the area and they cause problems with commuting. They actually cause more problems than they address. I would like to see some sort of technology that tells me where the trains are going so I can plan my trips around them.

Participant 1 – Ninety percent of our freight goes by truck. The remaining 10 percent is by train in the Laredo area.

(Moderator passes out handout.)

Moderator – Is there anything on here that surprises you?

Participant 2 – I am surprised that there is not more red on here.

Participant 3 – I am surprised by the population projections.

Participant 1 – This is good information. We should be “250-ish.” The map is surprising in that there are no other cities between San Antonio and Laredo so there should not be all of these “different colors” between San Antonio and Laredo. There are no other traffic factors in the area as those two cities are the biggest trip generators.

(There is general confusion in the group on the topic of level of service and the associated map. It does not appear that the maps give enough information to the participants so that they know what the map is trying to convey. Moderator explains...)

Moderator – So regardless of the maps...things are getting worse in the area. What should be done?

Participant 2 – Extra lanes would be good. Lane restrictions would also be good.

Participant 7 – Reroute trucks between Laredo and San Antonio. There are too many accidents.

Participant 1 – TxDOT does not appear to take into account truck traffic in allocating money to the area. Trucks do much more damage to the roadway.

Moderator – Do you think that trucks are paying their fair share?

Participant 1 – Well, TxDOT is not allocating based on wear and tear.

Participant 10 – A toll road for trucks might be good.

Participant 3 – They pay in Mexico.

Participant 4 – But then it would be passed on to the consumer.

Participant 3 – We paid \$40 to use a good road in Monterrey.

Participant 1 – Roads are built to last longer in Mexico. They use concrete.

Moderator – Solution is toll road for trucks?

Participant 4 – Do we want to be the “Guinea pigs” on this type of thing?

Participant 5 – We “lost our shirt” on the Camino Columbia.

Participant 2 – Build road for trucks and if they mess it up make them pay for it. I’d also like to see more emergency phones.

Moderator – So how should we pay for these changes? How is transportation currently funded?

Participants 2 and 5 – The lottery.

Participant 1 – Gas tax and the feds “kick in” some money, too.

Moderator – How much is the gas tax?

Participant 2 – “A lot.” It is a percentage of the purchase price. (Participants 6, 8 and 9 agree.)

Participant 1 – It is 20 to 30 cents.

Participant 10 – 10 cents?

(Moderator discusses tax...)

Participant 5 – So it is a fixed amount regardless of price?

Moderator – How much does it cost you per year?

No answers/guesses.

Moderator – It costs about \$250/year. Is that a lot?

Participant 3 – As much as I use the roadway and as bad as the roadway is I think it is a lot. Going back to planning issues...I-35 is really bad around Target. It goes from three lanes to two.

Participant 6 – They keep adding traffic lights, which causes problems in the area and puts more people on I-35.

Participant 1 – TxDOT should forget about amount making Loop 20 a loop. Just put lights on it and build a brand new loop.

Moderator – But how do you pay for that?

No answers.

(Moderator describes pay-as-you-go financing...that is why Loop 20 is taking so long...)

Participant 1 – Offer pass through tolls and increase vehicle registration fees. Realistically we should offer tolls as an option. We all feel that we get taxed too much.

Participant 4 – Why don't trucks count for more in the money we get?

(Moderator discusses funding...donor/donee states...)

Participant 1 – How do individual roads and bridges get selected for funding?

Participant 3 – Loop 20 was built to serve the university and a few other places, but developers moved in and now there is a lot more traffic.

Participant 2 – I have been here for 24 years and the changes I have seen are remarkable.

Moderator – So what do you do about these changes?

Participant 1 – TxDOT should look at cost savings. For example, putting the little bricks and fancy decorations on overpasses seems like a waste and is not needed. Need to look at cost cutting.

Participant 6 – Should legalize slot machines.

Moderator – How long has it been since the gas tax was raised?

No answers.

Moderator – Not since 1991 at the state level. Are you surprised?

Participant 5 – Not really. So I guess we are due for a raise.

Participant 1 – There are more vehicles today and they drive farther, so there should be more money. But I guess fuel efficiency is something that needs to be considered too.

Moderator – So would you rather see fuel taxes raised or more toll roads? (A lots of no answers...)

Tolls – 6 in favor

Many said support for a fuel tax increase would depend on where the money was spent.

Participant 4 – Why build toll roads over free roads?

Participant 5 – What are the advantages of a toll road? Is it just quicker drive times?

Moderator – Most money today is spent on maintenance. What about the idea of a local option fee?

Participant 2 – So people who use the roads pay for them.

Participant 4 – So upping the gas tax will put more money into the state fund, but it still won't come here.

Moderator – So does anyone have a problem with 25 percent of state revenues going to education?

Participant 10 – Why not get money for education from other places?

Participant 2 – The lottery is supposed to help education, right? As well as local taxes?

Moderator – So how should transportation be funded?

Participant 1 – We can't depend solely on toll roads but they need to be an option. People should be given the option and allowed to make the decision on their own.

Participant 4 – I am against toll roads. Period.

Participant 2 – I liked the toll roads I used at Syracuse where my daughter goes to school.

Moderator – So we have a general consensus on local option? (General — Yes. Three participants said no.)

Participant 1 – People would likely not notice a gas tax increase, but it is also the perception of a new tax. Laredo should be allowed to capture some of these revenues. So yes, I favor the local option.

Participant 2 – But this is just gas taxes. Maquilladora site locators complained about local taxes so we need to keep the focus on gas taxes.

Participant 1 – It should be kept local and not go statewide. Funds should not be distributed the same way they are now.

Participant 4 – I don't want to share with the rest of the state. I am adamant about rewarding our school teachers so that we can have a better education for our kids. We need to attract better teachers.

Closing Remarks

Participant 10 – It would be nice to have lower gas prices.

Participant 2 – We should charge developers more for transportation purposes. Can that be done?

Participant 1 – Sometimes developers are required to come to the table with money.

April 14, 2010, Dallas, TX

Participant 6 – “I go up and down I-35 E a lot, mainly between Denton and Waxahachie and often into Rhome. The time of day has a lot to do with how bad congestion is but often it does not matter what time it is. Wherever there is construction it seems that there is always congestion.”

Participant 2 – “In Fort Worth there is always a bottleneck just north of downtown. I have a lot of customers who come in from out of town and I have to give them directions to get around. I have asked about having a sign put in at Exit 51 where there is no information. It is often very congested south of Lewisville near Sandy Lake.”

Participant 1 – “I come from I-35 south of DeSoto and Cedar Hill. It is two lanes in that area and is very congested during the ‘work time.’ It also gets very bad in the Lewisville area and Regal Road and 635. People drive crazy!”

Participant 2 – “Is that because it is 4 to 5 lanes wide and then narrows past 635 to 2 lanes?”

Participant 6 – “And only one lane to make the exit.”

Participant 1 – “Yes, and coming onto I-35 north it gets bad, too.”

Participant 3 – “I've been on 30 and 635 but I don't travel on I-35 that much.”

Participant 1 – “I've taken I-35 through downtown in both the north and south directions and there are always accidents.”

Participant 4 – “My office is at I-35 and Walnut and the split at 112 is bad.”

Participant 1 – “I don't travel on I-35 all that much because of the accidents.”

Moderator – “Do you use alternate routes?”

All – “Yes.”

Moderator – “What routes do you use?”

Participant 1 – “It depends on the deliveries as my windows are small. GPS helps but I’ve been driving for 20 years and everyone knows the alternate routes. You really need to have a third choice in mind.”

Moderator – “Does anyone carpool?”

Participant 3 – “I used the buses when I first moved here but they were always late.”

Participant 1 – “I rode the bus in the Oak Club area and it was on time. I don’t recall it using the HOV lane, though.”

Moderator – “What is the biggest problem on I-35?”

Participant 5 – “I came from Lancaster (Pleasant Run to downtown) and the quality of the road is not good. It is a problem.”

Participant 6 – “The changing number of lanes causes problems.”

Participant 1 – “I think it should be widened to accommodate all of the people moving into the DeSoto area.”

Moderator – “Do you think that there is room to widen the facility?”

Participant 5 – “They can make room.”

Participant 6 – “At Lake Lewisville it goes from being 5 to 6 lanes down to 2. It causes congestion in both directions.”

Participant 1 – “The “Mixmaster” is bad during work hours.”

Moderator – “So is congestion the biggest problem?”

General response – “Yes.”

Participant 6 – “All of the exits and the associated weaving of vehicles cause a problem.”

Participant 5 – “Pleasant Run to downtown is old and doesn’t seem to have been touched. The new Central Expressway is “amazing.” That should be done to I-35.”

Participant 4 – “I take Walnut to Central and then go downtown.”

Moderator – “Do you experience congestion during other times of the day?”

Participant 6 – “Yes.”

Participant 1 – “At 9:00 and 10:00 it is fairly reliable. However, the problem is during the peak.”

Participants 2 and 6 agreed.

Participant 4 – “I use the facility at night. It is reliable then.”

Participant 1 – “I used I-35 E when I moved here. It was my ‘marker.’ If I could find I-35 E I could find where I needed to go in the city.”

Moderator – “Are trucks an issue?”

Participant 6 – “They are a problem everywhere.”

Participant 5 – “They are a problem on I-35 especially. You can’t get around them.”

Participant 1 – “I don’t recall seeing a lot of trucks on I-35. On interstate 20, yes, but not on 35.”

Participant 5 – “They just don’t use 35.”

Participant 2 – “Is there a law banning them from using the inside lane?”

Participant 5 – “I’m still confused by what the speed limits are on I-35.”

Participant 4 – “There aren’t any, really.”

Participant 6 – “I don’t see any truck restriction signs.”

Participant 4 – “The inside lane is supposed to be for passing, anyway. “

Participant 5 – “I would like to see more reflectors on I-35. It is hard to see the roadway sometimes, especially at night.”

Participant 2 – “When there is construction and cars are not using the usual white lane separation lines it can be bad. It ‘scared me to death’ going through Arlington the other day. They need to do a better job of marking lanes during construction.”

Participant 6 – “They also need to black out the old lane separation lines.”

Participant 1 – “Off of Harry Hines you can get on I-35 going southbound but you can’t get on going northbound.”

Participant 3 – “It has been like that for years.”

Participant 5 – “If I can use the tollway or other roadway besides I-35 I will.”

Participant 1 – “Agree.”

(Moderator passes out handout.)

Participant 5 – “I often take old highway 77 to Waxahachie instead of I-35. It is often just as quick.”

Moderator – “Is there anything in here that surprises you? What about the population projections.”

Participant 2 – “No, these don’t surprise me.”

Participant 4 – “We are right in the middle of the country.”

Participant 1 – “Seems high to me.”

Participant 6 – “But these projections are for 25 years or more.”

Participant 1 – “Isn’t Frisco growing really fast?”

Participant 5 – “All of the ‘peripheral’ cities are growing very quickly.”

(Moderator discusses increases in daily traffic.)

Participant 1 – “Wow!”

Participant 2 – “This doesn’t surprise me.”

Participant 5 – “Look at the 4percent trucks leaving downtown...I-35 by the Hyatt Regency (Woodall Rogers) is no place for trucks.”

Participant 6 – “It is probably because they are taking I-35 West instead of heading into Dallas. “

Participant 1 – “They probably also know how bad congestion is on I-35. Does 75 go into Oklahoma?”

Participants 4 and 6 – “Both.”

Participant 2 – “People are moving into Texas because of the tax climate.”

Moderator – “So you would say the area is still going strong?”

Participant 6 – “This area has weathered the tough times. I traveled a lot in the ’80s.”

Participant 1 – “I thought the 74percent seems off but I guess not.” (*Not sure what the 74percent refers to...*)

Participant 5 – “There have been times that I have taken the DART rail downtown...”

Moderator – “But you said you don’t use the bus.”

Participant 4 – “Well yea, the rail is better.”

Moderator – “Does anyone here commute by rail?”

Participants 4, 2, and 6 – “No.”

(Moderator discusses level of service.)

Participant 5 – “I agree with the breakdown portrayed here, but this is if nothing happens, right?”

Moderator – “No.” (Explains...)

Participant 5 – “Things would be worse off without the rail from Westmoreland.”

Moderator – “Is the rail helpful?”

General “Yes.”

Moderator – “And some people use it to commute (but not you)?”

General “Yes.”

Participant 4 – “The park and rides help a lot with the commuters.”

Participant 6 – “Extending to Flower Mound may not help LOS but it could help other things.”

Moderator – “So does everyone generally agree with the projections shown here?”

General “Yes.”

Moderator – “So what should be done?”

Participant 2 – “Double-decker.”

Participant 1 – “Don’t we have one of those on at 75?”

Participants 4, 2, and 6 – “No.”

(Participant 2 explains what a double-decker is to Participant 1.)

Participant 1 – “Ohhh...I like that!”

Participant 2 – “But how far do you have to go? 75 seems perfect for a double-decker.”

Participant 4 – “It could help traffic on I-35.”

Moderator – “So add lanes going north and south through downtown?”

“Yes.”

Moderator – “What about the double-decker concept? Is adding lanes to I-35 the answer?”

Participant 6 – “It would be an improvement but not the answer. The number of lanes needs to be consistent...of course cost and time will be an issue.”

Participant 1 – “Yeah, construction can cause congestion.”

Moderator – “What about right of way for the expansion?”

Participant 5 – “The segments running through downtown will need that the worst.”

Moderator – “So when you are going into Oklahoma, do you have to take I-35 and go through downtown? Would parallel facilities work?”

Participant 6 – “We already have Loop 635.”

Participant 4 – “We actually have three loops.”

Participants 4 and 6 – “But they don’t save time.”

Participant 3 – “I like the double-decker idea.”

Participant 5 – “We have the lottery.”

Participant 6 – “Yeah, and we should legalize gambling.”

Participant 1 – “The question with regard to a double-decker is: what are we double-decking for?”

Participant 2 – “I think we should double-deck for through traffic.”

Participant 5 – “Like traffic heading from south Dallas and through downtown.”

Participant 6 – “Yes, only you have to be able to get on and off at the major highway intersections.”

Participant 4 – “Or just make the exits onto 635 easier. That area causes a lot of congestion.”

Participant 5 – “The bridge over the Trinity River needs widening.”

Moderator – “What about your travel on Segment Two?”

Participant 2 – “I-35 past Hillsborough is OK. There are fewer cars there.”

Moderator – “Is there a loop in Fort Worth for I-35 W and, if so, is it as bad as 635?”

Participant 6 – “Pretty much.”

Participant 1 – “820 is busy.”

Participant 6 – “Sometimes the west side of Fort Worth is alright, but traffic on the north side of the city is some of the ‘worst in the state.’”

Participant 2 – “It goes down to two lanes and narrows, which causes a lot of congestion.”

Moderator – “So do you all think that the double-decker is the best idea?”

General “Yes.”

Moderator – “But will the people living along I-35 like the idea?”

Participant 6 – “Who lives along I-35? It seems like it is mostly commercial property.”

Participant 1 – “Adding lanes would be more cost effective.”

Moderator – “What about a rail line to Austin?”

Participants 2 and 4 – “That would be nice.”

Moderator – “And what would you do once you arrived at your location?”

Participant 4 – “Take a cab.”

Participant 5 – “I think there need to be more lanes running in the Trinity River bed.”

Moderator – “How should all of these improvements be paid for?”

Participant 6 – “Legalize gambling.”

Moderator – “How is the transportation currently funded?”

Participant 4 – “Sales taxes?”

Participant 5 – “Lottery.”

(Moderator discusses transportation financing.)

Participant 6 – “I still say we should legalize gambling.”

(Moderator discusses the effect of fuel efficiency on fuel tax revenues.)

Participant 5 – “So electric vehicles are not a good idea.”

Moderator – “What about making a double-decker that is an express toll facility?”

Participant 6 – “Seems to work on 75.”

Participant 2 – “I like the idea.”

Participant 5 – “It’s a good idea...better than taxing the city.”

Participant 2 – “I like tolls.”

Participant 6 – “I like tolls and gambling. People just don’t want to hear about more taxes.”

Moderator – “What about these diversions to education?”

Participant 4 – “Yeah, we need to get that back. Property taxes are supposed to pay for education.”

Participant 5 – “But we can’t take it back. Besides, a couple of cents on fuel is not that bad.”

Moderator – “What about a fuel tax increase where the new funds would be dedicated to transportation?”

Participants 1, 2, and 5 – (Unsure....thinking it over.)

Participant 5 – “As long as the money goes to transportation that would be alright.”

Participant 6 – “And no money to salaries, and more studies, focus groups, etc...”

Participant 5 – “Well do we all agree that you can’t put tolls on existing roads?”

Participant 4 – “121 was a joke.”

Participant 6 – “But it is better now.”

Participant 4 – “Well, yeah...”

Moderator – “What about adding a new lane on I-35?”

General agreement

Moderator – “And what about using congestion pricing on that lane?”

Participant 5 – “I don’t understand.”

(Moderator explains congestion pricing...)

Participant 1 – “That’s not fair.”

Participant 5 – “I don’t like that. It should cost less if it is more crowded.”

Moderator – “But you are guaranteeing a 55 mph speed limit.”

Participant 2 – “But what about breakdowns?”

Participant 4 – “In Houston they give you 30 minutes to move your vehicle.”

Participant 1 – “What if people don’t have money on hand? You would have to write tickets.”

Moderator – “It would be all electronic.”

Participant 4 – “TxTag makes that all easier.”

Moderator – “So a double-decker from downtown outward that is toll financed...”

Participant 2 – “Tolls and taxes add up and are costly. People need to have a choice.”

Participant 1 – “I don’t think the price should change. It should be flat.”

Participant 2 – “I agree.”

Participants 5 and 6 – “I like the toll roads.”

Participant 6 – “The toll roads in town are some of the better ‘traffic flow situations.’”

Participant 2 – “The signage on the double-deck facility in Austin is terrible. Need to do better if done here.”

Participant 4 – “What about having more HOV facilities?”

Moderator – “Is there room?”

Participant 4 – “Don’t know if it would help.”

Participant 2 – “It would help but not enough?”

Participant 5 – “HOV lanes are a waste.”

Participant 6 – “Yeah, it didn’t drive enough SOV to adopt HOV. There is ‘too much individualism.’”

Participant 1 – “Why is it so busy at 9 and 10? People should be at work?”

Participant 6 – “It’s all service people like me.”

April 21, 2010, Fort Worth, TX

Moderator – “So, why don’t we start with you all telling me about your travel on I-35.”

Participant 1 – “I have been using 35 since I could drive so that’s like; well I am 34 now so. I have always liked 35. In Austin, I have used it all over the place. Are you just talking about this area?”

Moderator – “Yes, we are primarily just talking about this area. I should have mentioned before I got in here that we are looking at the entire length of 35 but we are focusing primarily on Segment One. That is from here to just south of DFW. The segments overlap a little.”

Participant 2 – “Have you tried to get through there between 4 and 5 o’clock in the afternoon. There are not enough lanes.”

Moderator – “Okay, not enough lanes.”

Participant 2 – “Yeah there are too many people at that time and there is a lot of construction going on.”

Moderator – “Now let me ask you all, since we are talking about 35, to make distinctions since we are over here in Fort Worth. Please tell us if you are talking about W or E.”

Group all understands and says okay.

Moderator – “Do you think traffic congestion is bad during the peak hour?”

Participant 2 – “Yeah is 35 E going this way and west is that way? Yeah East is really congested between 4 and 5 o’clock. It is at standstill.”

Participant 3 – “Yeah and I think that when I first came to Fort Worth about 10 years ago, you didn’t have to sit in traffic and now you have to sit in traffic. Like on 35 going to Denton, is that west? Now with alliance and everything, between there and the 820 split, it is just horrible. At 3 o’clock today it was backed up.”

Moderator – “So what you are saying is that it has gotten worse over the last 10 years?”

Participant 3 – “Yeah because it used to, that is what I loved about this side is that you didn’t have the traffic, but now we are becoming like Dallas because it is so backed up on the roads.”

Participant 2 – “Is there any thought about making the travel to Alliance any shorter? From here or from a distance it is a long drive on that straightaway.”

Moderator – “Now when you say making it shorter, what do you mean?”

Participant 2 – “Like making a bridge. Or, a service road that goes down and makes things quicker, even though. You have never traveled there have you?”

Moderator – “No.”

Participant 2 – “I can’t explain it then. But Alliance to here is a long way.”

Moderator – “And that is the airport you are talking about right?”

Participant 2 – “Yes. Down over in the commerce area where all the warehouses are.”

Participant 3 – “Yeah they built a whole big new development over by Ross Perot Jr.”

Participant 2 – “There are a lot of businesses over there.”

Participant 3 – “Yeah there are a lot of businesses over there just coming out that way that have moved out that way. There is a lot of house building going on that way too. A lot of subdivisions are being built.”

Moderator – “So, what does that tell you?”

Participant 4 – “We are thinking about it.”

Everyone nods yes.

Moderator – “Traffic is going to get worse.”

Participant 4 – “I realize that I have two uses for 35E which is mostly where I drive. One is daily use, getting around town which is often at peak times.”

Moderator – “Now, wait a minute – now I am confused. You are traveling around town on 35E?”

Participant 4 – “Yeah on 35E.”

Moderator – “So you are traveling around Dallas then, not Fort Worth?”

Participant 4 – “Yeah I live in Dallas.”

Moderator – “Oh sorry, I thought you said you lived in Fort Worth.”

Participant 4 – “No, but you asked to distinguish which one we were talking about.”

Moderator – “No that is fine I just wanted to make sure.”

Participant 4 – “I have two uses – one as an around town artery taking me to the courthouse or to the library or around for those distances that I would not want to cover on surface streets. The other is a portal to get out of town, like heading up to Denton or Gainesville. I don’t run across the bridge in Gainesville as much as I used to, now that they sell beer here. But, that was the getaway going up to down south on the way to Waco and Austin. So, I am really realizing that I have two uses for 35E as day to day freeway and as a portal to other places.”

Moderator – “And how is your experience?”

Participant 4 – “It’s as crowded as most as a day to day freeway. It is becoming more and more unpleasant to travel as a portal, especially between here and Austin. We have a place in Wimberley and it is worth taking the back roads. It is not worth the fight, especially around holiday time.”

Participant 2 and Participant 3 both agree.

Participant 5 – “I believe my opinion might be skewed because I come from Los Angeles where traffic is already jammed. You don’t think about it, you just do it. I remember 35 E in 97 and 98, because I always thought it flowed better until you got to downtown. It might come to a stop but I never remember it being slow until you got past downtown. All I could use coming in to downtown to the west side of Fort Worth, it is only those 2-3 lanes. When you are coming toward Belknap — do you know where I am talking about? It gets real small. When you come past Lancaster it gets backed up. Now that is west. Coming from Dallas, in Farmers Branch going into downtown, it always flowed freely until you go over around downtown and that is understandable because that is where the main flux of people are. Everyone is coming or going out of downtown.”

Participant 3 – “I think 35 too, here in Fort Worth needs to do what they did going south toward Austin. Like, Burleson was only two lanes but now it expands out to 4 or 6. That has helped on that end, but when going out toward Denton, it is bad.”

Participant 2 – “That is confusing going out toward Denton though because there are all these exits you can take. And when you are in the center lane, if you ever try to get there and you have people going every which direction, that is a good place to have a wreck. Especially if you are not familiar with the area, because you have Rosedale going one way and east going one way. Now they have the new freeway up there but it is just real confusing.”

Moderator – “Now when you say it is confusing, what is confusing?”

Participant 2 – “Well if you are not in the exact lane that you need to be in.”

Moderator – “So, some of the lanes are exiting to the left and some are exiting to the right?”

Participant 2 – “Yes.”

Moderator – “I thought that is what you were saying but I just wanted to make sure.”

Participant 2 – “That is exactly what I am saying. And there are a lot of people that have to take the other lane because they are not in the right lane and now they have to go way out of their way because they missed where they needed to exit. Yeah, so that is real confusing.”

Moderator – “Participant 6, how is your travel on 35?”

Participant 6 – “Well I used to go to Denton because I used to work that route. So I had to take 35 to get to Denton but I didn’t have any problem with it. It goes a long way. So, I have no problems with it.”

Moderator – “Okay. What about you Participant 7?”

Participant 7 – “Actually, when you all were talking about Alliance, I used to have an internship out there when I was in college. I did it for one semester and they asked me to come back a second semester and I didn’t want to because driving took so much time. Not because I am lazy, but just because the drive there was long and I still had to come back and do some classwork. So, I was considering moving closer to there but that would not have worked out because I still had to take classes. Once I got closer to Alliance, like around 15 minutes away it wasn’t that bad. But getting there in the first place was quite a challenge getting there every morning, especially during peak hours, so.”

Moderator – “So, I think most of you have said that you have experienced the congestion getting worse over the last several years. Would you all agree with that?”

Everyone but Participant 6 acknowledges yes.

Moderator – “Participant 6, would you agree with that? Because you kind of said that your drive is fine.”

Participant 6 – “Well I used to live in Dallas County, and then I moved to Tarrant County in 1991. So, so far I haven’t had any bad experiences on 35.”

Moderator – “Okay, you don’t get stuck in traffic?”

Participant 6 – “No.”

Moderator – “Do you travel during the peak period?”

Participant 6 – “Well, maybe once or twice I have gotten stuck but it doesn’t usually cause me any problems. But all of the highways could be wider. Because I went to Houston for a checkup and they have these wide highways. And here, ours are just narrow.”

Moderator – “So when you say wider highways, you mean like adding lanes?”

Participant 6 – “Yeah, like multilane. Add more lanes.”

Moderator – “Tell me how many miles your commute is and how long does it take you?”

Participant 2 – “To get where?”

Moderator – “Like if you are going from home to work or something.”

Participant 2 – “I can’t speak on that because it doesn’t take me long?”

Moderator – “It does not take you long.”

Participant 2 – “No, it takes me like 5 minutes; maybe 6 minutes at the most.”

Moderator – “So, you don’t have to commute on 35?”

Participant 2 – “Well actually I have to come off of 35 but it is on and off. It is real quick.”

Participant 5 – “My commute on 35 always ends up during peak hours — 4-5 o’clock. And when I am coming into town that is the only time it gets congested. And that is really because of the drivers because it gets confusing down there. When I really think about it I am not stuck in traffic that long.”

Moderator – “But about how far are you going?”

Participant 5 – “Going about 10-15 miles. It takes me about a good 20-30 minutes.”

Participant 3 – “I used to do the 35W south to Hillsboro everyday because I used to be the marketing manager at the mall there in Hillsboro. But going down it wasn’t bad but coming back like through Burleson was bad, but now they have added more lanes. Now I actually go to Alliance because of contract work and I actually live on that side. So, that is where I notice a lot of the 820 mess and on 35 right there. It usually takes me about 15-20 minutes, just depends on if there is a wreck or something. Roundtrip it is 35-40 miles.”

Moderator – “But what takes you 15 minutes? To go how far?”

Participant 3 – “About 15 miles.”

Moderator – “So, you are moving right along.”

Participant 3 – “Yeah, like I said really only if there is a wreck.”

Moderator – “Do you travel during peak hours?”

Participant 3 – “Yes.”

Participant 7 – “I only live about 10 miles away from work. It takes me about, if I leave early, it only takes me like 20 minutes. But if I leave closer to peak it might take me 25.”

Participant 1 – “Mine is real similar to yours (*meaning Participant 7*). I am only 15 or 25 minutes. It is only 10-15 miles. I seem to like start and stop in the morning or afternoon. I have had good luck in the afternoon.”

Moderator – “Participant 4, I know that you said you are semi-retired, so do you try and avoid the peak?”

Participant 4 – “I do and my commute is downtown to the city archives, library, county archives. It is about 9 miles on 35E. Off peak it could take only 15-20 minutes, or it could take closer to an hour. It is kind of hard to tell. More often it is closer to 15-20 minutes, but occasionally it could be an hour.”

Moderator – “So, is there a problem with reliability?”

Participant 4 – “Absolutely. And closer to the downtown area.”

Moderator – “So, when everyone travels to work, do they travel alone in their car?”

Everyone nods yes.

Participant 1 – “I am sorry to say, I would like to carpool with someone but I just have no one to do it with. I would, I would.”

Participant 7 – “I have been considering it.”

Moderator – “So, everyone would like to carpool?”

Everyone nods yes or says yes.

Moderator – “Now Participant 1 says she would, but have any of you really looked?”

Participant 1 – “I really did. We even have a board.”

Participant 7 – “Everyone in our office does their own thing because we are a smaller firm. Some people leave early and some people come in at like 8. So, since it is not huge – most people just do their own thing.”

Participant 5 – “Where I work, most of the people live in Mansfield or Arlington, so the company is in Mansfield. I don’t know anyone coming out this way.”

Moderator – “What about transit, do you all have transit options?”

Participant 2 – “Yeah, a lot of people where I work use the transit system, and before I got a car, I did too. The problem with the transit system is that it is just not reliable. Even though it says it will be there at a certain time it doesn’t mean it is going to be there at a certain time. You know, buses can be up to an hour or two hours late. And if you are trying to get to work on time, buses aren’t reliable.”

Moderator – “Now, Participant 7, you work downtown too, right?”

Participant 7 – “Yes.”

Moderator – “Have you ever considered using transit?”

Participant 7 – “I actually tried. But you can’t really plan on it. You can’t plan it down to a five minute window really. The wait time, of course we live in Fort Worth so you really can’t

compare it to New York. But there is such a big difference. There it is consistent public transport, but here you are like waiting and waiting and waiting.”

Participant 2 – “I would actually have to leave two hours ahead of time just to make sure that I made it to work on time. And then you take a chance of being there an hour ahead of time.”

Participant 1 – “If we had a system like New York, I would use it all of the time.”

Participant 5 – “Even if Fort Worth had a system like Dallas, like Dallas light rail.”

Participant 2 – “It doesn’t make sense that on Sundays if you work after 6 o’clock or if you have to be at work before 6 o’clock you are just stuck.”

Moderator – “Now, you said that the Dallas system works really well. Are you talking about the light rail system or the bus system?”

Participant 4 – “I don’t know the bus system, but the light rail system is really good. They are moving a line much closer to me and it is going to be a really good alternative during fair weather. It won’t take me exactly where I need to go, but it will take me two or three blocks from where I need to go. That I might not want to do in winter weather, but in fair weather. We talked about reliability earlier and absolutely I would vote for it.”

Participant 2 – “Hmmm.”

Moderator – “Now, Participant 2 you made a ‘hmmm’ about that?”

Participant 2 – “Well I am talking about the transit system in Fort Worth. I just wouldn’t bet my job on it because you know I wouldn’t depend on the transit system here in Fort Worth to get me back and forth to pay my bills. I have seen them go through a lot of different changes, public speaking and ask people what they need. But I have never seen them give the people what they need.”

Moderator – “So, what is the biggest problem with 35 today?”

Participant 2 – “The holes in the road.”

Moderator – “The potholes? So, you are saying the roads are not maintained well?”

Participant 2 – “In my opinion no.”

Participant 1 – “The big trucks, they wear me out too.”

Moderator – “Well that was going to be my next question, are trucks an issue?”

Everyone nods their head yes.

Participant 1 – “There does seem to be a lot more trucks for such a small area. There just seems to be a large concentration of trucks, that you don’t usually see like in Dallas.”

Participant 5 – “Well you have to understand that with Fort Worth being the hub around Arlington and all of the little suburbs and they are all growing like around Arlington and Mansfield. So, the population is getting bigger and increasing so everyone is driving and it is getting more congested.”

Participant 4 – “I am going to play the age card here. You talked about the difficulties of 35, in the urban segments much of it is that 35 grew organically and as a result there are still artifacts that make it like a crazy road. Left hand exits, I know why those left hand exits are there because I saw them lay the concrete as it became Stemmons Freeway there and I know why there are certain bends and forks. It results in leaving certain artifacts. I don’t know around Alliance, but I know there were some crazy jogs around 35 and I have a feeling that you are describing an artifact that we would not put up with in the 21st century but that we would under an Eisenhower era.”

Moderator – “So, what do you do about that Participant 4?”

Participant 4 – “Well I don’t know, you can’t short of – well, I guess there are a couple of things. You can slash and rebuild but the re-engineering now with a lot of the difficulties, like all of the financial difficulties – that would be hard to justify. We are talking about a corridor that is built from scratch for the 21st century that sounds like a solution. Or, at least easing some flow.”

Moderator – “Now what are you talking about when you say a new corridor?”

Participant 4 – “Hadn’t we talked about a new corridor that was going to be built off of the pathway off the current 35?”

Moderator – “Well that is one of the current things we are about to move into when we talk about what we do about the future.”

Participant 4 – “I have heard that proposed and I have seen that mapped out. That is one solution. The other solution is to tear down and rebuild section by section. That seems awfully expensive and awfully (?).”

Moderator – “Participant 2 is saying no on that one.”

Participant 2 – “I was born in 1969 and they are still working on roads from when I was born.”

Moderator – “So, you don’t have any real confidence then?”

Participant 2 – “No, I don’t I am sorry. It is still not finished. They come in with a new plan as they develop. So, now they are going to make it wider and put in four lanes there. But they have been working on it since 1969?”

Moderator – “So, are you saying they should have put four lanes in, in 1969?”

Participant 2 – “No, I am not saying that. But they should have completed something before then. They couldn’t have come back and made the lanes wider by now? The lanes that they should put in – where did that money go?”

Moderator – “Okay, well we are not going to talk about money yet. But we will get to that. Talk to me about all of the areas growing; Mansfield, Arlington. I have some handouts that will probably not show you the most recent push. But they do kind of look at the growth. I want you to take just a few minutes to look at them. This first page shows us the population in Segment One for the counties and you can see how the population was in 2000 and what is expected in 2035. I think someone mentioned all the growth to the north of here. So, when you look at Denton and Collin County that is some pretty substantial growth here. Does anything about these numbers surprise you? What surprises you?”

Participant 4 – “Yeah. That Cook and Grayson aren’t projected to grow to the same percentages that the rest of these areas are. I guess that is because they are out of the current growth bubble for the next 25-30 years.”

Participant 6 – “I have a question. 35 goes all the way up to Oklahoma right? How far north does it go?”

Moderator – “It goes to the Canadian border.”

Moderator – “You can see on here there is a projected increase of 79 percent in 2035. That is a pretty significant population increase. Do you agree with that?”

Participant 1 – “Population wise. Well, I suspect it is hard with the economy though where people are going to go. It is going to be the best place where people are going to get jobs. So, I guess probably.”

Moderator – “Remember that we are thinking 25 years down the road. If you look at the growth that has happened in Texas over the economic downturn that we have had, Texas is one of the only states that is still adding jobs. All of the people that forecast those things say that will continue because of the iron belt and the Snowbelt.”

Participant 7 – “Yeah and it is the best place to start a new business.”

Moderator – “The bottom chart shows us how long it will take you to get to work and what it did in 2008. In the 15-29 minute range it actually improved and between 1990-2008 a lot of projects got implemented here.” (*Jokes about Participant 2’s comment about Rosedale – and reminds them that is a city problem not state and we are talking about 35*).

Moderator – “If you look at the second page it is a map that shows you some of the daily traffic volumes in 2008. Along I-35 it shows you how some points, which show you how many cars were on the road and the second one shows you percentage of the total number that were passenger vehicles. The third number shows you trucks.”

Participant 5 – “As in 18-wheelers?”

Moderator – “Yes, as in 18-wheelers.”

Participant 2 – “So, does it look like there are less 18-wheelers traveling?”

Moderator – “Well if you read this thing on here it says that between 2000-2008 out of the locations where data were available the truck volume increased in greater proportion to the cars. So, that would tell you that there are more trucks on the road. So, if you are coming down from Oklahoma, you come from 17 percent to 20 percent to 20 percent to 13 percent and then at some point south of 820 a lot of those trucks get off because then you are down to 8 percent. But it does look like more trucks are taking 35W than 35E, percentage wise. But, that is just percentage wise. You can see there is a lot more volume on 35E than there is on 35W.”

Participant 4 – “And more passengers getting on, not necessarily more trucks getting off. If you calculate the percentages out in the total you have an increased number in the net trucks but a greater increase in the number of private automobiles.”

Moderator – “And then if you flip to the last page, what we have here is the level of service map. It is a formula that takes into account the percentage of trucks, traffic volumes, and the following distance. It is all kinds of things that go into calculating that. But it is a grading scale just like in school from A-F however we have an E in the level of service map. A, B, C are good for the most part. A is that you are traveling in the middle of the night and there is no one else around you because cars around you feed into the formula too. It would be like you driving down the road with no other cars around you. When you get to E, you are experiencing a lot of stop and go, sounds like what some of you have described your commute as now. F is a lot of gridlock. So if you look at the map at the top you see the 2008 level of service. Coming down from Oklahoma you see everything is pretty good as you come into Fort Worth.”

Participant 1 – “Until you get to 28th Street.”

Moderator – “Where is that?”

Participant 1 – “28th Street.”

Participant 5 *agrees with Participant 1* – “I know exactly where that is.”

Moderator – “Well it doesn’t say that here on this map. But I guess you know exactly where this is. Then if you look at the map on the bottom that is the level of service anticipated in 2035, you can see that looks pretty bad.”

Participant 5 – “You know I have traveled to Oklahoma really this month 5 different times. Where this is on this top map is where it is backed up, especially around 4-5 o’clock but sometimes even 3 o’clock. Right past Denton, it backs up a little before the fork. When I saw that I thought about it – I have done this recently.”

Participant 1 – “Yeah where two comes into one.”

Participant 5 – “Yeah.”

Participant 1 – “Where 281 feeds into W. It feeds into 35W there. A person coming from downtown can go 281N, but a person coming from south must go in from 35 because they never built a ramp. It is weird.”

Participant 1 – “This is a lot like 35 in Austin. Where it just stops. Bumper to bumper, especially in Lake Riverside. You live there so you know it is horrible, and that is how Dallas and Fort Worth are going to be. I definitely think they should open that up because Austin needs it desperately.”

Moderator – “So, what will we do to open this up? So, how do we fix this problem?”

Participant 7 – “I think that if we think of a way without building because then you have the wait time. But I like the idea of carpooling. It is just something that the younger generation perceives as not convenient for us. But if there were more opportunities to promote carpooling and if it were tied into social networking like Facebook groups or communities online where people from the same work area or school area could go online and find people that are already going that way. You know something like existing like an online community, where you already know someone so you are not driving with a stranger. But more of like an accepted idea or easier so people don’t have to e-mail someone and initiate it. I would love to do it and I think people my age would do it but it just needs to be more convenient. If there was a way to access a pool of people that wanted to carpool that would be easier.”

Moderator – “So, Participant 7, why don’t you create something like that?”

Participant 7 – “Oh I would love to with some of my friends but I am going to be moving in a month and half and when I move my new roommate and I will be carpooling.”

Participant 2 – “I would make the transportation system that already exists more efficient for the people. One of the things that most people have a problem with is that they say most people will not use public transportation because it is not convenient and not reliable. You know, on Sundays we still have to go to work and why do you have a system that shuts down at 5 p.m. on Sundays?”

Participant 6 – “Do they have an HOV lane like they do in Dallas? They don’t have that right? So, why don’t they add that?”

Moderator – “So, would an HOV lane make you more likely to carpool?”

Participant 5, Participant 6, and Participant 7 all agree that it would make them more likely to carpool.

Participant 3 – “And the trains, if we have the trains like Dallas does.”

Participant 6 – “Why don’t we have the HOV lanes like Dallas does?”

Moderator – “I don’t know. (*Jokingly*) *“I ask the questions here, I don’t answer them.”*

Participant 5 – “I also believe that comes with the population and the growth. You look back 8 years ago and it was not this big and I know we are talking about 35, but they are pondering the same thing in Arlington right now. Arlington and Mansfield was just dirt and now it is communities everywhere and now that they have the stadium they are considering public transportation. So, when it comes down to it, it is the people, history, and if you are ready for

this. Whether you are ready or not, the growth is here so you are going to have to expand or it is going to be bad.”

Participant 1 – “I-75 in Dallas used to be two lanes and now it is expanding. It is so much better now. That used to be the nightmare of nightmares. So, if they can do that with 75 with all of the houses on top of houses they can do that here.”

Moderator – “So, can they widen 35 here and do you think that is a reasonable solution?”

Participant 3 – “It would help.”

Participant 4 – “It seems to me there are 3 ways to ease congestion. You can add more road capacity by adding lanes. If you have 4 lanes, then you add one lane, you increase capacity by 25 percent. So, you could add more road capacity. You could reduce the number of automobiles by incentives of transit — public transit. Or, disincentives like higher gasoline, road taxes, or tolls, or you could make greater utilization of the roadway that you have. Greater utilization means that you take out curves so that average speeds could increase or you devise a means for cars to travel only 4 inches apart instead of 20 feet apart at high speeds. And I think the thing we have been focusing on is more capacity with fewer cars.”

Moderator – “So are you saying we should look at more technological solutions?”

Participant 4 – “Well, I wondered if there might not be a fourth or fifth way. Just sitting here, I can only come up with three. But yeah, there might be some technological solutions that allow us and maybe it is a low tech solution taking out some of those artifacts. The average speed of Central Expressway increased by not having those humps that it had, by leveling the grade – that was a factor for increasing the speed.”

Participant 1 – “That was a huge improvement.”

Participant 2 – “On 35W South on the side of the freeway, you have housing developments, you have schools over there so if you widen out the roads what do you do about the people that live there?”

Participant 4 – “You gut it out. They are doing the same thing on 183 in Irving.”

Participant 1 – “Yeah, they did the same thing on 75 and they did it, and in that area...”

Participant 2 – “Have you seen the transit and the homeless statistics in Fort Worth, Texas, alone? Have you guys ridden down Lancaster?”

Participant 1 – “Yeah.”

Participant 2 – “Yeah. So if you take out all those houses that have people living in them now — that subsidized housing — and you get them out and they have no where to stay that just makes Lancaster that much more congested with homeless people living there.”

Moderator – “So you are saying if we added lanes in certain parts...”

Participant 2 – “That would be a bigger problem for the community.”

Participant 2/Moderator – “Because there is a lot of low income housing over there.”

Participant 3 – “In Nashville they moved the missions and stuff when they did the roads up there downtown and it helped. And I think there are a lot of missions and Salvation Army over there in Lancaster and that is why it gravitates over there.”

Participant 5 – “Is that what you are referring to the historical Participant 4? The artifacts?”

Participant 4 – “Yeah the artifacts that are left over, the crazy curves. Central Expressway was built between automobiles that traveled at speeds going 45 miles an hour and there was an awful lot of this going under underpasses. It was an earlier time in engineering and by flattening out that grade to a greater degree you could increase automobile speed, which increased capacity and that was an artifact left from an earlier time. Those left exit lanes that loop and fly and slow because they scare drivers are artifacts left over from a different engineering philosophy. And at some point you have to decide to cut them out; if the challenge is to increase capacity that is one way to do it.”

Participant 2 – “They were just built here in Fort Worth maybe just four years ago, that new one, that interpass. The Mixmaster that is right over downtown that hits into 35.”

Participant 4 – “Well, yeah, there was a version of that going back to the time that they built.”

Participant 2 – “It is not even five years old right, maybe 7-10 years old? But that was something that they just put into existence.”

Participant 3 – “Well they made 35 loop further around to have more lanes and stuff, so it doesn’t go through downtown; it takes you around the post office and stuff.”

Moderator – “Sounds like we have a couple, several different solutions. We have incentivizing, carpooling, improving transit so it is a viable option; the HOV lanes because that helps incentivize carpooling getting more people out of their car; making carpool arrangements easier (lets sum that up that way).

Participant 4 – “You can disincentive travel.”

Moderator – “Well we haven’t gotten there yet. Did I say adding lanes? I know you all said adding lanes too. Technological fixes perhaps; geometric fixes, upgrading the highways, and reconstructing them to increase thru cut.”

Participant 2 – “Take the cars off the road and put them in the air.”

Moderator – “Oh yeah, that has been a long time coming.”

Participant 1 – “Does this take into account that there are...I’ve heard that with computers more people are working out of their home?”

Moderator – “This estimates how many people they think will be doing that at the time. That is certainly another strategy to encourage.”

Participant 1 – “Because it is becoming more and more. And people wouldn’t be making the commute.”

Moderator – “Or, maybe not at peak hours. But do you think if you took some of the cars off of 35, if you didn’t expand it or add any lanes, if you took some of the cars off of 35 do you think it would fill up with people that are taking alternate routes right now?”

Participant 2 – “Like buses and bicycles?”

Moderator – “Not necessarily talking about bicycles but a lot of people said they would do whatever they can to avoid I-35, so they are taking surface streets. Participant 4, I think you said you take surface streets. So if you made it better on I-35 do you think all those people taking surface streets are going to get back on I-35?”

Participant 5 – “Yeah, as soon as they see there is no traffic jams.”

Everyone agrees.

Moderator – “So how do you solve that problem?”

Participant 4 – “You don’t. It seems like that is the contradiction inherent to this business — that a road creates its own business, it creates its own traffic. You put a highway down and people will find it easier to get into downtown to work so they will build houses out on the highway, so it builds up the highway.”

Moderator – “So you have a whole chicken and egg thing.”

Participant 4 – “The road creates its own traffic.”

Moderator – “So, let’s go back to something you said just a minute ago Participant 4. What about disincentives? You said tolls, increased fees, like what if you charged a daily fee to get into downtown Dallas or downtown Fort Worth.”

Participant 4 – “You laugh but that is what they are doing in New York.”

Participant 2 – “That is like paying to park to go to work (laughs).”

Participant 4 – “You laugh but that is what they are doing in New York City.”

Moderator – “Well they tried to do that but it didn’t work so well.”

Participant 2 – “It does discourage you from driving every day; it would help with the carpooling, and public transportation, and alternatives like riding a bicycle and jogging to work.”

Moderator – “So do you think it is fair or reasonable to do something like that?”

Participant 5 – “I don’t. I don’t. I don’t. The roads are built for us to have easy access. So if you have a toll road, so singularly yes I would love to have a straight way to work so I would pay a toll. However, I don’t think that is the main focus for the people and that may be political, I am not going to go there.”

Participant 2 – “I think it is the cost.”

Participant 5 – “Yeah I believe the cost. The cost is adverse to what we are trying to do because the roads are for the people.”

Moderator – “What do you mean the cost is adverse to what we are trying to do?”

Participant 5 – “A toll road would probably eliminate some of the traffic.”

Participant 2 – “It would help maintain it.”

Participant 5 – “But the road is there for the traffic to have access to it. Why should there be a road? I am going to tell you as a matter of fact, the North Dallas Tollway, I can get on North Dallas Tollway and there is no traffic.”

Participant 1 – “Right. Right. And it was supposed to be paid for how long ago and they just continued with it being a toll road. A long time ago it was just supposed to be a temporary thing and it was going to be paid for and it’s not and now forever it is going to be a toll road.”

Moderator – “We are going to talk about the funding in a minute. Let me ask you this, what if you added a lane or two to 35 and that one lane was a toll lane so if you were late to work you could take it?”

Participant 1 – “Kind of like an HOV lane?”

Participant 2 – “So you have a choice? A choice?”

Moderator – “Yeah, an HOV lane or a toll lane or one of the other options is a HOT lane, which is a high-occupancy toll lane. So, if you are carpooling you could go for free and if you are driving by yourself and it is worth your time you could pay.”

Participant 1 – “That is a cool idea.”

Participant 5 – “I like that idea, but it’s just the toll road.”

(Everyone likes the idea, nodding and saying yes.)

Moderator – “So what do you have to say, Participant 4?”

Participant 4 – “I think it had to do with – you were almost at that point, Participant 5, realizing that if you charge \$20 to drive on that road to the guy who tears tickets at a movie theater he is going to opt out at some point but the man who owns the movie theater is going to say that \$20 is not as important to me as convenience. So both the movie theater owner and ticket taker are both financing the road through the use of their automobile taxes. And as a result it becomes a rich man’s system, which doesn’t make sense.”

Moderator – “So you don’t think that is fair?”

Participant 4 – “No, I don’t think it is equitable. I would rather say equitable. But I don’t know, I can’t think that through with toll lanes and HOT lanes. There comes a point that it becomes inequitable, but I can’t define that.”

Moderator – “Okay. Well, I want to go back to trucks for a minute. You all said there are a lot of trucks on the road, but it doesn’t really sound as if this is a big issue for you on the road. Am I misunderstanding that? Is it a big issue?”

Participant 6 – “I have traveled 35 on the Dallas side and there are a lot of big trucks, I don’t think it is a problem.”

Participant 2 – “I think more of what we were talking about is the holes in the streets and that the trucks were causing them.”

Moderator – “That the trucks were causing them?”

Participant 6 – “After that last winter freeze — all the ice.”

Participant 5 – “I don’t recall the trucks ever really being a big problem. Unless I have seen 30 trucks at one time, unless the freeway is backed up. Seeing a few trucks here or there. There are a lot of trucks that travel 35. I love the big trucks.

Moderator – “You love the big trucks?”

Participant 5 – “I love the big trucks in traffic. Because then you can zip and zoom around them. Trucks give me an opening.”

Moderator – “Trucks hate it when you do that, you know that right?”

Participant 5 – “I am not clipping them.”

Participant 4 – “Let them fight it out if they want to.”

Moderator – “What if the one lane on 35 was for trucks?”

Participant 2 – “Would they have to pay?”

Moderator – “Maybe. What if they do have to pay?”

Participant 2 – “That is the same thing as the rich man and the poor man, don’t you think? Their job just happens to be driving a truck.”

Moderator – “Don’t you think they are going to pass that on to you anyway?”

Participant 2 – “We are catching it right now.”

Moderator – “Don’t you remember when the gas prices were really high and milk was like \$5 a gallon?”

Participant 2 – “Per cow.”

Participant 4 – “Austin has done that on sections of 35 — limiting trucks.”

Moderator – “Truck lane restrictions. Trucks can’t drive in the left lane.”

Participant 5 – “They have that here.”

Participant 3 – “I thought Arlington has that.”

Moderator – “Yeah it is a county thing.”

(A lot of chattering, everyone agreeing that it is on I-20). Participant 3 – “I think it is on 20?”

Participant 4 – “The truck issue has brought me back to the point that I was thinking about earlier. I make two uses of 35. Trucks are just a matter of course on my day to day travel on urban 35. Where they really torque me is when they are stacked up on the highway when making those long trips using 35 as a portal to other places.

Moderator – “Truck traffic is a huge deal in Austin.”

Participant 2 – “That is how things are transported back and forth. So we as customers can enjoy what they bring into the city.”

Participant 4 – “Dallas is fortunate. Dallas and Fort Worth are fortunate that we have some good loop roads.”

Moderator – “So the trucks aren’t driving through the middle of your downtown.”

Participant 4 – “Not supposed to.”

Participant 2 – “Trucks don’t really drive through downtown here.”

Moderator – “What if they built more new freight lines and more things were shipped by rail?”

Participant 2 – “Then wouldn’t that cause a job opening thing again, if they took the driving jobs away? Everyone needs to work. For some people, that is all that they know how to do. My dad was a truck driver.”

Moderator – “Well I want to go back to one thing that Participant 4 said about alternate facilities: parallel facilities. We talked about operational things we could do on 35 that exists, adding capacity to it. But what if you built a new facility, where would you put it and what would it look like?”

Participant 2 – “I missed something, can you repeat that?”

Moderator – “We talked about some of the things that you could do to the existing 35: adding lanes, adding HOT lanes, and do all this other operational stuff to make it flow better. But what if we built a new road; where would it go and what would it look like? Participant 4 had mentioned something about it initially so I wanted to go back to it.”

Participant 5 – “Are you talking about revamping 35?”

Moderator – “No, a new 35...”

Participant 2 – “Could you do what they did in Ft. Worth 30 downtown? They kind of left it open but built over it.”

Moderator – “Okay, like double decking the existing 35.”

Participant 2 – “Yes, a double decking.”

Moderator – “Okay, where would that start and stop?”

Participant 2 – “35 starts downtown coming off of 5th Street. going around a circle like this. So that would probably be the best place to start it going toward the north side toward 28th Street.”

Moderator – “So you are talking about going from downtown going north.”

Participant 2 – “Yes, and you could probably start it the same way going toward the south. They have one road starting in Lancaster that goes south and one road that goes around and goes north 35.”

Participant 3 – “But are you talking about going out of the city?”

Moderator – “I am asking you all.”

Participant 4 – “I am going to give you a history lesson. The history lesson is when you used to drive to Austin you used to drive through every pig path between here and there. You would go through Italy, Waxahachie, and Midlothian and all these little towns and stop lights and you would be parallel with the rail road tracks. Sometime in the 50s, maybe the 40s, they began engineering this huge interstate thing so they went way out of town east of town and west of town and this big highway went through and that was the interstate. So the path of the interstate is actually offset, sometimes significantly offset, from the original highway that went to Austin.

Participant 2 – “So are you saying start at the end? Start at your destination to get to where you want to start?”

Participant 4 – “If we are talking about the 35 corridor and we are talking about a great percentage of through put and we are talking about local use we are not going to go way out here to get to work but we are talking about local use as one use, and portal to portal use. Going up to Oklahoma and down to Austin, maybe it does make sense to offset a new corridor from what the traditional one is now. Why double deck? Just make one that goes way out of the way.

Moderator – “For the people that are driving to Oklahoma to Austin.”

Participant 4 – “From Mexico to Canada.”

Participant 2 – “So where would the people get off that need to go to the mid-cities?”

Participant 4 – “You wouldn’t.”

Moderator – “I think what Participant 4 is trying to say is you wouldn’t take that route for the people that want to get off in the mid-cities.”

Participant 2 – “How is that convenient for the people in the mid-cities?”

Moderator – “The people that are here that are using this will keep using 35 here.”

Participant 1 – “And those people who do will.”

Moderator – “Is that a solution?”

Participant 1 – “It is a thought.”

Participant 3 – “I know that when you go to Austin on a holiday it is bumper to bumper from Hillsboro all the way to Austin, you know where it splits.”

Participant 4 – “Well you might be going there to bring little Collette home for the Christmas holidays but that trucker that has truckloads of turkeys doesn’t need to follow that highway. He could be following one 20 miles to the east.”

Participant 3 – “That is why I said something needs to be done because I know they are fixing where the two 35s come together there in Hillsboro.”

Moderator – “So Participant 3, Participant 4, and Participant 1, you three have been talking about traveling outside the Dallas area. I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but, it sounds to me like you are saying 35 is worse outside of the metro area.”

Participant 1 – “Well I am more familiar with Austin and absolutely, 35 in Austin.”

Moderator – “What about the trip from here to Austin?”

Participant 1 – “Yes, during the holidays. I used to drive a 67 Mustang back and forth and if I was sitting there too long it would overheat and get stalled and I would have to pull off; oh it was horrible. But during the holidays it is even worse.”

Participant 3 agrees.

Participant 3 – “Yeah and going up to Oklahoma during the holidays it is crazier. Like this weekend we had it worse with the race going on out at Texas Motor Speedway.”

Participant 2 – “Do you ever notice that people try to get to the same place and try to leave at the same time? So maybe leaving a little bit earlier.”

Moderator – “And that was one of one of the things that Participant 7 said about the carpooling. And Participant 1 talked about teleworking and starting at different times of the day.”

Participant 6 – “I think 35 is just outdated. It needs to be updated. And it needs to be modified.”

Moderator – “All of it?”

Participant 6 – “Yeah, all of it.”

Moderator – “From where to where?”

Participant 6 – “35 where the HOV lane is on the Dallas side is okay. They need to do that in Tarrant County further south.”

Participant 5 – “And from the fork on 35 where they meet back up going north to Oklahoma.”

Moderator – “So where the north comes back together?”

Participant 5 – “Yeah, that section there only has two lanes.”

Moderator – “So they need more lanes?”

Participant 5 – “Yes, they need more lanes; 35 needs to be widened.”

Participant 1 – “And that is what they did with Central because at some points it is two lanes.”

Participant 5 – “They are working on it after Oklahoma on the way to Wichita, Kansas.”

Participant 3 – “Fort Worth city needs some help; 35 too, not just going to Austin and Oklahoma. We need some help right here.”

Participant 2 – “Yeah just right here in Fort Worth.”

Participant 5 – “Well what Participant 4 was saying I didn’t think the numbers were going to match. But I see if you have an alternate they would match.”

Moderator – “So you like Participant 4’s idea of having an alternate route.”

Participant 5 – “So intercity traffic doesn’t have to worry about people who don’t need to drive in the city.”

Participant 4 – “If I was going down 50 years ago to see Aunt Martha in Italy then we could take it and it would be really easy to take the road. But if we were going to Mexico and wanted to go the fast way we could stay out of Italy, Midlothian, and all the little towns.”

Moderator – “Okay, so we have talked a lot about different options; of course, there are a lot of different price tags for these options. So, let’s talk about funding. Before we actually start talking about it I want to know what you know about funding. So do you know how your transportation is funded?”

Participant 2 – “Through my tax payer money.”

Moderator – “What tax payer money?”

Participant 2 – “All of my money.”

Moderator – “Let me qualify what we are saying here. We are talking about highways primarily; roads that TxDOT is responsible for, the interstate, what is that 287 out here? No county roads, not Rosedale. We are talking about FM roads, the interstate, major highways.”

Participant 2 – “Does it come through emission testing, inspection stickers, tax and title?”

Participant 3 – “Federal funding.”

Moderator – “What federal?”

Participant 3 – “I know there is certain federal funding with match.”

Moderator – “Participant 4?”

Participant 4 – “I was going to say when it was first put in, in 1919, it was 50/50 state and federal. I know gas tax is in there but I am not sure what percentage goes to the state?”

Moderator – “Anybody else have any ideas?”

Participant ? – “Well you mean like the taxes we pay that a percentage goes to the state?”

Moderator – “I am specifically asking you how roads are paid for. Not how roads are paid for but how transportation is paid for. That is everything from mowing the grass on I-35, to the signage, building a new lane, bridge inspection.”

Participant ? – “Now the tolls are funded by the federal government right.”

Participant ? – “No, the tolls are funded by the tolls that you pay for them.”

Moderator – “Everybody give up. Well, Participant 2 was on the right track and Participant 4 was on the right track. Your highways are primarily paid for from the gas tax. There is a tiny, tiny, tiny percent that comes from vehicle registration fees, but most of that goes to the county in which you register your vehicle. The same applies with emissions testing. Anyone have an idea how much you pay in gas tax or how you pay?”

Participant 5 – “I know it is a small percentage and it is all added together.”

Moderator – “It is not a percentage, it is a flat fee you pay. You pay 20 cents per gallon for state fuel tax and 18.4 cents for federal fuel tax. You pay a total of 38.4 cents. I said you pay a flat fee. So, when gas is \$4 a gallon you pay 20 cents; when it is \$1 a gallon you still pay 20 cents. You got that?”

Moderator – “The last time the gas tax was raised was?”

Participant 2 – “Last year.”

Participant 5 – “’08.”

Moderator – “Participant 5 says ‘08’?”

Moderator – “1991. So, almost 20 years ago.”

Participant 2 – “So the price of gas going up, no tax has been added to it for almost 20 years?”

Moderator – “Yes, that is absolutely right. Does that surprise you all?”

Participant 3 – “Wow.”

Participant 2 – “Wow.”

Moderator – “Does it also surprise you that of that 20 cents that is collected for state gas tax, 25 percent of that (so a nickel) goes to fund public education?”

Participant 4 – “Yeah, that does surprise me.”

Participant 1 – “Yeah, it does surprise me.”

Participant 2 – “It surprises me, especially with the drop in public education.”

Moderator – “What do you mean the drop in public education?”

Participant 2 – “There are less kids graduating from high school.”

Participant 5 – “Yeah, I know when they were talking about toll roads and that is why when I said percentage I used the wrong terminology; I meant centage, a small amount of cents because when they were talking about toll roads they said all this same stuff.”

Moderator – “So it seems like there is a little bit of dismay about what I said.”

Everyone agrees.

Moderator – “So do you think you pay enough? Now I know everyone feels they pay enough, right? Now you said (*looking at Participant 2*) taxes before, so you think you really get taxed a lot?”

Participant 2 – “Yes I do.”

Moderator – “But then I told you that you are only paying 20 cents a gallon.”

Participant 2 – “But where are the other taxes going? Because when I look at my check, I see taxes for a lot of stuff.

Moderator – “So, you mean your paycheck.”

Participant 2 – “Yeah, not just that; when we pay the light bill, the gas bill, and when we go to the grocery store. There are taxes for everything we do as a society.”

Moderator – “But your transportation is only funded from the fuel tax.”

Participant 2 – “Okay.”

Moderator – “Only the gas tax.”

Participant 2 – “So does that mean anybody that doesn’t buy gas for their car doesn’t pay for the highways?”

Participant 4 – “Well think about it; they aren’t using the highway, they aren’t buying gas.”

Moderator – “Well that is not true.”

Participant 2 – “Yeah, I know that is not true.”

Moderator – “What about people with electric cars?”

Participant 4 – “Ohhh.”

Moderator – “Only thing they pay right now is vehicle registration.”

Participant ? – “Good point.”

Moderator – “So do you think as fuel efficiency increases and we have federal mandates to increase efficiency, what is going to happen then?”

Participant 3 – “There won’t be enough money.”

Participant 2 – “What about people that use public transportation; are they not paying any tax?”

Moderator – “They are not paying any gas tax; public transportation is done at the city level. So I don’t know what they do in Fort Worth. So the city collects a tax.”

Participant 2 – “And that doesn’t go to you guys.”

Moderator – “Not us, I don’t work for TxDOT.”

Participant 2 – “I mean it doesn’t go to TxDOT? So, each city that is getting money for roads and maintenance, are they not putting their money together to do these things? So are they just holding on to their money and fixing their roads individually?”

Moderator – “Well that is a complicated question. In some instances, the city collects property tax and some sales tax to a certain extent, and then they use that for maintenance and building their city roads. But if they have a project like....”

Participant 2 – “A new freeway.”

Moderator – “Yeah, I-35 or something like that the city is usually required to share in the cost of the project. Depending on what type of project it could be 90 percent state and federal and 10 percent local match. But the local match doesn’t have to be money; it could be right-of-way, which is money too, local engineering, and environmental work.”

Participant 2 – “So if they match something that is not money, then the money that they collected for their roads and streets, what happens to that money?”

Moderator – “Well they are using it for other projects in the city. It might be going to the library; I don’t know.”

Participant 2 – “Okay.”

Moderator – “Now that we know a little bit about the funding situation. What are the options that we have?”

Participant 4 – “Can I ask you a question real quick?”

Moderator – “Sure.”

Participant 4 – “What is added to that 15 cents a gallon; are there federal government funds that are added?”

Moderator – “To that 15 cents? When you include the federal part of that, there is a little more than 15 cents. Well, it is hard to say because you get the 15 cents only because you are looking at the state portion. But if you combine the federal portion the percentage is a little bit different.”

Participant 4 – “States kicking in. I mean the federal government.”

Moderator – “The federal government is kicking in. Because you do pay that 18.4 cents to the federal government and Texas gets that back, but Texas is also considered a donor state so for every dollar Texas sends to the feds they are getting back about 92 cents because they are subsidizing other states’ highways that are not very populous, like the highway that goes through Montana. Does that make sense to everyone?”

Participant 6 – “So then they have a surplus of money to do what they need to do.”

Moderator – “They who?”

Participant 6 – “The funding from the taxes from gas for the highways.”

Moderator – “So you are saying TxDOT has a surplus?”

Participant 6 – “Right.”

Moderator – “Not necessarily, because right now they are spending more than half of their budget maintaining what they already have. They have more than 78,000 miles to maintain.”

Participant 6 – “Maintaining meaning repairs?”

Moderator – “All of it, meaning guard rails, bridges.”

Participant 2 – “So, Texas as a donor state is taking money to help other people who fix their roads and highways and we as the state of Texas need to come up with ways to get money to fix our roads.”

Participant 4 – “Not quite. The feds are doing that. It isn’t our money to begin with; the feds have swooped in and collected it and said we will give you dollar for dollar back for what we collect in Texas because we are nice guys or we will give you 92 cents for every dollar because we want to help our neighbors in Montana. But that 92 cents is more than what we are collecting.”

Moderator – “Well it is not more than what we are collecting.”

Participant 4 – “Well it is in addition to.”

Participant 2 – “Yeah, I get that.”

Moderator – “Okay, so we talked about electric cars, increased fuel efficiency and gas tax not being raised since 1991. So what are our options to pay for all of these solutions we came up with?”

Participant 2 – “Get a bicycle.”

Participant 7 – “Increase the gas tax. Or implement some sort of tax for people with electric cars.”

Moderator – “Okay, so tax the people with electric cars.”

Participant 7 – “And/or increase the gas tax.”

Participant 1 – “I don’t know anyone with electric cars, where are they?”

Participant 2 – “Hybrid cars?”

Moderator – “Well not hybrid cars. They are still buying gas.”

Participant 2 – “I am like her; I don’t know anyone with an electric car.”

Participant 4 – “They are coming.”

Moderator – “We are talking 25 years into the future. We might be flying and then we won’t have to worry about this.”

Participant 4 – “There is our aero car.”

Participant 1 – “There is a movie or something about destroying the electric car because the Big 3 — they destroyed all the electric cars because they don’t want them around because of all the things they would get rid of if we plugged them in, instead of having to deal with Mobil and all that.”

Participant 2 – “I don’t think technology will allow that to happen. We are growing and as far as technology is concerned it is coming whether we want it or not.”

Participant 5 – “What would happen if we went to an all-electric society? That will take away all that money, right?”

Moderator – “Absolutely.”

Participant 5 – “The government will come up with something.”

Moderator – “What if we didn’t pay gas tax anymore?”

Participant 1 – “It would be in the electric bill from charging your car.”

Moderator – “But that won’t go to transportation, that will go to the electric company.”

Participant 2 – “If we lose the gas tax, our streets are going to look worse than they already do.”

Participant 4 – “I think what she is asking the concept of gasoline maybe a twentieth-century concept. Let’s think an energy tax; whatever type of energy you get like electro energy from plugging in your car or natural gas, or coal fired automobiles.”

Participant 2 – “You have TU and Direct Energy already trying to divide up the money for electricity for our house and then if you include our cars in that too then it becomes like the internet service — you are going to have everyone around the corner trying to get paid for it.”

Participant 4 – “No, I think what she is saying or what I am hearing and thinking about is that tying your revenue source to the means of transportation which was gasoline at the first of the twentieth century which makes sense because the cars that are still on the road were gasoline. But in the twenty-first century we are going to be using alternative energy sources so it is not directly derivative anymore.”

Participant 1 – “Have you ever driven in a hybrid car? I had a friend that searched the internet for them. I am not that high on them honestly. I think they are okay. They are a good alternative to what I have now. But I mean I would love to go with a completely electric car.”

Moderator – “Let me ask you, Participant 4 was talking about changing the tax collection to a new mechanism. But what if we did away with the gas tax altogether and just paid based on a mileage fee?”

Participant 7 – “How would you calculate that? When you take your car in to get inspected they check that?”

Moderator – “There are all different ways to do that.”

Participant 1 – “Like every time we take a turn we have to pay a toll.”

Participant 2 – “It would decrease your travel time where you are going to. People would move closer together if you had to pay a tax for every mile. My family would move closer to me.”

Participant 4 – “They are charging by the mile right now at the pump at the QT.”

Moderator – “You are essentially paying per mile right now based on the gas mileage.”

Participant 7 – “That helps with a lot of issues like you said with the gas, regardless of what car you drive it is not based on the energy source but how far you drive and that automatically makes you do things like reduce the number hours you are on the road and makes you think of energy efficient ways to be off the road.”

Moderator – “So you think that is a good idea?”

Participant 7 – “Yeah, but I don’t know how you fix that amount because I think everyone will have differing opinions on what it should be.”

Moderator – “So that is an option we have out there.”

Participant 2 – “Would it depend on how much you make an hour, on your gross salary, like everything else does — like your hip living, where you live.”

Moderator – “But your gas tax does not depend on that.”

Participant 2 – “Yeah, but if we tax it any other way than going to the pump that should matter shouldn’t it?”

Moderator – “I don’t know, should it?”

Participant 7 – “But now it doesn’t matter if you make \$100,000 a year or \$50,000 a year; you are still paying the same price.”

Participant 2 – “Do you know how many people don’t eat to put gas in their car?”

Participant 7 – “I can’t even imagine.”

Moderator – “So what other financing alternatives do we have?”

Participant 3 – “They could sell sponsorships on the road.”

Moderator – “This freeway brought to you by McDonalds.”

Participant 1 – “It does seem to be the way we are going.”

Participant 7 – “When you do your taxes they could have something that if you have one car or two cars or by your income? That is an alternative.”

Moderator – “So you said increase the gas tax too. If they did that, what is a reasonable amount?”

Participant 7 – “What did they increase it by last time?”

Moderator – “I don’t remember; it has been twenty years.”

Participant 7 – “Oh, I didn’t know if you knew.”

Moderator – “I don’t know off the top of my head. Think about this; gas prices fluctuate by a few pennies all the time. Do you pay much attention to that?”

Participant 2 – “I sure do.”

Participant 3 – “Yes I do.”

Participant 2 – “It is up to \$2.80 right now, when it was just \$2.62.”

Participant 4 – “I recall about a year ago there was a discussion about raising the tax because the price was going down. The idea being that the consumers wouldn’t notice if we were on a downward slope on gasoline. I just remembered that and it makes sense now.”

Participant 2 – “Wouldn’t it be something for the people that sell the gas, couldn’t we tax them?”

Participant 7 – “Then they would tax us.”

Participant 5 – “The 20 cents that comes out for gas is a flat fee; it has nothing to do with gas prices.”

Moderator – “What if we adjusted that. What if instead of paying 20 cents a gallon you pay 10 percent of the price?”

Participant 2 – “And then the price never went up again.”

Moderator – “I didn’t say that, that has to do with the oil companies. Or what if you even connected the amount you collected, the tax, to the consumer price index so it rises with inflation? We talked about how it hasn’t risen in twenty years. Everything has risen in twenty years, right? So does that seem reasonable? Participant 6?”

Participant 6 nods yes, Participant 2 nods no.

Moderator – “Participant 2, you are still saying no.”

Participant 2 – “It would help the value of cars to go down. I don’t think GM would be making as many cars as it is making right now.”

Moderator – “Because the gas is going to cost too much?”

Participant 2 – “Yeah.”

Moderator – “And then people will be out of jobs again?”

Participant 2 – “I don’t know, I think bicycles are going to come back.”

Moderator – “Maybe those people that are working on cars can work on bicycles.”

Participant 3 – “I know GM is going to build a plant to make more efficient cars.”

Participant 2 – “Instead of building more cars that we don’t have money to pay for the roads that we have now?”

Participant 6 – “I have lived in this area all my life and I have seen this area grow and you need to keep up with demand. So the roads need to be updated with more people.”

Moderator – “And what is your solution for paying for that?”

Participant 6 – “More taxes.”

Moderator – “Participant 3?”

Participant 3 – “I think they should increase the tax if it hasn’t been increased but also create new ways of bringing in money like sponsorship, HOT lanes, and you still have to keep in mind the little guy who can’t afford the tolls.”

Participant 6 – “One more thing: who decides how much tax gets taken out of gasoline?”

Moderator – “That would be your state legislature. And the part that goes to education is constitutionally mandated.”

Participant 6 – “Most people don’t know about that tax. I didn’t know about it. Because I have to get gas almost every day.”

Moderator – “Well good, we like you.”

Participant 7 – “As far as public education in the future how are they planning on dealing with that?”

Moderator – “This is just my own personal opinion and I should turn off the tape recorder right now, but I can’t imagine TxDOT ever going to the legislature and saying we don’t want any more diversions. Not only does gas tax fund public education but it also funds the department of public safety and a few other small programs, so they don’t get that whole thing. But can you see TxDOT going to the legislature and saying we don’t want to support public education anymore? Can you imagine it would be a battle between state agencies?”

Participant 4 – “This has been interesting for me. Because I grew up with a system in the twentieth century locked in, and never thought that we needed to think of this differently. For those of you who are inheriting the system that my parents helped build and I used all my life, you have to change it. You have to change the way we pay for it and the way we use it.”

Moderator – “And it is not just on a state level but at a federal level, too, where you really have some policy issues that are complete opposites of each other. You are taxing the thing you use to finance your roadway system for gas and yet you have federal mandates that say fuel efficiency has to increase by X percent such and such year.”

Participant 4 – “The thing you have to remember, this whole business is relatively new right about 80 years ago, or 90 years ago was the first time the federal government said we need to help states build interstate roads so we are going to put money into the states.”

Moderator – “And states actually started doing that before the federal government did.”

Participant 4 – “Exactly. At the start of the century, right before automobiles started coming in the responsibility for rural roads was the person whose land it went in front of. You may have been asked by your county sheriff to work on it, then the county started to come in. Then the state said these automobiles are coming on faster than what they can do so we have to start taking away responsibility from the counties.”

Moderator – “Some of the very first roads were toll roads. It was truly a user pay system.”

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Moderator: “Let’s start with how you travel on I-35. Does anyone commute on I-35? I bet Participant 1 does.”

Participant 1: “I travel fast. Fast every chance I get. I use I-35 daily to commute from DeSoto to Ellis County.”

Participant 2: “I travel I-35 when I have to go to Baylor, but it got so bad with the construction, it was awful, so I switched to I-45. I-35 is life-threatening when you’re going to Baylor Hospital. It’s bad!”

Moderator: “It’s pretty bad when you’re going to the hospital for a life-threatening illness and you’re taking your life into your own hands on the highway!”

Participant 2: “Yeah! So I just go the other way—it may be a little longer, but it’s a lot smoother ride. You don’t have to worry about stopping and going, and you don’t have to worry about the construction.”

Moderator: “Okay. Who else? Participant 3, I know you’ve only been here for a short time, but do you travel up and down I-35?”

Participant 3: “I travel I-35 every day I have to go to work, and when I start school I’ll have to also. Before I actually lived here I took I-35 about everyday to come here from Lewisville.”

Moderator: “And how was that trip for you?”

Participant 3: “It depends on when you go. I mean, between 4 and 7 the trip is bad when you’re going 10 miles per hour or so the entire time, and then there is a wreck, and a wreck inside of that wreck. So...”

Moderator: “Okay, so when you’re talking about traveling from Lewisville, remember we’re not from around here, are you taking 35E or 35W?”

Participant 3 was not sure if he was using 35E or 35W, so there was some discussion among group members, and they determined that he was traveling on 35E from Ellis County to Lewisville.

Moderator: “What about you, Participant 4?”

Participant 4: “You know, I’ve lived in the Dallas area all my life and I’ve traveled I-35. I have seen all the changes, and I hate the downtown loop exchange from Oakcliff area going around—that’s like the worst. My daughter is just learning how to drive and we have not even approached that area because it seems so dangerous. In Red Oak, working for the police department, we’ve suffered through all the construction going from 4 to 6 lanes, and even now we still have a lot of construction on the weekends. When are they ever going to finish?? The police department has to deal with all the wrecks on I-35, so I see all the reports and I see the danger that seems to be involved right there at our Red Oak exits.

Participant 2: “There are a lot of accidents at Ovilla Road.”

Moderator: “How far is Red Oak from here?”

Participant 2: “Eleven miles.”

Moderator: “Okay. What about you Participant 5, do you travel on I-35?”

Participant 5: “I don’t do it as much as I used to; I use I-35 to go to the VA hospital. I was a truck driver a long time ago and I’ve seen some of the mistakes people have made. When I get into the Red Oak, the exit by the bank is dangerous. My concern is the concrete barriers along I-35 from Italy to Red Oak. They don’t give! I almost had a wreck on I-35 and hit the concrete barrier to avoid another car.”

Participant 4: “What about the service roads — are they part of this too?”

Moderator: “Yes, we can talk about the service roads too.”

Participant 2: “They’re bad too!”

Moderator: “Some of you have been driving I-35 for a while. What I hear you saying is that you’ve seen it getting more and more congested. But, like Participant 4 was saying, there has been an expansion. Is that...?”

Participant 4: “And that is a good change, but it’s just the construction that goes along with that. I guess the congestion is inevitable. One thing is they did change our service roads from being two-way to one-way. It has made getting somewhere **SO** inconvenient, especially in the Red Oak area. I experienced the same thing when I lived in Wilmer on I-45—it was the same way, from two-way to one-way. It put the Dairy Queen completely out of business because you had to go miles one way and then go back around to get to it.

Participant 2: “A lot of those businesses along the service road are no longer in business because they made that a one-way.”

Participant 4: “I just don’t think that was good a thing. I just don’t see the purpose. I don’t really know that we have accidents; I don’t know what it was hurting having the two-way service roads. I’m sure there is a bigger picture, but I’m just not aware of it. It sure caused a lot of havoc in our town.”

Moderator: “Well, maybe if you were aware of it, it would make a difference to you?”

Participant 4: “It might.”

Moderator: “Okay. Now, Participant 1, you spend a lot of time commuting, right?”

Participant 1: “Yes.”

Moderator: “Do you commute in the peak hours?”

Participant 1: “Yes, I have to spend a lot of time going over to Arlington, so I travel along I-35 to I-20 and then back up 360. It’s ugly. I would rather take a beating than have to do that during rush hour, but it’s interesting. I was listening to Participant 4 about the two-way to one-way and I could see why they had to do one-way because the ramps got so much longer and high speed. You couldn’t yield anymore. But what I see is there aren’t enough exits. As soon as you hit Ellis County, you’ve got to go two, three, four miles—it’s a long distance—for some exits. There is an exit for Milford, then one for Italy, and then you don’t get another one until you get almost to the Waxahachie area. You really don’t have enough access points, which causes you to have to go forever back up and around. As Red Oak keeps growing, you’ll have to have some more exits, won’t you?”

Participant 4: “Well it would be overpasses. I don’t know that the off-ramps are the problem, so much as when you’re on one side of the highway to get around going to the junior high. It’s such a long, long, long, long way to get somewhere when you’ve got to cross over to go this way to back that way, you know? I don’t know if we need more streets cut through; I just don’t know how we would do that either because of the houses.”

Moderator: “What about do any of you travel on I-35 to go on long distance trips? To go to Austin, or...”

Participant 2: “Yeah—Austin, San Antonio...”

Participant 6: “That’s the good thing about south — it gets you to Padre!”

Moderator: “Well, only to San Antonio, then you have to take another route.”

Participant 6: “Well yeah, but they built something around Austin. To where you used to have to stop, the trip to Corpus is about 8 hours and you’d spend 2 hours sitting in traffic in Austin on I-35, but now they built the toll road around Austin.

Moderator: “So, have you taken the toll road in Austin?”

Participant 6: “No, I haven’t been yet. But I will be going this summer sometime.”

Participant 2: “I’ve gone there a lot because my brother lives down there. I have one that lives in New Braunfels, San Marcos, and Wimberley. If you want to get through Austin, you had better be through Austin by 9 o’clock, or else you’re going to be sitting in traffic for three hours. Traffic is backed up all the way to Georgetown; it’s just awful. It takes you forever.”

Moderator: “So, do you think that part of I-35 is worse than it is up here?”

Participant 2: “No, that’s a breeze. I would rather go more south than north any day.”

Participant 6: “No, always go south.”

Moderator: “But you just finished saying that you spent three hours sitting in traffic!”

Participant 2: “If you hit Austin at a certain time, you’re going to be sitting in traffic, but you don’t have to worry about all these crazy people trying to run you off the road and all this construction.

Moderator: “But up here, there are crazy people and construction?”

Participant 6 and Participant 2: “Yes.”

Moderator: “Okay. Participant 1 is nodding her head.”

Participant 6: “Traveling from I-35 to US-75 (going north) is fine, but it’s the coming back part through downtown — from US-75 to I-35 that is scary because if you’re not directly in line with the signs that say I-35 South through downtown, you have to make a really—I mean it’s scary at night.”

Moderator: “What do you think about HOV lanes?”

Participant 4: “They’re great, but why do you have to have more than one person? It seems like the HOV lane is more about...”

Moderator: “Well it wouldn’t be an HOV lane then.”

Participant 4: “Well, I don’t even know what HOV stands for to tell you the truth.”

Moderator: “High-occupancy vehicle.”

Participant 4: “Okay, then let’s call it ‘long distance lane’ or something.”

Moderator: “Okay.”

Participant 4: “Because that’s pretty much what it is. You get on it and you stay in that lane for a very long distance. It’s not like you’re in the other lanes and just going a very short distance and going off. It seems like they should make that more for...”

Participant 3: “Well wouldn’t anyone just take that lane then?”

Moderator: “I think what Participant 3 is saying is how do you make sure that the people in that lane are really going a long distance?”

Participant 4: “You keep them from being able to get off. I guess what I’m saying is that if there was a lane that was designed to go from where you get on the HOV lane now in the Oakcliff area

and a place to get off in downtown Dallas for people who travel in the morning to downtown. That is kind of where I experienced it—I had to go to downtown Dallas in the morning for something and I experienced that horrible bumper-to-bumper I-35 traffic. I had to use my daughter to go with me so that we could use the HOV lane. We just flew to downtown! And I thought why isn't there a lane that is designated when you're going from Point A—the downtown area, the downtown area to north to Lewisville. There is a lot of traffic that is just through. I guess that's what your left lanes are supposed to be about."

Moderator: "But, the HOV lane that is there now does pretty much what you're saying, right? From Oakcliff to the downtown area?"

Participant 4: "Yes."

Moderator: "But what you're saying is that maybe it should be expanded, maybe..."

Participant 4: "No, I'm saying that more people can't get on it because you have to have more than one person in the car."

Moderator: "But, remember that you said that you were on that HOV lane and you just flew through, right?"

Participant 4: "Right."

Moderator: "Well, if you let everybody on, won't it be another lane just like all the other lanes and be bumper-to-bumper?"

Participant 4: "I don't know, you could also have the people who have to get off, who are getting on; they should be designated for certain lanes — people who are through traffic."

Moderator: "I understand what you're saying. So, the people that are driving from Oakcliff from downtown, but only have one person in the car—they're stuck in the bumper-to-bumper traffic, but they're really going. They have a straight shot."

Participant 6: "It gets abused all the time."

Moderator: "You think it gets abused?"

Participant 2: "ALL the time!"

Participant 4: "And they're probably people like me who just have to get from point A to point B and weren't on I-35 to get off in Oak Cliff; they're just trying to get to the long distance where they took the HOV lane from here to downtown and got off and they just didn't have someone in the car."

Participant 2: "There are single people using it all the time."

Moderator: “You know the fine is \$200, right?”

Participant 2: “My luck, I would get caught and everyone else would go free.”

Participant 1: “I work in downtown Dallas traveling from DeSoto, and used that lane for the little while my daughter was living with me, but there were police at the entrance almost every morning. There was no chance I was going to go on it without my daughter.”

Participant 4: “I guess, like when you’re going to Houston on I-45, don’t you get downtown and the people that are going straight through—you go over the traffic and the others go another way? I guess that’s what I’m kind of saying—I-35 should have a way to get through all of that so that you’re just staying on I-35; you’re not getting off, you’re just trying to bypass and go north.

Participant 2: “Like they have a road going around Austin?”

Participant 4: “I guess that’s what I’m saying.”

Moderator: “Okay, we’ll keep those thoughts in mind. Before we move on, what do you think is the biggest problem with I-35?”

Participant 1: “Traffic.”

Moderator: “Traffic, congestion. Okay, but congestion just primarily in the peak periods, right? Or all the time?”

Participant 2: “It’s all the time.”

Participant 1: “Semi trucks are the biggest thing I see.”

Moderator: “Well, what about trucks?”

Participant 1: “You have more and more on the road, and they are now almost exclusively taking up one lane. If traffic has to stop I try to get away from any trucks in front of me because they are so slow at starting up, just because they’re large.”

Participant 2: “Trucks are really bad early in the mornings and later in the evenings. That’s when you see them more out on the highway.”

Moderator: “About what time?”

Participant 2: “Usually in the morning, when I used to commute back and forth to Dallas, you would see them from 6 to 10, and then in the evenings, usually about 5:30-6:00 they are just everywhere. SO when you have your peak hours...”

Moderator: “Trucks are driving in the peak hours?”

Participant 2: “Yes.”

Moderator: “Well, are you sure they’re just driving in the peak hours? Because that’s when you’re driving, but when you’re at work you can’t see them out there.”

Participant 2: “Yeah, that’s just my take. I don’t know what they’re doing when I’m at work! It just seems like that’s when they’re out.”

Moderator: “But Participant 1 says that they’re the biggest problem.”

Participant 2: “They are the biggest problem.”

Moderator: “Now, are trucks the biggest problem, or is traffic congestion the biggest problem and trucks contribute to that?”

Participant 2: “Trucks contribute to that, because if you get behind a truck—you’re stuck.”

Moderator: “What if there was a separate lane for trucks, kind of like what Participant 4 was talking about? Because the trucks probably aren’t going anywhere...”

Participant 2: “They wouldn’t obey it.”

Moderator: “They wouldn’t obey? Okay. They may not be going anywhere in Dallas, they could be going to San Antonio.”

Participant 4: “Well yeah, if we had those special couple of lanes you could bypass through, they would probably be in those lanes. And they would be flying like they always do.”

Moderator: “Okay, let’s keep going. I have some handouts I want to pass out that talk about what I-35 is going to look like in the future.”

Handouts are given out.

Participant 6: “I heard about that like 10 years ago. It sounds like a great plan.”

Moderator: “What plan did you hear about?”

Participant 6: “I’m not sure.”

Moderator: “Well, this doesn’t have a plan on it. That’s what I’m here to find out about from you—what the plan is for the future. This just talks about what we have to accommodate. So if you look at the first page, you can see that in Segment Two, the 13 counties, you can see the population in 2000 and then the projected population in 2035. So if you look at Dallas County—that’s obviously a big, huge jump there, but if you look at some of the smaller counties on the right hand side, like Johnson County, Ellis County, Parker and Kaufman—some of those

populations are doubling between 2000 and 2035. And for this whole Segment Two area that we're talking about, we've got a population going from 5.3 million people two years ago to 7.6 million people in 2035. Participant 4 is looking kind of wide-eyed. You think that's a lot, right?"

Participant 4: "I'm thinking we're going to get them all."

Moderator: "We're going to get them all in Ellis County?"

Participant 1: "Johnson County is really growing."

Moderator: "So you can see that the population is projected to grow quite substantially. If you look on the second page, what we show here are some traffic volumes on different segments on I-35. We've got I-35W and E on here. The box on the left-hand side is the daily traffic volumes and that was in 2008. The middle box is the percentage of that — that is passenger vehicles, and the box on the right is the percentage of trucks. For instance, if you look at I-35E coming out of Dallas, you have 32 percent of the traffic is trucks—that's a pretty good chunk. So maybe you all are right about those trucks, right? And then if you look to the last page..."

Participant 4: "What would we do without those trucks though? As far as getting our goods from Point A to Point B? It's so important."

Moderator: "Sure it is! Do you think the good should be moved by trucks? What other alternatives are there?"

Participant 4: "Well, I don't know that our train system is set up to move freight right now."

Participant 2: "I don't think the train is set up for that now."

Participant 6: "No, but they're supposed to have an Amtrak there."

Moderator: "Well, Amtrak wouldn't move freight; that's just going to move people. But, do you think there should be some sort of investment in rail?"

Participant 5: "The tracks don't always go right behind the warehouse, especially in this area, it's so rural."

Moderator: "So, upgrading freight lines doesn't seem reasonable to you?"

Participant 2: "Not really."

Participant 4: "I think they're working on that."

Participant 5: "In Dallas it might be, but not this area."

Participant 4: “Over between Hutchins and Wilmer, there is a big facility there, and there is talk about the Lancaster airport being turned into a freight center. That was the long-term plan. I used to work for the City of Wilmer and that was seven years ago. They shot it down, but it is still in the plans. They have built a large rail facility and trucking center. There are a lot of warehouses in that area. I mean, I think they’re working on it, but it’s just going to have to come a long way to get our trucks off the road I think.”

Moderator: “That is what we would call an ‘intermodal facility.’”

Participant 1: “My concern is with ‘Big Box’ stores — the Wal-Marts, Target, everybody — because they use just-in-time-inventory. They do not invest in a large facility to store everything. They depend on those trucks to bring it in immediately because that’s what that cash register that’s scanning is doing. So, how can a train be just as responsive? That is one of my concerns.”

Participant 2: “Because that’s how they do their inventory now—it’s what they scan. People don’t go out and do the inventory anymore. If you scan it, it goes into the files. If you’re short, they pick it up and put it on the truck.”

Participant 6: “Their distribution center is in Cleburne.”

Participant 2: “Yeah, but that’s how Wal-Mart does their inventory, it’s how Target and a lot of these grocery stores do their inventory.”

Moderator: “So Participant 4 says that maybe it will work, but there are some concerns that it might not. Well if you look at this last page, the map is showing you what we call a Level of Service Analysis. A Level of Service is a formula that encompasses several things, including the traffic volume on the road, the percentage of trucks, how much following distance there is between cars. It takes into account a whole bunch of different things to come up with this Level of Service. It’s a grading scale, just like school, from A to F. If you look at the top map you can see that in 2008, on 35W right around Fort Worth—it was pretty bad. It wasn’t so bad for most of the other parts. If you look at the plans in 2035, that area on 35W and 35E gets a whole lot worse, and the other parts pretty much stay the same for the most part. They stay the same because in this modeling run that was done for 2035—it includes all of those construction projects that you are complaining about. It’s taking into account how when those projects are completed, they will make traffic flow better. So, the grading scale goes like this: an A is when you’re traveling in the middle of the night pretty much. You’re the only car on the road, there are hardly any other cars around you and you’re traveling at normal speed. An A through C are pretty good; C you’re moving right at the speed limit most of the time with a little bit of stop and go. When you get to D, E, and F is when it really starts to break down. An F is pretty much gridlock and an E is stop-and-go, stop-and-go. The chart on the bottom shows the vast majority of what we’re talking about here in Segment Two, that traffic flow doesn’t get that much worse. That’s because of the improvements that are already underway and that are planned. It takes into account what is in the plans for the next 35 years. Does that all make sense to you?”

Moderator: “So, looking at the whole handout that I gave you, is there anything that is surprising?”

No answers.

Moderator: “Participant 4 made a comment earlier that the growth that was going to happen was all going to be in Ellis County.”

Participant 4: “It’s a lot of growth. That’s what I’m most concerned with.”

Moderator: “But Participant 6 said that Johnson County is really growing too, right?”

Participant 6: “Yes. That’s a lot further south. See, there is a lot of land there. You’ve got Arlington then Mansfield, and then you’ve got Midlothian to Waxahachie and then Ennis. The movement south is growing a lot. Mansfield is getting kind of like Waxahachie. They built that bypass around 287, now there are no trucks that can go on Main Street anymore, they have to go around the bypass. But, it seems like if you can’t get in Dallas you go to the next city.”

Moderator: “So do you think that’s why this area seems to be growing, because Dallas is already so crowded — people are just moving south?”

Participant 6: “Yes.”

Moderator: “Okay.”

Participant 2: “I think a lot of people would rather work in a big city, but live in a small city. You have the hustle-and-bustle, then you come home to your quiet settled down little place. And if you want to do something, you can just go up there and do it and then come back. You don’t have to worry about all the crowds and all the traffic.”

Moderator: “So all those people coming are certainly going to create more congestion on I-35, right? So I’m here to find out—what do we do? Participant 4 already had one idea that we have a lane(s) designated for thru-traffic. But Participant 3 questioned how we would know, how would enforce that eventually, how would we know that those people are really thru-traffic, right? But then Participant 6 and Participant 2 both said something about a bypass, kind of like what they have in Austin, so that’s a couple of different options that we have. Let’s talk about the thru-lanes first. If we had the thru-lanes, south of Oakcliff—you talked about using the HOV as a thru lane, but we don’t really have an HOV lane to use. So, would we take one of those regular lanes out and make it into a thru-lane?”

Participant 2: “That would just make it more congested for the other lanes if you add an HOV lane.”

Moderator: “So would we add a new lane? I need your ideas — come on!”

Participant 4: “Make the HOV lane the thru-lane and the next lane the HOV lane if you have to have one.”

Moderator: “Well, now we’re squishing it down even more.”

Participant 2: “Then it’s squished down to two lanes.”

Participant 4: “Well, you’ve got a lot of people in those two lanes that could be over in the other lanes going straight through.”

Moderator: “So, Participant 4’s concern is that the people that are in the HOV lane or the other lanes are really people that are getting off and on a lot, they’re not going the long distance. But you’re saying they should be.”

Participant 4: “I’m just saying that you’ve got your people who are commuting inside your communities, and you’ve got your people that are traveling long distances.”

Participant 3: “So, they’re traveling through those communities, but not stopping.”

Participant 4: “Of course, they do have to get off to get gas, food, but...”

Participant 6: “What about Amtrak from city to city? That’s what I was talking about earlier—I heard about this about 3 years ago. You were going to be able to travel...”

Moderator: “So you could get on a train in Dallas and go to San Antonio?”

Participant 6: “Yes.”

Participant 5: “Aren’t they talking about rail coming to Waxahachie?”

Participant 6: “Yeah.”

Moderator: “Is that a good idea? You would take that?”

Participant 6: “Yes—rail saves wear and tear on your car, it brings money into the counties...”

Moderator: “How does it bring money into the counties?”

Participant 2: “Are you talking about creating new jobs by building it?”

Participant 3: “Well that, and also are you saying that them paying for the tickets and the ticket money going toward the city.”

Participant 6: “So you would build it out in the rural...”

Participant 5: “Rail would be a lot of money to build. It was controversial in larger cities like Garland and Richardson.”

Moderator: “Do you think that rail would take the cars off of I-35? Would that cut congestion?”

Participant 6: “Yes.”

Moderator: “So do you think enough people would take that?”

Participant 5: “Yes, the percentage would be enough to take it.”

Moderator: “Where should the rail go?”

Participant 6: “I don’t know!”

Participant 1: “It should stop in the major cities. It should start in Dallas, stop in Austin and pick up passengers, then go on to San Antonio.”

Moderator: “So, Participant 1 thinks it should go to San Antonio. Participant 6 agrees with that. So if you took the train from Dallas to San Antonio, then what happens when you get to San Antonio?”

Participant 1: “How would you get around?”

Participant 4: “Rent a car.”

Moderator: “Rent a car, cab...”

Moderator: “You said that you have relatives in New Braunfels. Would you take the train from Dallas to San Antonio—what if there was a stop in New Braunfels? Would you take the train?”

Participant 2: “Probably. That would cut out my travel time. If the train stopped in the smaller cities, you would have time to visit and do sight-seeing.”

Moderator: “So it would be recreational for you?”

Participant 2: “Yes. It would cut down on traffic between Austin and San Antonio.”

Participant 4: “Now, it would have to be affordable to you.”

Participant 2: “Yes, it has to be affordable.”

Moderator: “And there has to be a way to move you around once you get to where you’re going.”

Participant 2: “Yes, and people who don’t have relatives there need to have an alternate way of getting around. Like shuttle buses or trolleys would be great.”

Participant 1: “Say you’re living in Waxahachie and want to go to Austin. Would you drive to the station in Dallas to catch the train—meaning you would get back on I-35?”

Participant 2: “You could catch a shuttle.”

Moderator: “So you think there should be a shuttle to Dallas? What if the train and it stopped in all those little towns along the way? You said that would be nice because you could go sight-seeing. But the trip you could drive would take you about three hours to get to Austin; what if it took you five hours on the train? Are you still going to go on the train?”

Participant 3: “Then again, a lot of people are on that train not to stop and go to each one of those cities.”

Participant 2: “That would be the same congestion that you have in your car.”

Participant 4: “What if you have a rail system that is on a schedule. This rail goes straight through from Dallas to Austin or wherever, then you have another one behind it that when they get to Ellis County gets off the main rail to stop and pick up people. The regular rail is still flowing, but the other rail makes stops in each county. The people who live in that county, instead of driving all the way to Dallas, they can drive to the station in that county. Or, you’ve got the option to go the long term.”

Moderator: “So you have an express and then a local. Kind of like bus service.”

Participant 4: “I guess that’s what I’m saying.”

Participant 3: “Then again, how long is the train going to be sitting there waiting? You said people wanting to get off to go visit the town, people wanting to get on don’t want to wait very long.”

Moderator: “Well, I think that’s what Participant 4 is saying, it would be on its separate rail, right?”

Participant 4: “It would have to be off the main rail.”

Participant 3: “That’s what I’m saying. It’s on its separate rail, and it goes to one of the counties. So someone—instead of driving—goes to the rail station in their county. Would they just be sitting there waiting to leave?”

Participant 4: “Yes. It would leave at a specific time. It’s kind of like getting on an airplane. You can’t just go to the airport and get on a plane when you want; you have to get on at a scheduled time, so you would have to plan your trip around the scheduled times for the rail.”

Moderator: "Okay, so what are the solutions we have to solve the traffic congestion on I-35?"

Participant 2: "An alternate."

Moderator: "An alternate around. Where would we put it and what would it look like?"

Participant 2: "You could start it at Colorado where it really starts bumbling up."

Participant 6: "Right at the bridge."

Participant 2: "Yes. That's a bad area because you've got people coming off when you're trying to get over here and you go around that little loop to get over to this hospital. Start it there, bring it all the way through Dallas past the canyon."

Participant 4: "Are you talking about double decking?"

Participant 2: "No! No double decking."

Moderator: "No double decking, okay. So you build a separate facility that is a bypass starting at Colorado going through the canyon?"

Participant 2: "Right."

Moderator: "That doesn't get you to Waxahachie!"

Participant 2: "Well, that's true. But there's not that much traffic here."

Moderator: "Okay, so the traffic is not that bad here?"

Participant 2: "It depends when you travel through there, you know? You could start it right there at Ovilla Road and make it go all the way around if you wanted to."

Participant 6: "I don't think the solution is going to be on the highway, on the roads."

Moderator: "What's the solution going to be? On the rail?"

Participant 6/Participant 3: "No. To decongest 35 is not going to be done by making alterations to 35. It's going to have to be done by some other type of transportation."

Moderator: "So what's it going to be?"

Participant 6: "I don't know."

Participant 4: "We couldn't go underground because of too much rock in Texas. That's why I'm thinking we would have to go up over what we have now."

Moderator: “Participant 4 is saying something like double decking I-35. She said that it needs to be at least two lanes, right?”

Participant 4: “Well, if you have a wreck you have to have a way to get around that wreck.”

Moderator: “So, are we talking about it being elevated or are we talking about it being like a bypass?”

Participant 4: “It would be nice to have a rail. It would cut down on how many people are on the road, but you still have to get trucks and commuters through town.”

Participant 5: “The bypass in Midlothian made a huge difference for truck traffic.”

Moderator: “If you built the bypass for I-35, Participant 4 says it would have to be at least two lanes. But, where would you put it?”

Participant 4: “Yeah, that’s the thing—you can’t bypass through downtown Dallas. The high rises—that’s why I’m saying the double decking is kind of like a bypass. The elevated lanes would be used for the through-traffic. They would take you up and over, and through.”

Moderator: “So maybe those should be the lanes for the through-traffic?”

Participant 4: “Yes.”

Participant 5: “Either way, we’re looking at money.”

Moderator: “Well that’s the next thing we’re going to talk about. But before we get to that, I want to mention one thing to Participant 4 about the HOV lanes. They are ‘high occupancy vehicle’ lanes right now, but what if you could, as a single driver, pay a toll. So the people that are carpooling, they’re going for free, but you, if you really need to be downtown...”

Participant 4: “I would do it.”

Moderator: “You would do it? You like that idea?”

Participant 4: “I used to have a toll tag.”

Participant 2: “You can buy a toll tag for a whole year.”

Moderator: “So, you all kind of like that idea?”

Participant 4: “I do. As long it was affordable, as long as you’re not really gouged for having your work in downtown Dallas. The real problem is that the industry is not coming out to where we live. We have to travel so far to make a decent living.”

Participant 2: “True.”

Participant 4: “In my particular case, I enjoy working close to my home, but I’m not making big bucks there either.”

Moderator: “So should Ellis County do something to bring more jobs here?”

Participant 4, Participant 1, and Participant 2: “Yes.”

Participant 2: “That is one of the reasons why I don’t work...”

Moderator: “Participant 1 works for the county, right?”

Participant 1: “If an industry wants to relocate and come to Ellis County, one of the first things they do is look at the transportation system. Ellis County is part of the 12-county region. You’ve been up to Frisco and all those places, and see how congested it is? There is really a crisis on the infrastructure—there is no money out there. Ellis has to compete with at least the Big 4 counties—Dallas, Tarrant, Collin, and Denton—because they are so heavily populated, they have more representation in the region and they make sure they get their dollars first. So, we have had no success in getting dollars down into Ellis County. The other thing that I noticed on the maps here is that I-35 cannot be widened in Ellis County.”

Moderator: “Why is that?”

Participant 1: “Air quality.”

Moderator: “Okay.”

Participant 1: “And because the whole area has to be in conformity, and the region planning deal runs the model and says ‘These projects right here buy us a better air quality than these projects here,’ and they need to take care of all the air quality up to the north. If I-35 is to be widened in Waxahachie, someone else would have to give up a project up north. I don’t know of a soul that is going to do that.”

Participant 2: “It’s not going to happen.”

Participant 1: “I’ve tried. They don’t want to give up anything, so we’re kind of stuck.”

Moderator: “Well, the air quality issue aside, let’s talk a little about if we could do some of these improvements—how would we pay for them? Let me start with if you know how transportation is funded in general.”

Moderator: “Participant 5 says taxes. What kind of taxes?”

Participant 3: “City tax.”

Moderator: “Participant 1?”

Participant 1: “Gas tax.”

Moderator: “I want to make a distinction about what we’re talking about. We’re not talking about city roads, not talking about county roads. We’re talking about state maintained roads—you know the interstate, 287, farm-to-market, roads like that. Your transportation is funded primarily though gas tax—fuel taxes. Almost all of it is through fuel taxes. There is a tiny bit from registration, but most of that goes to the county. There are a few other little things like that. Do you know how much you pay?”

Participant 4, Participant 3, Participant 5 say no.

Participant 4: “They don’t put that on the pump do they?”

Moderator: “No, they don’t. They used to put it on the pump, but not anymore. Do you know Participant 1? Well, we pay 20 cents per gallon for state fuel tax and we pay 18.4 cents per gallon for federal fuel tax; so a total of 38.4 cents per gallon.”

Participant 1: “But there is another caveat to this. We don’t get all those cents back.”

Moderator: “We don’t get all of those cents back. The 18.4 cents for federal—we send that to Washington. For every dollar that we send to Washington, we get about 92 cents back. For the last few years, we got about 92-94 cents back. Texas is a donor state, so we’re paying for the interstate highways in the less populated states—like North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, etc. They don’t have enough people to pay for and maintain the highways there. So, what I want to talk about primarily is just the state part of it. The federal part, we can’t do anything about that—send the money, get it back, it’s very categorized on what you can use that money for, those types of things. The 20 cents that you pay in the state gas tax—25 percent (5 cents) goes to education—the permanent school fund. That is constitutionally mandated. Most people do not know that fuel tax supplements schools. A small percentage, about 6 percent, pays to fund the DPS (state troopers). There are a few other minor things too. After you take all that stuff, you don’t have a whole lot of money left, right?”

Participant 4: “What percentage actually goes to the roads?”

Moderator: “Well, the other part of that is that TxDOT is spending more than half their budget to maintain what they already have. They have 78,000 miles of roadway they need to maintain, so we have even less to spend on double decking or elevating, or a bypass, or doing rail, or any of those things. Does anyone know when the last time the gas tax was raised?”

No answer.

Moderator: “1991—almost 20 years ago.”

Participant 4: “I think I know why.”

Moderator: “Why?”

Participant 4: “Because gas prices keep going up. I mean, how can they tack that on to people that are already feeling that we’re in a crisis about how gasoline prices already are? We would want to crucify somebody that wants to raise taxes on it.”

Moderator: “But when you go get gas and you see different gas stations—they are a couple of pennies different here, a couple of pennies there. Sometimes it will even fluctuate daily 10 to 20 cents. So if you added a penny to the gas tax, would you notice that?”

Participant 4: “No. That’s a very small percent isn’t it?”

Moderator: “The next thing I’m going to tell you is that when I say that the gas tax is 20 cents per gallon, it’s a flat 20 cents. It’s not a percent. So when gas is \$1 a gallon, its 20 cents, and when gas is \$5 a gallon, it’s 20 cents.”

Participant 4: “Yeah, if they only raised it one penny per gallon, I don’t think there would be much of an uproar.”

Participant 2: “But, 20 cents a gallon—you’d have people out for blood!”

Participant 4: “But, 5 pennies—we would notice that.”

Participant 1: “How much does a penny actually generate?”

Moderator: “Well, if you have a car that gets 20 mpg, and you drive about 15K per year, you’re paying, in state gas tax, about 1 penny per mile. Over the course of the year, you’re paying about \$255.”

Participant 4: “Wow.”

Moderator: “Now, you say ‘wow.’ Why do you say wow?”

Participant 2: “That’s a lot.”

Moderator: “You think that’s a lot?”

Participant 3: “Not as much as I thought it would be.”

Participant 1: “How much do you think \$250 gets you? Would it maintain a road or fill a pothole?”

Participant 2: “No, it won’t fill a pot hole.”

Moderator: “It seems like a lot when you’re saying this is how much you’re paying over the course of the year. When you look at registration, people are paying about \$60 per year, plus inspection, it’s like \$28. But, like Participant 1 was saying, in the big scheme of things, \$255 won’t buy you much.”

Participant 2: “It won’t buy you nothing.”

Moderator: “So, what are we going to do? Now Participant 4 said that maybe we could raise the gas tax a little bit. But what are our other options? You mentioned toll roads earlier—do you like the idea of toll roads?”

Participant 2: “They’re okay.”

Participant 4: “We’re probably saying that because we’re not living up in Dallas and we don’t use toll roads. I used to have a toll tag in the very beginning. I was in outside sales; I had to take the toll road all the time. It was nothing for me to spend \$35- \$50 per month on tolls.”

Participant 3: “One of the dumb things too it that even after the toll road is paid off, they are still charging people.”

Moderator: “Why do you think they still charge you?”

Participant 3: “I have no idea.”

Moderator: “Well, what did we just talk about? About maintaining the roads. Future tolls will be used for maintenance and operating the road. So it sounds like you all are kind of ‘toll roads are okay, but you probably wouldn’t use them, right? If we’re spending all of the money now on maintenance, we’re going to have to keep spending money on maintenance because the system can’t withhold. So if we don’t have any money for added capacity, we can’t build those extra lanes. What do we do?”

Participant 4: “I am willing to pay to get up on that elevated around town. That way, it’s not like I have to do that every day. People that are trying to go around the Dallas area would probably be willing to pay for it too.”

Moderator: “Okay. The other thing about financing that I wanted to make you aware of too, is—now if we’re using the gas to pay for our transportation, right? So, you all talked about using a little car, right? So you probably get pretty good gas mileage, right? What about electric vehicles—what are they paying?”

Participant 4: “Who do you know who has one?”

Moderator: “Don’t you think that over the next 25 years, more people will have them?”

Participant 4: “If it was affordable, but hybrids are...”

Moderator: “Right now electric vehicles don’t use gas, so they’re not paying anything but still using the roads. Granted that is a small percentage of the vehicle fleet on the road, but is that fair that they’re not paying anything?”

Participant 2: “No, I don’t think so.”

Moderator: “The hybrids are paying because they use gas too, but they use a lot less gas.”

Participant 2: “But they’re a lot more expensive than your regular car that you go out and buy.”

Moderator: “Right, but do you see that as the fuel efficiency in all types of cars increases, which it will over the next 25 years because of federal mandates that say so, we will be collecting even less gas tax? Does that make sense?”

Participant 4: “Okay, we could have electric stations. The vehicles would be made with a special plug so that you’ve got to go and plug it in to the electric station to get electricity. And charge...”

Participant 1: “But most people with electric cars charge them at home. Right now it just has an X amount of time it can go.”

Moderator: “I think what we’re trying to talk about here is that the vehicle fleet is going to change in the next 25 years so we have to think of a better/different way to pay for transportation.”

Participant 2: “There has to be more of a greener way. That would be better on the environment.”

Participant 4: “I don’t know how it charges, but it takes a long period of time to charge?”

Moderator: “I don’t know either, Participant 4. I told you that right now you’re paying \$255 per year for your car; what if we charged electric car owners \$255 to register their car?”

Participant 4: “Well, for one thing, the electric cars are probably going to cost more than your regular cars. Hybrids...”

Participant 5: “I get magazines from my electric company every month. They’re always talking about different types of fuel—corn, water, and different stuff. They’re saying in about 20 years, there won’t be any gas.”

Moderator: “That’s what we’re talking about.”

Participant 5: “All having to deal with the government. But they keep talking about different kinds of fuel. They talked about electricity, they talked about water, they talked about corn, coal...”

Moderator: “I hope we don’t have coal powered cars; could you imagine shoveling?”

Participant 1: “I hope we don’t have windmills on our cars!”

Moderator: “You know Participant 1, I’m wondering when we’re supposed to all have flying cars—getting to the Jetson’s thing.”

Participant 4: “I can barely afford my electric bill now. I mean I have been so poor for the last four or five months with \$500 electric bills that—how am I going to afford electricity for a car?”

Moderator: “Okay, let’s forget about the electricity for the car for a minute. Let’s just think about other funding mechanisms. You liked the toll bypass, right?”

Participant 2: “That would be good.”

Participant 4: “I would. But, if you can hardly get around town without having to pay a toll, then no, I’m not going to like that.”

Moderator: “Okay, and you sounded like you were okay with maybe raising the gas tax, just a little bit.”

Participant 2: “A little bit. Not to where it will jar you or anything.”

Participant 3: “Gas price is going to be going up, so they could increase the tax part of it too.”

Moderator: “That’s the point. What if we—you know I told you the gas tax hasn’t been raised since 1991, that’s almost 20 years ago, right? I don’t know of anything that hasn’t gone up in price in 20 years. What if we linked the gas tax to inflation, to the consumer price index or something? What if it was a percentage of the gas, of the total—like sales tax?”

Participant 4: “What about the people who are making the money off the gas?”

Moderator: “The oil companies?”

Participant 4: “The ones who made these huge profits off the gas. Why aren’t they supposed to...?”

Moderator: “So you think we should go to Exxon-Mobil and say ‘You need to pay us more’?”

Participant 4: “Yes.”

Participant 2: “They made billions and billions of dollars, just gouging people.”

Participant 4: “Why shouldn’t they be responsible for the roads too? If it wasn’t for the roads, they wouldn’t be making their money and their gas. So why do we, the little people, have to bear the brunt of the big industry, the gas people. They should have to be paying something else too.”

Moderator: “Okay. You’re not the first person that has said that.”

Participant 4: “I’m not? And I thought I was original!”

Moderator: “So, does anyone else have any other ideas?”

Participant 1: “I have one. We’re talking about \$200 some odd dollars, but that’s not maintaining the roads, is it?”

Moderator: “No, it’s barely, barely, barely maintaining the roads.”

Participant 1: “Because the cost of maintaining a road is just like everything else. The gas involved and the oils and everything else that it takes to maintain the road has gone up.”

Participant 2: “Labor has gone up too.”

Moderator: “But nobody wants the gas tax to go up.”

Participant 1: “So, we’re not taking care of what we have, we’re letting it fall down.”

Moderator: “And the more it falls down, the worse it gets and the more expensive it is to repair.”

Participant 2: “Maintain what you have, I guess. But you still need something around Dallas though.”

Moderator: “That’s what we’re talking about. How would we pay for that? Well, Participant 1 mentioned something, and it’s not really in the scope of what we’re talking about. But, Participant 1 was talking about something earlier—why don’t you tell everyone what you were saying.”

Participant 1: “Some of the thought on rather than doing the gas tax and because the alternative type fuels are coming in, fuel efficiency has gone down and we’re getting less and less of that gas tax. The figure she gave you was a dollar for today, but we were getting a little bit more back in 1995, but because inflation has hit us and fuel efficiency has decreased the number of gallons that you’re buying, the thought process is possibly looking at the number of miles that you drive. There has been a program, I think in Oregon, in which people have signed up and they are charged for the number of miles they drive. People like you that don’t have to travel across Dallas/Ft. Worth, but you’re usually doing your small commutes—do you actually put 15,000 miles on your car a year?”

Participant 2: “No.”

Moderator: “So, you’re paying less than that \$255.”

Participant 1: “But people like us who have to go out and do these meetings and everything, put 15,000 plus. My better half works in Southlake and works in DeSoto, so that trip is very expensive. So, we’re paying your part.”

Participant 2: “My husband used to work at the VA, and it was 88 miles round trip, so he was paying his part! I paid my dues!”

Participant 1: “Would you be willing to pay for the number of miles, rather than the gallons of gas?”

Participant 2: “It would all depend on where I worked, and how much I traveled.”

Moderator: “But, don’t you see that the people that travel a long way are already paying more in gas tax.”

Participant 1: “And they’re the ones that are on roads using them more than you.”

Moderator: “In the mileage-based user fee model, everyone pays the same. You can structure it different ways, but in this particular instance everybody pays for what they use. So if you drive 10 miles a week, 10 miles a day, or 100 miles a day...”

Participant 4: “What about the truckers?”

Participant 1: “Would that be acceptable for you? Say we were using 20 cents again, rather than placing that on the number of gallons that you bought, placing it on the number of miles that you drove.”

Moderator: “That way the people that drive electric or hybrid cars are paying the same amount as the people who drive regular cars or trucks.”

Participant 5: “What’s the percentage of hybrids or electric cars?”

Moderator: “I don’t know. I think it varies on where you are. They are a small market share. Participant 4 made a comment—what about the truckers? She says that a mileage-based fee might be unfair to truckers.”

Participant 2: “Yeah it would be because they’re the ones that do the long-hauls.”

Participant 1: “How much damage do you think a truck does to a road as compared to a car?”

Participant 2: “Oh, 10 times more than a car.”

Moderator: “The trucks may not be paying their share, but they do pay more in taxes than passenger vehicles. Okay, we’re almost out of time. I want to give everybody one last chance to

say anything that they want to say about... you all have given us some ideas for solutions, and I thank you for your opinions and thoughts.”

Participant 5: “I think that L-train is a good idea.”

Moderator: “Okay, we talked about elevated for lanes, for trains...”

Participant 4: “It’s okay, they’re going to build one and I’m going to look for my name on it.”

Moderator: “This train brought to you by Participant 4—The Participant 4 Express. Anybody have anything they want to throw out there?”

Participant 1: “We are in a critical situation because we’re losing infrastructure daily on a county level.”

Participant 2: “We can’t even maintain what we have, let alone build something new.”

Moderator: “Right, and I hope you all learned something about that.”

Participant 4: “I never even thought about all these things. It’s given me a lot of food for thought.”

Participant 2: “I never thought about it either—I just complained about it.”

Moderator: “But do you feel better now?”

Participant 2: “I feel better. I feel more informed.”

Participant 1: “Do you feel empowered to go do something about it?”

Participant 4: “Yes.”

Participant 1 (*paraphrased from hand written notes, not on recording*): Ellis County is concerned with the I-35 corridor: the existing alignment from Waxahachie to Dallas County is extremely developed. There are major industries where we get property tax from, which is relief to residents. If I-35 is widened, the road begins to encroach on industries and then the industries will go elsewhere. If we start widening in an urban area, we lose business—meaning the residents take on the tax burden. Ellis County is in a sad situation; the roads need to be repaired, etc.

April 22, 2010 Belton, TX

Participants 1 and 2: I-35 is congested all the time.

Participant 1: Especially in Austin.

Participant 2: When we moved here 8 years ago there were a lot of cars but now we have 100K cars. You can't go out without seeing wrecks. It has gotten worse since we moved here, especially with the economy. There are a lot of cars but they seem to be moving all the time. It is "bumper city" when there is a wreck because there are no alternate routes for cars to use.

Participant 4: There are certain spots that bottleneck. You'll sit in traffic but then there is nothing (that seems to be blocking it). They need to have more access ramps. There are ramps only every 20 miles and people pull off into the medians and get tickets to avoid congestion. Something needs to be written somewhere that says that if you are just sitting there you should be able to get off the highway and "make your own trail." Everybody does, and I try not to, but when you see a thousand cars sitting there you have to. There are just not enough on- and off-ramps. Maybe break it down into four lanes like in Hillsborough.

Participant 2: Yes, they need to add more lanes. We also need high speed rail in the area.

Participant 5: I-35 is packed and one the main reasons are the trucks. Most of them go slower than passenger cars which causes backup. On the ramp situation, I think there should be more exits but not as many entrances as those are what cause the bottlenecks. People can't merge and get up to speed correctly. We have some of the worse driving habits in the U.S. People don't know how to merge.

Participant 4: I agree.

Participant 5: And if we can't expand just have some better acceleration lanes. We need longer lanes so that when people get on they have more room to get up to speed.

Participant 4: Those on-ramps on 35 in Austin at the lower deck are a joke.

Participant 5: You have to go from 40 to 70 in a short distance on those on-ramps. You are automatically taking traffic down to the speed of the on-ramp.

Participant 6: The first time I ever came to Dallas and got on I-35 to go to Waco and Austin I thought it was a mini-freeway. It has two-way traffic on the access road and short on-ramps. The whole thing to me seemed so '25 years ago.' It's a joke to call it an interstate like what I-20 and I-40 are. They have acceleration lanes.

Moderator: Well the highway was built in the 60s and hasn't been improved.

Participant 6: But the ones I've been on were built at the same time as I-35.

Moderator: Typically, they are rebuilt based on volumes and now 35 is seeing significant increases in volumes. You've seen what's going on in Temple, right?

Participant 4: It backs up there, too.

Participant 1: You have to watch out with your truck.

Participant 3: Well I agree it is very congested. I will go 'backways' going into Temple but sometime you can't avoid it. I will take the tollway to avoid Austin. That area has definitely got problems.

Participant 1: It's too expensive to take a truck on the toll road. It's like 35 to 45 dollars for the trip.

Participant 1: Everything is relative. I've lived in Dallas and drove 20 to 30 miles on 635 and you talk about congestion...this is absolutely wonderful.

Moderator: I think a lot of you are using congested to say that a lot of cars are there, but it seems like traffic is moving, right?

Participant 5: All the way from Jarrell to Hillsboro is two lanes. But it seems like there is a lot of traffic between Waco and Temple and it is there all the time, no matter what time of day. There is a lot of traffic around Troy. Just go back and look at the number of accidents in that area, and nobody really knows why that is happening.

Participant 1: There are only two lanes there.

Participant 6: Seems like the truck traffic has doubled.

Participant 4: That's because of NAFTA.

(Moderator passes around handout.)

Participant 5: Is this after the recession? A lot of people moved here after the recession because of the Texas economy.

Participant 6: I read in the paper they were going to build 8 lanes through Temple. Is that true? The same article said the population is going to double.

(Moderator discusses population projections.)

Participant 6: But the population north and south of here is where the traffic is coming from. I don't think this area really matters.

Participant 1: You don't think the Bell County population is going to grow more because of the military base?

Participant 5: Really, the only thing that will fluctuate (with regard to the base) is the family size. They know how many people they will have and they move people off. Every year it goes up and down.

Moderator : Looking at other counties, like Ellis County...

Participant 6: That's amazing.

Moderator: Look at the traffic volumes...

Participant 6: It seems like the truck and passenger volume should be the other way around to me.

(Moderator talks about distribution facilities on 35 at Corsicana and potential reasons for the truck numbers.)

Participant 5: Hwy 36 comes through Waco and that is a major east-west corridor. I-35 is a north/ south route. People will go over to 35 and make that trip to Dallas or Austin from off of 36. We used to make that trip all the time in my old job going between Brownwood and Houston.

Participant 6: The company I worked for hauled between Sweetwater and (didn't catch...) and we made trips like that.

(Moderator discusses level of service discussion.)

Moderator: Segment Two is one of the few areas that does not change dramatically. A lot of it still operates alright. The reason it stays like that is all of the projects occurring over the next 25 years.

Participant 6: So this reflects the 8 lanes project (in Temple)?

Participant 5: And without these it would be all red?

Participant 4: Some will disagree but I don't understand this law about getting over when law enforcement has someone pulled over. I have seen some near misses because people see that cop and then have to get over. Problem is multiplied on down the road behind the officer from everyone slamming on their brakes. I understand it's to protect the officer, but I-35 is like a "blood stream" and when you block it things backs up badly.

Participant 5: I think that's why they give you the option to get over or slow down. It gives you a way out. I support the law because having people pass you at 70 mph is dangerous. People can't correct their vehicle at that speed.

Participant 4: For example, if I have a flat I'm getting over as far as I can. Officers try to get on the other side and I agree about the need to save their lives but to save one you are putting 50 others in danger.

Participant 1: I had an incident like that just a while ago. Someone had a gooseneck trailer pulled over and I was in the middle lane. The guy in the right lane pulled in front of me and it was lucky that I was empty or I would have rear ended him.

Participant 5: That goes back to texting and cell phones in the vehicles. People are not paying attention and that is what is causing a lot of these accidents.

Moderator: So back to I-35...are there any surprises here?

Participant 6: I don't have any way of knowing what the actual statistics are so I'll trust you.

Participant 5: How many traffic counts did they do to get these numbers? If they just did one then it is not accurate.

(Moderator discusses traffic counts.)

Participant 1: I think they have a laser dude.

Participant 5: No those black things stretched across the road are what count vehicles.

Participant 3: This is not showing much growth for Bell County, but we are already adding more schools and there is talk of needing new facilities for kids.

Moderator: I think that it is because the 2000 population was so small. It looks like it is doubling. See?

Participant 6: If you were 50,000 in 2000, you would then be at 100,000...

Participant 4: If you want to see the true population of an area put a counter at the HEB. Those are packed all the time.

Moderator: So everyone agrees that the area is going to grow?

General "Yes."

Participant 4: And nobody has mentioned Scott and White. That sucks jobs in.

Participant 3: And the new children's hospital...

Participant 5: and the VA....

Moderator: So how do you accommodate this growth?

Participant 3: Expand I-35 and add the HSR. Put it along I-35 because that is where the traffic is. These data here show the traffic is all SOV so put them on the train. I've heard a lot of people taking about how they would like a rail between Dallas and Austin.

Moderator: So a rail line from Dallas to Austin or Dallas to San Antonio — is this a good idea?

Participant 5: No. Texans want their freedom and will want their car when they get there (on the train). People want to commute by themselves. They have transit in Dallas and Houston but is it maxed out? No.

Moderator: Need to keep in mind the difference between transit and HSR. People don't typically commute from Dallas to Austin.

Participant 6: When I lived in Dallas, I flew on SouthWest Airlines sometimes 15 times a week to get around the state and even Oklahoma. If they had had a railroad between Dallas and Austin

there is “no way in hell” I would have taken a plane. You have to go to the airport and go through security and so on...

Participant 5: You are not going to get around that with HSR. They will have the same security and you will still have to drive to the train station. You are just using a different means but you still have to get to the station.

Participant 6: I lived in the suburbs of Chicago for years. I worked in the Sears Tower and it was just a way of life to take the rail. If there was rail here it would be crazy to not use it to commute into Austin, but it has to get you where you need to go.

Participant 3: You can use HSR to get into Austin along the main corridor and the main cities and then have smaller trains to make the smaller stops.

Participant 4: But can you just imagine what would happen if something happened to one of those trains, seeing as how bad traffic gets here when there is an accident?

Participant 5: The DOT would have to build proprietary tracks because they could not share the tracks with commercial rail.

Moderator: So we have the rail alternative out there...

Participant 6: I have a question...with HSR we are talking about passenger, right?

General “Yes.”

Participant 5: What would be “sweet” would be a ferry style HSR where you can load your car on there and go to Austin or Dallas and then have your car when you arrive.

Participant 6: I like that idea.

Participant 3: That would be good for elderly people who need to go see family.

Participant 4: We have not talked about RVs.

Participant 1: They are the most dangerous thing on the roads.

Participant 6: Agree.

Moderator: How do we get trucks off the road?

Participant 3: They need to utilize trains more. The rail is there, so we need to use it.

Participant 4: There was a study that said if we utilize trains to their maximum capacity it would be significant.

Participant 5: Where I worked you had perishable goods, so you still have to have trucks.

Moderator: But what if the trucks are stuck in traffic?

Participant 5: Well that’s an issue...

Participant 4: And then the train just goes right by you while you are in traffic.

Moderator (to Participant 1): Do you have tight delivery windows?

Participant 1: Pretty tight. I have to get there in time so that I can make my next pick up. The delivery window depends on where I am going. In Austin, I have to have a bigger window.

Participant 6: I was a dispatcher, and you don't want your trucks to have an empty load. If you see an empty flatbed well then that guy is not making any money.

Participant 5: We actually developed software that worked with multiple trucks that would coordinate pick ups and drop offs so that they stayed loaded. We had a certain LOS that meant the trucks had to be at the store at a certain time and if we did not make it, it was generally because of traffic on I-35. During the holidays that was all out the window.

Participant 6: They need a separate highway.

Participant 4: Have that in New York, but then cars get on the truck highway.

Participant 1: Sort of like what they have now with the lane restrictions between San Antonio and Jarrell. I don't like that. Sometimes cars know you can't use the inside lanes and cars will be going 55 to 60 on the two lanes that the trucks can run on. They need to get out of the way so we can run there.

Moderator: Does everyone agree that we need to add lanes?

All: "Yes."

Participant 4: What I don't understand is that this should have been done years ago. Instead of adding four lanes, we will now have to add 8 lanes just to get ahead.

Moderator: So, expand rail options and add lanes. If we add lanes, should they be on an old facility or new?

Participants 1 and 2: Add to existing.

Participant 2: They can find room.

Participant 5: If they expand I-35, they are going to take land along I-35. When they do that you will take what they tell you your house is worth.

Moderator: So are you in favor of expanding the current I-35 or having a new facility?

Participant 5: Expand I-35, but it won't solve the problem. We need a new facility.

Participant 2: But how can you say you don't want land taken and then want a new facility?

Participant 5: Eminent domain will happen regardless. Double decking is the only way to avoid that.

Moderator: What do you all think of that?

Participant 2: “Yikes.”

Participant 3: What if you have an accident up there?

Moderator: Do you know people who commute from Belton to Austin?

Participant 3: No.

Participant 5: Even the HOP only has about 5 people in it.

Moderator: If they had their own separate lane, would it encourage use (by carpoolers)?

Participant 2: They have it in Atlanta and nobody uses it.

Participant 4: I have known people who cheat.

Moderator: So HOV lanes are not viable?

“No.”

(Moderator describes HOT lanes.)

Moderator: What about HOT lanes?

Participant 6: That would be nice.

Participant 3: (Unsure.)

Participant 5: Is this a toll road? Nobody takes those in Austin. Nobody wants to pay to use roads.

Participant 6: I would use that like the one in Chicago (HOV) but I would say that 50 percent of the cars there were SOV.

Participant 3: But how would you enforce that with TxTAG?

Moderator: There are nine projects that are HOT; some are variable priced. Explains...

Participant 6: I think if you were going from here to San Antonio, and had one of those lanes about ten miles outside of Austin, and you were not planning on stopping, it would make sense to use it.

Participant 3: But we have the tolled loop. Why have that if you have a HOV going through Austin?

Participant 4: If I was driving and came to a complete stop and there was a toll road nearby I would definitely take it. In your focus groups, is there ever any resolution on these solutions?

(Moderator discusses toll facilities in Austin and how they don't help commuters.)

Moderator: What do you think are the best ideas?

Participant 5: Longer trailers (double 48s and triple 48s) would help truck traffic.

Participant 3: Hope they have something to deal with the accidents.

Participant 5: If you have a truck only lane, like HOV truck with longer trucks, you cut 50 trucks to 10.

Participant 4: One of the problems is the logs. Some drivers have to make up their logs. They are pushing the drivers from point A to point B, like Participant 5 said it is all service oriented...it comes down to greed and the truck drivers are just trying to make a window. We need to cut them some slack but the dispatcher's bottom line is to make money. Start with the companies and give them more of a window.

Moderator: So how does that affect congestion?

Participant 4: They are concerned with getting from A to B.

Participant 5: It's not necessarily the trucks causing the problem. There are a lot of bad drivers, but trucks are part of the problem.

Participant 4: Work on the good drivers. They know what they are doing. Then they can deal with the bad drivers. Look at who is getting a license at the DMV... little old ladies who get on 35.

Participant 5: What about technology? Most major cities have green and red markers on the interstate that tell you the road is closed ahead. People here just run up on lane closures.

Moderator: What about bigger signs that show travel time and congestion? Would everyone like that?

Yes.

Participant 5: It would be good for the signs to show travel times on 35 versus the toll road.

Participant 6: I think that is a great idea. I remember an article in the 60s about a cable that would run under the road that would take you where you need to go. It was supposed happen in the 80s. So, if we are talking about technology then according to those guys we should have been there already...

Participant 4: The technology is there, but the oil companies won't let it happen.

Participant 5: Powerful lobbies won't let the government move in that direction.

Participant 4: Obama was saying no drilling but now here he is drilling for oil. It's not his fault but he is getting pressure to do it.

Moderator: So how do we pay for all this? How is it paid for now?

Participant 3: Income taxes.

Participant 6: Interstate is funded by the 50 cent a gallon gas tax.

Participant 5: And those funds are earmarked.

Participant 4: I don't know...let me think about it.

Participant 3: If someone could take HSR they would not mind paying more for gas in taxes because they would be buying less gas.

Participant 3: Weren't all roads originally toll roads?

Participant 5: Sales tax.

(Moderator discusses gas tax.)

Moderator: Do you know the amount of the gas tax?

Participant 3: I know that gas wouldn't cost as much if they took the taxes off.

Participant 5: And they keep going up.

Participant 4: A few years ago they talked about doing away with the gas tax because gas prices were so high, but it was only going to take off like 30 cents.

(Moderator tells group the amount of the tax.)

Moderator: So Participant 3, you think it would be cheaper without taxes?

Participant 3: Well that's what I heard...

(Moderator discusses tax assessment.)

Participant 1: Well why can't oil companies, who have been making profits off the oil, pay more?

Participant 4: I'm not an expert in the oil business. You have independent drillers, and geologists charge a lot because they have to be right, and drillers take a lot of chances. When they hit a good one, they are going to make a good profit, but we're not talking about the independents. The big guys should "big time" pay more because they do it with no effort.

Moderator: When was the gas tax last raised?

Participant 4: Didn't they "chop it off?"

No.

Moderator: Almost 20 years ago was when it was last raised...not advocating, just discussing how it works. Federal mandates on fuel efficiency....What do electric vehicles pay?

Participant 1: Nothing?

Participant 6: And who will pay for the railroads if people using the railroads are not driving cars?

Participant 4: But think about it: The majority of the people are not rich. There are low income folks and if we jack up the price on the gasoline, they are not going to be able to make it to work. They are in a bad situation. Look how long it took to get minimum wage up. It's hard to live on that. The entities above (government) look down and say that we can live on that.

Participant 5: Two statements: There is a gap between electric vehicles and regular cars but there is also a gap between the number of cars now and when they last increased the fuel tax. They are getting more from more fuel consumed and more cars driving.

(Moderator discusses fuel efficiency affect on fuel tax revenues.)

Participant 5: My second statement relates to road quality: why don't they build them better? If they built them, better they would not have to fix them all the time.

Moderator: So you feel in Segment Two that you don't think you are getting your fair share?

Participant 5: Yes. Everything seems to be working fine north and south of here but not here.

Moderator: So we've talked about all these people coming here....TxDOT spends most money on maintenance...and yeah big cities get most of the money...but you do have some projects here....but will that be enough?

Participant 3: I doubt it. Seems we are always behind.

Participant 6: I lived right near 161 in Dallas and it took \$16K a foot to build that. But if you go out their right now and start it won't be that, and 38 cents a gallon won't pay for it.

Participant 3: And they are building a bypass around Temple. Wasn't there a lot of controversy about that?

Moderator: But you all just said we need to do something... add lanes, encourage more modes...so how to pay?

Participant 3: Income tax. There are people moving here and they should help out.

Participant 5: Sort of a toll road.

Participant 6: Gas tax is sort of a toll, right? The question is: would we be willing to pay 30 cents instead of 20?

Participant 1: I think oil companies should help out.

Participant 5: Car companies should help out, too.

Moderator: What about registration fees, etc....local option... specific to Segment Two?

Participant 4: What guarantee is there?

Moderator: But would you be willing to support a local option?

Participant 6: Most cars are foreigners (outside of region) driving through here. I might not drive on 35 for more than 100 miles a month. I wouldn't mind paying if it would help but...

Participant 4: I'm on the road all the time, and what (Participant 6) is saying makes sense. Put a "gadget" on people's car and whoever is using the road pays for it.

Moderator: So what about adding lanes to 35 that were tolled and went through the area?

Participant 6: That would help the area users. Our traffic would be minimal, really.

Participant 4: If there is a bottleneck, they will use it. Yeah, put them on there.

Participant 6: Do you have numbers on through traffic?

Moderator: What if we did away with the fuel tax (state) and just charged people for the miles?

Participant 5: And you expect them to be honest?

Participants 1, 4, and 6: How would you collect?

Participant 6: I don't think you could make it work but I wouldn't mind paying if it worked and everyone else was paying it.

Closing Comments

Participant 5: There is no one single answer for the question and problem that has been presented here. No silver bullet. However, there are a lot of people out there and if private industry and government worked and used technology it would work. Politics could limit the effectiveness. Is Texas willing to fund it, and is the government willing to take the hits on spending that money? Can they make the changes necessary (tighten belts)?

Participant 4: We need better people in charge. We are working ten years behind and we need to figure out the problem before it happens. Look at Austin: I have never seen a city run so "shoddily." As soon as they fix something, they are behind. If we ran our lives like that, we "wouldn't have any clothes on." The entities in charge need to be better equipped.

Participant 3: I would like to see it based on usage. Maybe that would force lower income people to carpool. I don't want any more taxes, income or other. Lower class people don't pay at all but still use the system. Middle class pays for everything.

Participant 2: They should make the service roads one way. I'm so tired of people from out of state coming at me and thinking it is one way. It is a safety issue.

Participant 1: Nothing to add.

Participant 6: The acceleration and deceleration lanes, that five inch white stripe, to me that is an "invisible wall." I want to see more policing of that line. Right here in Temple I see people crossing that invisible wall a hundred times a day. If they controlled the traffic going through

here, it would be twice as good. As far as fixing financial problem.... It's going to take a lot of solutions.

Participant 5: Another problem is our government in Austin with the "bicameral" legislature. They need to meet more often to solve traffic problems.

Participant 4: But don't you remember we had one of the best highway systems 20 to 25 years ago? When you let stuff lag behind that is what happens. People are not doing what they are supposed to be doing. People have to be accountable. What's the governor doing?

April 29, 2010, Gainesville, TX

Use of I-35

Participant 6: I have noticed recently that there is not a lot of room. I almost hit two 18-wheelers on my last two trips. I have noticed this very recently.

Moderator: Does this vary by the time of day?

Participant 6: I don't really remember.

Participant 2: With vehicles getting bigger, I-35 seems to be narrower. It scares me. In the older parts of the road and near the entrances, it seems very narrow.

Participant 2: There is a crook on the on-ramp and if you are going to get up to speed in order to merge, you may lose control of your vehicle. You can't "look and crook."

Participant 3: From here to Ft. Worth (I drive there every morning and evening) it is pretty good. However, where it comes together at 35E it gets narrow there at the bridge.

Participant 6: A lot of this has to do with the vehicle. I have a 4 cylinder so some of my problems may be that I don't have the "gusto."

Participant 7: I travel just about the whole length of I-35. I used to live in Laredo. From Denton to Gainesville is usually not that bad but I have seen it pretty crowded. Denton to north of 820 is tolerable but other than that I would rather not go through Ft. Worth. I used to live in New Braunfels and would drive into Denton and would wait until 8 or 9 to leave Denton so as to avoid traffic along the I-35 corridor. I know it needs to be widened and it kills me thinking about what they will need to do to get that done.

Participant 2: It's congested all the time... even at 1:30 in the afternoon.

Participant 7: I have to allow 30 minutes to go 7 miles.

Participant 3: Friday nights are horrible at the bridge.

Participant 2: Yeah I have to allow an hour and a half to get to Dallas.

Participant 7: It is almost not worth having Dallas people come up here for 7 o'clock events because they can't get here.

Participant 2: And you can't u-turn to go north in some areas.

Participant 4: I've traveled for many years around Sanger and I used to live in California. I moved back here around 1992 and it was overwhelming coming back because traffic was not this congested when I left. And I always thought Texans were polite but now everyone is so rude...they are a lot nicer in California. I travel back and forth to Carrollton through Dallas and it is bad between Dallas and Lewisville. When I was working, if I did not get up and leave early, I was in trouble. Since the casinos have come up it is now crowded on the freeways during the weekends. We make trips back and forth to Austin to see our sons and that is a nightmare. We just made a trip there and it was stop and go on a weekend and there were no wrecks. It is normally about a three hour trip.

Participant 3: Austin has got to have the worst traffic in Texas. I would rather drive in Houston.

Participant 1: The times that I travel, what I notice is that it is not as congested. I travel at around 7:30 from Denton to Gainesville and I leave after 4:30. You can see more traffic but it is not to the point that you can't keep moving.

Moderator: But you are making a reverse commute, right?

Participant 1: Yes, and I live before 288 so I skip a lot of the congestion. It is horrible getting caught in Ft. Worth. And Lewisville to Dallas is very dangerous. The lanes are very narrow and there are bumps all in the road. It doesn't seem well maintained... especially after the last big snow.

Participant 2: The new Mixmaster around 635 is horrible, very narrow, and it is new.

Participant 3: Yeah it gets pretty rough there.

Participant 7: Right there where 12 splits off.

Participant 1: The signage is very important. I missed the exit a while back.

Participant 3: It's tough to identify right and left exits. You don't know what side of the road the exits will be on.

Participant 2: And signs don't say where you are going once you exit.

Moderator: So what are the biggest problems?

Participant 2: On and off ramps and signage.

Participant 3: Yes, signage is bad.

Participant 4: We have to keep in mind that growth is not going to stop. Look at Denton.

Participant 6: The mindset of how people drive doesn't change depending on the size of the road. Trucks, for example, just keep barreling through regardless of the roadway. I have a CDL and I know they are not all bad but it is a concern. I have not seen a lot of improvements in the past 20 years.

Participant 7: I have to admit that I see a lot of improvements around New Braunfels. I didn't think they would ever finish that but when they did it made all the difference.

Participant 6: Yeah but when you make improvements you have to keep up with them. You have to stay on top of improvements. Not necessarily on a yearly basis but they need to be updated on some type of basis.

Moderator: Do you mean maintained or expanded?

Participant 6: Both.

Participant 2: Where the factories have died out it is not so bad, but then others go up and then there is a need there.

Moderator: So are you saying I-35 should have already been expanded?

All: Yes.

Participant 6: You can see the connections happening with Oklahoma.

Participant 8: I travel every weekend (10K miles since January) on I-35 and it needs to be widened but it has been a long process. I don't have any trouble between here and Dallas because I know the times of day when traffic is going to be bad and up here it is still not bad, but that is because I know the times.

Participant 6: But you are working on a broken system...you should not have to schedule around a broken system.

Moderator: Now you, Participant 3, commute through Ft. Worth, right?

Participant 3: Yes. I leave at 4:30 in the morning, get through Ft. Worth and power nap at a rest stop. But I leave right at 5 to get back home. I-35 at 820 is the most irritating because it is two lanes and there is plenty of shoulder room for another lane.

Participant 7: I've had problems between Dallas and Denton on Sunday.

Moderator: Do any of you carpool?

Participant 8: We (Participants 8 and 1) do when we can.

(No others.)

Moderator: Would carpooling help?

Participant 7: A lot of people's schedules don't allow it.

Participant 2: Especially for the casino employees. A lot live in Arlington and they have a lot of variability in schedules.

Participant 7: And I don't know anyone who teaches when I teach.

Moderator: What about other modes?

Participant 8: There has been talk about getting a rail in Corinth but they (Corinth) didn't buy into it.

Participant 7: And I think it is a great idea but would not work for me.

Participant 2: I take the DART bus to Las Colinas I and love it.

Moderator: Would you take rail to Austin?

Participants 4 and 5: Oh, yes. But I had transit growing up, and I don't know why we don't have it here.

Moderator: If there was transit in the area would it alleviate some of the congestion around here?

Participants 4 and 5: Definitely.

Participant 7: A commuter rail from Dallas to Denton would be nice because I could go to events in the DFW area that I don't go to now because I don't want to get on I-35. However, it would not benefit my commute.

Participant 6: You brought up rail...we used it all the time in DC but the important aspect of it is when does it run? Will it have varying routes? Is it just evening/morning or is it going to run throughout the day with varying routes? Something like in DC would help and people would use it.

Participant 2: It would have to run four times... "school time" and "work time."

Moderator: So is everything getting worse?

All: Yes.

Participant 7: The University of North Texas (UNT) bus service is starting to get a lot better because of their improvements. When they first started doing the shuttle bus, where I lived 6 blocks from campus, they could not get enough buses on that route. They were always like sardine cans. Now they have enough buses. But what they have done is make those buses express buses. You can't just get on the bus and ride down and get off. You have to get on your specific route because the buses don't make all of the stops.

Participant 2: I don't think improving other alternate routes is going to help I-35. People are set in their ways. It might help through traffic, though.

Participant 7: I think improving certain routes, like 289, would take pressure off of 75.

(Moderator passes out the handout.)

Participant 7: West Texas is looking better and better.

Moderator: Look at the increases in population through 2035....it will increase congestion.....looking at traffic volumes....looking at trucks....

Participant 7: That is the funny thing about 35...at night it is all trucks.

Moderator: Looking at the LOS maps, these include current projects...

Participant 6: You're kidding...

Participant 8: The Denton mayor was telling people up here that the traffic was coming five years ago...now look at it. As soon as you hit 380 in Denton you used to be able to just go through with no problem, but now it doesn't ease up until Sanger.

Participant 5: I travel 35 at night and there are a lot of trucks there running me over. I have to drive 75 or 80 to keep ahead of them.

Participant 6: That is one of my concerns...ramps are not adjusted to the speed that is required to merge, especially with the trucks on the highway.

Participant 7: There is not enough time to get up to speed and merge. We need longer on-ramps and you need to be able to cruise at that speed until you find an opening.

Participant 2: If you are leaving the TA coming to Gainesville it is a bad on-ramp. It does this... (gestures).

Participant 1: I was scared when I transferred cities because I was shocked at the on-ramps. The exit at UNT, right after the bridge, there is a blind spot where the fence is and the visibility is very poor getting on.

Participant 4: It is terrible in Denton and it has been that way for years. I guess there are too many things that have to take place there. Every on-ramp from UNT stadium on is very dangerous. If you have a truck coming in the slow lane they have almost run me off the road to keep from hitting merging traffic. It is bad between Denton and Corinth.

Participant 2: There is a long ramp to come down here in Gainesville and people pile up on there and it is totally blind. It is dangerous with the trucks being there.

Participant 5: We need to look at the accidents that have occurred and why they have occurred in order to fix the situation.

Moderator: So what are we going to do?

Participant 7: Give really good subsidies for smart cars and get people into smaller vehicles. This will create more room.

Participant 2: And they can't go fast...I like that idea.

Participant 5: But then it will be like Austin where they just sit still.

Participant 4: I like the double deck in Austin. My hat's off to them on that and the ramps are better there.

Participant 5: The new loops and toll roads in that area are good, too.

Participant 6: My problem is when does a toll road quit being a toll road? That could be one of the solutions but I can't believe that we would never have something paid off.

Moderator: So if you had a toll road where would it be and who would use it?

Participant 2: I would never use it.

Participant 7: I probably would.

Participant 4: I read that a while back, they were going to build a toll road from Plano to Denton but I don't know what's happened with that.

Participant 6: I guess that you could make I-35 a toll road or take land and make a new toll road. But I don't think there is enough room to expand in Denton and you couldn't do it in Lewisville either.

Participant 3: So wouldn't it be easier to build up, like a double-decker (DD) rather than out?

Participants 4, 5, and 6 like this idea.

Participant 4: And there needs to be four lanes on each side all the way to Carrollton.

Participant 3: Or maybe south of Denton.

Participant 6: If this is what is projected (referring to handout) then whoever is the architect on the roadway needs to build into their plan something for a DD.

(Moderator discusses metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and planning.)

Participant 3: Okay, that makes perfect sense...they haven't committed a lot of money.

Participant 7: I thought there was going to be decking somewhere along through Denton?

Moderator: So you all like the idea of DD?

All: Yes.

Participant 7: Because of the land. You would not have to take any of it.

Participant 3: Semis could be on top and commuters on the bottom.

Moderator: So how would access work on this?

Participant 2: If you are going to expand other roads it will be like loops coming off the DD.

Participant 6: You don't have the same access. You should have to go farther to get off. It is a fast lane to get through the territory. I have seen these in Jersey and with some of these fast toll lanes, they actually have their own service stations on the facility itself.

Participant 7: Like the Kansas turnpike.

Participant 4: Another thing they need to do if they expand is keep truckers out of the inside lanes like in Austin. I don't see anything wrong with having a lane for the trucks.

Participant 8: You talk about needing longer merge lanes, but people don't stay behind those solid white lanes. You have to drive defensively.

Participant 7: If you have enough lane, where you can judge the length and get up to speed that is a big improvement.

Participant 6: These truckers have to pick up a lot of speed to make it up these hills and there are certain things they have to do to maintain speed.

Moderator: Well what about a DD for trucks only?

Participant ?: No.

Participant 3: Trucks are the least of our problems. Room on the roadway, speed and signage are the biggest problems. A lot of the problem is people always being late and driving like idiots. I used to do that when I was younger.

Participant 5: I lived in Denton for 25 years and was active with the city and they were stubborn about their roadways. When loop 288 came along, they didn't think they were going to have problems with trucks on there but they were wrong.

Moderator: So Participant 5 mentioned the 130 facility in Austin...is it worth it to think about something like that for 35...a different facility?

Participant 5: One of our sons had to get on I-35 before they had 130, and he loves it (130). He says it does not cost that much and it gives people a choice.

Moderator: Well I'm trying to get at the bypass idea....talks about Austin toll roads...130 not used because it is of little value to commuters....

Participant 3: Is that because it is so far out of the way?

Moderator: About nine miles...

Participant 3: I would take it. I would take something like that to avoid Ft. Worth.

Participant 7: I've tried taking 20 as an alternative and the time taken going around is equal to the time you lose in congestion.

Participant 2: I don't like toll roads. I had to take one once when I missed a sign.

Participant 3: But the toll roads are so much better maintained.

Participant 2: Yeah because money is coming out of your pocket daily.

Participant 6: They continue to maintain it but at what point is a toll road paid off?

Moderator: So does everyone like the DD idea?

Participant 1: Depends on where the exits would be.

Moderator: But a parallel facility is not really a good idea?

Participant 8: It would be nice if there was room, and I don't think there is. We have already had the land taking argument here but if there was room I would pay to drive a toll road like that. When they built George Bush, I loved that. A DD would be great too. Widening lanes would be great as well. Adding two more lanes, even if they were tolled, would be fine.

Moderator: So you want to add to the existing facility...either up or down or out?

Yes.

Participant 6: But everyone agrees that we don't want land taken like the Trans Texas Corridor was going to do.

Moderator: How do transportation improvements get paid for?

Participant 2: Federal grants, motor vehicle fuel taxes.

Participant 6: Some comes from the federal government.

Participant 1: I know that about $\frac{3}{4}$ of fuel taxes go to transportation and the rest goes to education.

(Moderator talks about fuel taxes.)

Nobody knows when taxes were last raised.

(Moderator discusses fuel efficiency... increases in VMT relative to decrease in fuel tax revenues.)

Participant 6: I would like to see some sort of analysis and comparison between the sort of improvements we are talking about. What does a DD cost relative to other types of improvements?

(Moderator discusses road costs.)

Participant 2: I say we use convicts to construct the roadways. They are cheaper.

Participant 8: But then you have to pay someone to watch the convicts.

Participant 3: Yeah, we don't need more people watching other people work.

Moderator: So regardless of the solution we implement, how do you pay for it? (Discusses bonding.)

Participant 8: Well, like you said, we have more fuel efficient vehicles, which are driving down fuel revenues.

Participant 6: But our population growth should be offsetting that. We have some of the fastest growing cities in the nation.

(Moderator discusses increases in construction costs.)

Participant 6: If we expand 35, won't that increase truck traffic? Wasn't that the point of the TTC...to increase truck traffic?

Participant 8: I understand that at some point we are going to have to increase fuel tax revenues. Some areas have a road improvement tax. I have seen "privilege tax" for vehicle ownership and we have a lot of people moving into the state. We need to look at a tax on new vehicles. I paid up to \$800 in West Virginia.

Participant 2: My husband works on cars, and we buy and sell a lot of them, and that would kill our business.

Participant 8: We have a lot of students in the area, and what about them?

Participant 6: Give exclusion.

Participant ?: But how many of them come to school with a car?

Participant 6: When I went to Florida, I got an exclusion.

Participant ?: There are ways of getting exclusions.

(Discussion of registration process and how a new vehicle tax would work...couldn't follow...even after listening to tape.)

Moderator: Discusses toll road financing...why they are not free after a while. So who likes tolling?

Most participants like tolling.

Participant 7: I don't like having my credit cards charged when they are already maxed out.

Participant 2: I would not use toll facilities.

Participant 5: We have to be thinking about growth and new ways of addressing problems. Fixing traffic issues and providing transit options will be a boon for urban areas.

Participant 4: We usually shop in Gainesville. They have everything we need.

Moderator: So if something does not happen to fix congestion then the economy of these cities will be affected?

Participant 5: Yes.

Participant 7: It is weird that people drive 40 miles to work and pass each other on the highway.

Moderator: Should there be policies encouraging people living close to work?

No.

Participant 2: We are regulated enough. The new school came in and 51 is really populated now so now we have people passing us going 70 when there is a tractor in front of us. This is not country anymore and those roads are dangerous with drop-offs in ditches and people flying around here at 90 mph.

Closing Comments

Participant 7: Public transportation should be looked at as a solution. Trains are very cost effective. Even improved bus service, such as commuter buses, would be good. The thing is we keep looking at the I-35 corridor but it is only a part; it won't solve all the problems. I would like to see more transit.

Participant 6: I agree that some sort of transit along with expansion of I-35 is needed. I also like the fee on new registrations.

Participant 5: I have lived here a while and Denton has not planned for this growth and now we're sitting here in a panic because responsibility has not been taken. They are putting a Sam's up here on I-35 and I don't know how that is going to work.

Participant 2: Yeah residential areas being built like they are is a problem.

Participant 4: Public transportation, even from Denton to Dallas with maybe stops in between, can be very expensive. It is the same problem but we need more of that. I also think that we need a toll road. From Oklahoma to wherever. When the TTC thing came along I did not like taking people's businesses and property but what are you going to do? I understand people's land concerns but something needs to be done about 35.

Participant 3: Until today, I never considered transit an option but for in-town people (people not going to work in Gainesville), but for Ft. Worth and Denton people it would probably be great. If I had a job where I could use a park and ride, I would use it.

Moderator: What about getting to use a toll facility for free as a carpool? Is that an incentive?

Participant 3: It just depends on the work schedule.

Participant 2: Residential areas are a problem. I might be alright with tolls if I didn't have to take it. Transit could work if it goes where people need it.

Participant 8: You are going to have to get the money some place and it is going to require taxes. I am not opposed to tollways, or just painting lanes. I am not opposed to new bonds, new taxes. Something needs to be done. Just do it.

Participant 7: It will be our money anyway.

Participant 1: I am definitely for public transportation because it will save everyone car maintenance and expenditures and would reduce congestion and save lives. The only thing against that is that you have a problem once you reach your destination and you don't have travel alternatives. I also think that some sort of agreement with TxDOT and local government about addressing back roads is needed because some of those are even worse because of the traffic. There also needs to be public education about not needing to use 35 all the time. I might use a toll road but I would not use it every day.