
Texas Transportation Institute

Interstate 35 Citizens' Advisory Committee Public Outreach:

Business Listening Session Results

Work performed under TxDOT RMC 0-6581, Task 11

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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 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 below indicates the dates and locations.

Key Observations

Unlike the focus groups with the general public, the business listening sessions differed more from each other. In the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, the listening session indicated that this area had already defined their needs to meet the future demands in the I-35 corridor. They felt that primarily TxDOT and to a lesser extent Federal officials were a roadblock to implementation. They were very supportive of being in charge of their own destiny. They also expressed concerns over future funding and its inadequacy in meeting the needs. They indicated that comprehensive development agreements and involving the private sector were the only mechanisms to get the proposed improvements financed.

In the Austin area the business listening session favored better utilization of existing infrastructure. Many expressed dissatisfaction in the perceived under utilization of State Highway (SH) 130. To this group, moving trucks from the downtown core was a huge issue. Moreover, the group did not believe that meaningful improvements could be made on I-35. Instead they preferred a more system-wide approach where alternate corridors should be improved. However, they did support adding managed lanes on I-35.

The segment four listening session focused on making local improvements at bottleneck areas such as Loop 20. This group felt that I-35 could be expanded because there is sufficient right-of-way. They were opposed to a new facility. One of the primary concerns was facilitating trade with Mexico.

A listening session held in San Antonio yield comments related to both segments three and four. The biggest concern for this group was eliminating bottlenecks by correcting what

they saw as design flaws. For instance, they felt that many ramps were outdated and even new ones that were constructed were inadequate as soon as they were operational. Interestingly, this group also felt as if the “area was its own worst enemy.” Several people indicated that many different agencies are tasked with transportation planning and none of them are working in concert with one another. They felt that this issue would have to be resolved before any meaningful decisions could be made.

Like the general public focus groups, the business listening session participants felt that more traveler information would be useful to the public. This would allow them to make better informed decisions about both routes and modes. Also, like the general public, they saw a need to make what they considered short-term solutions first such as ramp configurations. With the exception of the Austin session none of the other groups mentioned advances in technology and alternative work schedules as viable solutions to improving congestion, although this was mentioned in every general public focus group.

There was more of an understanding among these groups about transportation finance and funding. There was a strong call to end diversions of gas tax revenues. Most felt that the easy fix for additional funding was to raise and/or index the gas tax but they also did not perceive this as very likely. There was some support for a local option tax either on gas or general sales. The Metroplex participants felt very strongly that private sector participation was necessary to get improvements implemented.

Table ES 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/Ft. Worth – NCTCOG offices		8
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INTRODUCTION

The Interstate 35 (I-35) Citizens' Advisory Committee was formed by the Texas Transportation Commission to develop alternatives for meeting the current and future needs of the I-35 corridor. The Texas Transportation Institute conducted focus groups with the general public and listening sessions with members of the business community to assess the attitudes and opinions of these important stakeholders. This report documents the results of four listening sessions that were conducted with the business community, one in each segment of the corridor. A companion report, *Interstate 35 Citizens' Advisory Committee Public Outreach: Focus Group Results*, documents the recruitment efforts for both the general public focus groups and the business listening sessions. For the most part, recruitment for the business listening sessions was accomplished with the help of local chambers of commerce. In some instances, such as the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce and the North Central Council of Governments, these groups actually screened participants for the session.

The listening sessions were comprised of individuals that had businesses within the corridor or businesses that regularly use I-35 for transporting their goods. Two schools in the I-35 corridor were also represented in the sessions.

BUSINESS LISTENING SESSIONS

Segment Three

This group was comprised of individuals that represented:

- a major hospital,
- a major university,
- a company utilizing heavy equipment,
- a housing developer,
- a major grocery store chain, a service company, and
- other businesses in the Austin area.

Almost immediately the conversation turned to the issue of trucks on I-35. The representative from the grocery store indicated that they carry approximately 400,000-500,000 truck loads per year on I-35. Additionally, they have large distribution facilities along the I-35 corridor. A person representing the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce indicated that the chamber is

exploring ways to offer incentives to trucks to move off of I-35 in the peak period. Others also mentioned that the Texas Transportation Commission has asked TxDOT to study options related to this issue.

While there was general agreement that truck traffic on I-35 impedes the flow of traffic, a couple of people did not believe that removing truck traffic would make a significant difference in congestion. They felt that any additional space that was freed would immediately be filled with additional cars. Several people were interested in a report that documented the volume of traffic on SH 130. They were also interested in knowing the origins and destinations of this traffic in an effort to determine what is “local” traffic and what is through traffic. All participants agreed that there should be many solutions explored.

With regard to truck traffic on I-35 and truck use of SH 130, one participant inquired of the grocery store representative why their company did not use the area toll facilities. The grocery store representative indicated that they had conducted their own study of the facility and had concluded that it would not be cost effective to use SH 130 given the total number of loads they move. This person did state; however, that their company would be willing to revisit the issue should incentives such as lower truck tolls be offered on SH 130.

One participant pointed out that in many cases traffic congestion is now seen as a cost of doing business yet actual road user costs are not figured into the calculus of people’s and business’ decision making.

The moderator asked if any studies had been conducted on where employees live. One business had done this and indicated that most of their employees live to the northwest. Subsequently they have continued to move their offices out of the central Austin area. The representative from the university presented a study they had performed that showed that more than 16,000 students reside outside of the city in which the university is located. That means they are commuting on I-35. This university also has a campus in Round Rock. Faculty must commute from San Marcos to Round Rock. To address the congestion issue, the provost has added a stipend to their mileage reimbursement to allow them to take SH 130 to avoid congestion on I-35.

The company that moves heavy equipment indicated that they would prefer to use SH 130; however, their gross vehicle weights prohibit them from doing so. This generated a lot of discussion about the bond indentures associated with SH 130 and what they allow and disallow. Many suggested that they be revisited.

Overwhelmingly the group felt that TxDOT should be taking a more system-wide approach. They also felt that the department should be working more closely with cities and counties along the SH 130 corridor to plan and coordinate development so that SH 130 does not end up being like I-35. Several people mentioned the commercial and housing developments

that have occurred in Buda and Kyle and how many extra trips on I-35 these establishments generate.

There was some discussion of rail options but most did not think this was a viable option for relieving congestion on I-35. Many of the businesses represented either could not use rail or currently used rail but only in a very limited capacity. However, most people felt strongly this was still an option that should be explored. Again, they wanted all solutions considered.

Similar to the general public focus groups, this listening session suggested short-term and long-term solutions. One of the most supported suggestions was providing traveler information. Again, use changeable message signs to inform the public about traffic conditions and travel times so they can make better decisions about routes and modes. Other short-term solutions included offering incentives to divert truck traffic off of I-35. They also suggested allowing longer combination vehicles (LCV) on SH 130. This would provide an incentive to trucking companies to use the toll road if they were allowed to use LCVs. The participants also thought the department should immediately start working with counties and other entities to plan for and direct growth.

Longer term solutions included adding managed high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes to I-35. One participant noted that an HOV facility running into the city from the south, serving Kyle area residents, might be beneficial given that that area supplies a significant amount of area workers and is fairly inexpensive to live in. The group suggested these lanes be priced so as to provide a congestion free alternative. Participants also recognized the need to provide better ramp configurations and acceleration/deceleration lanes.

There was considerable discussion and some disagreement about expanding I-35. Some participants believed that only looking at I-35 would be a mistake, and that for the Austin area there needs to be a more system-wide evaluation that includes other facilities such as Mopac, in particular. It was also noted that I-35 is currently “maxed out” and that it would be a better use of funding to look at developing other alternatives. It was also recommended that there be a focus on maximizing utilization of SH 130.

In terms of paying for transportation solutions, the preferred method was raising the gas tax. Raising and even indexing the gas tax was seen as viable solutions to not only funding transportation programs but achieving other transportation related policy goals such as emissions reduction as well. However, there was much skepticism about the prospects of actually raising the gas tax. The diversion of fuel tax revenues to non-transportation uses was also cited as a major problem. One of the participants noted that due to the growing market for hybrids and other highly fuel efficient vehicles that the fuel tax would not be sustainable. Vehicle miles traveled (VMT) fees were mentioned as a potential solution that should be examined.

Segment One/Two

This group was comprised of:

- a “geo-tech” company,
- two county government agencies,
- a printing company,
- two real estate development companies,
- an area university, and
- a chamber of commerce representative.

Participants noted that construction in the Dallas-Ft. Worth (DFW) area along I-35 has created significant problems but that once completed the newer facilities have made commutes easier. Access continues to be an issue with many of the representatives, as it was noted that the placement of u-turns and exit/entrance points can enable or hinder access to local business depending on where they are placed. Some participants related their experiences in dealing with various TxDOT offices in the area with regard to addressing access issues with mixed results. There was also frustration expressed by a participant with regard to the long response time for a TxDOT office to provide a permit for what was perceived by the participant as being a simple and innocuous job.

Group participants agreed that their region, the DFW area, is growing, will continue to grow, and is a strong economic engine nationally. However, congestion was seen as hurting the local economy in many ways. The chamber of commerce representative noted that they often had difficulty attracting new businesses to the area. In fact, when hosting potential businesses they often offer a helicopter tour as opposed to a driving tour. He stated the reason for doing this was entirely because of traffic congestion.

“Maximizing throughput” was seen as one of the best solutions to area congestion. Participants favored expansion of general purpose facilities but most were not convinced that that would happen and that most new capacity in the region would be in the form of managed lanes.

There was also discussion about utilizing transit to address area congestion. Buses were the preferred transit choice given the expensive nature of rail, but support for transit development as a means of addressing area congestion was by no means unanimous. Many participants stated that it is simply cheaper to build roads and that area residents would much rather travel in their own vehicles to get where they need to go as opposed to having to rely on transit services. Chicago was cited as a good example of how multiple modes could be incorporated into an effective and highly utilized transportation network, but it was quickly pointed out that there

were numerous differences between the Chicago area and the DFW region both in terms culture and development patterns.

The area university representative noted that their institution had made significant investments in their campus transit system that was working rather well. They have developed a rail system and have invested in many new buses that run on express routes. They also strongly discourage students from bringing a car to campus.

There was a substantial amount of discussion with regard to project delivery methods and, in particular, the role of comprehensive development agreements in addressing regional mobility needs. Most of the participants in attendance were clearly in favor of utilizing private equity for infrastructure development but felt stymied by TxDOT administrators as well as federal transportation officials. Issues that were raised specifically included the perceived inefficiency of required environmental assessments and the necessity of business impacts assessments. There was a perception among some participants that these requirements were a means for TxDOT and federal officials to “stick their nose” into local development and usurp local efforts.

One participant noted that the steps being taken in the DFW area with regard to developing priced facilities could be implemented all along the I-35 corridor to address many of the issues that triggered the initiation of these outreach efforts. That sentiment was echoed by other participants.

The lack of funding for transportation development was seen as a major issue, with several participants noting that these discussions would not be necessary if there was sufficient funding to meet the state’s needs. Raising and indexing the fuel tax were mentioned and generally supported by the group participants but most did not believe that this would occur within the foreseeable future. The potential political repercussions of a tax increase were cited as the major factors undermining a fuel tax increase but two participants noted that the lack of public knowledge about transportation funding and financing exacerbates the problem. The chamber representative noted that they often conduct a “Budget 101” workshop to help educate the public.

Segment Four

The segment four focus group was attended by:

- a customs broker,
- a telecommunications company,
- an electrical cooperative,

- a real estate developer,
- an orchard owner, and
- three ranchers.

At the outset of the meeting the ranchers in attendance stated that they were participating so they could get assurances that the Trans Texas Corridor was not going to be constructed.

In terms of general issues with the segment, most of the participants stated that any problems encountered by their business occurred due to various design issues within Laredo or occurred within other segments of I-35 such as in Austin and Waco. The I-35 / Loop 20 interchange was cited as a particularly problematic area in terms of causing local traffic problems.

While there was a general sense of agreement that congestion was becoming an issue in segment four and more specifically in Laredo, most participants stated that congestion was worse along other sections of I-35. The orchard owner noted that he made runs up and down the I-35 corridor and stated that Waco was starting to get very bad in terms of congestion. It was noted by another participant that the entire length of I-35 between San Antonio and Waco causes him trouble in his travels.

It was noted on several occasions that state and federal entities do not understand the importance of the I-35 corridor and in particular Segment Four as it relates to the international border with Mexico. This point was made by the customs brokerage representative as well as the real estate developer.

Road expansion in terms of more lanes and better access roads was cited as a potential solution to the area roadway troubles. In terms of road expansion along segment four, most of the participants did not see why expansion could not occur if it is needed, seeing as how the right-of-way for such expansions would be available. The customs broker noted that while congestion on I-35 and the general condition of I-35 did not much affect his business, his employer supported any expansion of the facility as a means of facilitating better trade.

The issue of developing new facilities was discussed but many of the participants stated that there would be significant right-of-way issues with that approach. The real estate developer noted that current state laws discourage landowners from donating land for such projects due to the fact that land values go up along the facility but the owner often loses their agricultural exemption. This participant noted that a 10 to 20 year "locked-in," guaranteed value on land would help make landowners more willing to participate in the process.

Rail and transit development were viewed favorably by participants, but in general there was a strong belief that any problems in the area could be addressed by making better use of existing infrastructure such as medians, shoulders, and access roads.

Participants in the Segment Four listening session did not favor increasing fuel taxes in order to meet short-term and long-term needs. Toll roads and toll road revenues were mentioned as one possible solution by one of the ranching representatives but that solution did not appear to have much support among other participants. Raising vehicle inspection and registration fees were also recommended and at one point discussion turned towards using an EZ Tag-type system that would charge out of region drivers for use of the area roadway network. While there was some support for the idea of charging out of area drivers for use of the local roadway network it appears that the group did not feel that this solution would be workable.

Ending diversions was endorsed by this group as one possible means of addressing the state's transportation financing issues.

Segment Three/Four

This listening session was attended by representatives of:

- a large construction firm,
- a used car dealer,
- two cities,
- a material distributor,
- a construction equipment manufacturer,
- a non-profit,
- two consulting firms,
- a transportation advocacy group,
- the area Regional Mobility Authority (RMA),
- a building supply store, and
- a regional mobility advocacy coalition.

The building supply chain indicated that it ran approximately 80 trucks in the area.

There was general agreement by those in attendance that the San Antonio area was growing and would continue to grow. There was also general agreement that the problems faced by the region would continue to worsen if action was not taken to address them.

Congestion on I-35 for the businesses represented is an issue but it was expressed more in terms of the affect on their employees and less in terms of their business operations. Several participants, including the representative of the used car dealership, noted that their employees had substantial commute times. The used car dealer noted that commute times into San Antonio in the AM peak and out of San Antonio in the PM peak were the worst. This business had several locations, and the representative noted that employees making the reverse commute to their New Braunfels location did not have the same issue as their San Antonio based employees.

The representative of the construction equipment manufacturer did indicate that congestion can seriously affect their deliveries. This participant noted that delayed deliveries one day cause delays for the next day's deliveries, as their operations run on a shuttle-type system. The construction company representative also stated that congestion can interfere with their schedules. The business consulting representative noted that even though congestion does not affect his business directly, it does create a domino effect that affects his business as well as those he represents.

“Bottlenecking” was identified as one of the major problems along I-35, which was attributed to design issues. Poorly designed on- and off-ramps at Loop 1604 were highlighted as one example. The building supply representative noted that it is frustrating to see ramps, such as at US 183 and I-35, that just open and already appear to be too poorly designed to accommodate the current volumes, much less the future volumes.

The lack of information with regard to traffic conditions was highlighted by several participants throughout the session. This was expressed in terms of a lack of information about traffic incidents, congestion, and alternate routes. A couple of representatives noted that they or other employees traveled on a regular basis into or through Austin, and that the lack of information about traffic conditions in Austin is a real problem since congestion can be very erratic. In response to this comment, the consulting representative noted that having information about congestion and incidents is not enough, because many drivers do not know enough about area roads to be able to take advantage of alternate routes and therefore avoid congestion. Better use of existing dynamic message signs and an AM station dedicated to relaying traffic conditions were recommended as means of providing travel information to drivers. The RMA representative stated that if drivers do not know they can save an hour and half by using SH 130 for \$5, then how is SH 130 a viable alternative? At a later point in the session, the building supply chain representative noted that technology is a much cheaper solution to area traffic problems than rail or new facilities, and that his employer was utilizing more GPS-based applications in their fleet to address various problems.

In response to the discussion regarding possible solutions to issues facing the I-35 corridor and Segments Three and Four, one of the city government representatives recommended three short-term fixes that he believed could be carried out without substantial investment. These

included better incident management and making more of an effort at informing the public about carpooling and park and ride opportunities.

Issues with regard to planning and coordination between various state and local entities recurred continually throughout the course of the session. It was noted on numerous occasions by numerous participants that there is a substantial number of governmental entities in the area that all seemed to be charged with the planning of various infrastructure, but that there appears to be little, if any, coordination. A “disconnect” between TxDOT and the various local entities was highlighted by one of the consulting representatives who went on to say that projects are often developed without having those who would benefit from the development on board from the beginning. The building supply chain representative noted that TxDOT has a bad habit of caving to political pressure and “shoehorning” on- and off-ramps in areas where they do not belong.

Rail was discussed a great deal as a possible solution to issues facing I-35. A city representative noted that the presence of an integrated transit system (that included rail, transit, and pedestrian facilities) in other areas of the world reduces the need for vehicles in those areas. However, other participants noted that funding is simply not available to carry out the development of such systems. A second point was made by the representative of the used car dealership that rail would most likely not help commuters very much because they would still have to find some means of getting them from the rail station to their place of employment. He also stated rail would not help their business because they had millions of dollars already tied into their location and would not abandon it to relocate closer to rail.

One of the city representatives in attendance noted that park and ride facilities were becoming a lot more crowded, and that people were starting to better coordinate carpooling and vanpooling efforts in the area. Incentives for carpooling and even high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, assuming that HOVs rode for free, had some support among several participants. One of the consultants in the session noted that solutions such as these would help the area in the event that it went into non-attainment for air quality. However, in terms of actually implementing an HOV or HOT facility there was a belief that general purpose lanes could not be taken and would have to be incorporated as part of added capacity.

Another idea that was proposed with some support was having expanded rail services and an elevated highway for through traffic, similar to the facility located at Hildebrand. The construction company representative noted that doing a double-deck facility would probably solve a lot of problems but that it would be extremely expensive; perhaps even more than the Trans Texas Corridor was expected to cost.

A couple of participants pointed out the need to separate truck traffic from passenger vehicles. However, the ability to do so, they noted, would depend on the available right-of-way. One of the consultants in attendance stated that depending on available right-of-way, it would

probably be best to go “up,” such as with a double deck facility, in the urban core, and also build “out” outside of downtown and central San Antonio. The RMA representative stated that expanding Loop 410 and/or Loop 1604 to accommodate more traffic could help divert through traffic and the regional mobility advocacy coalition representative agreed with this recommendation, noting that Loop 410 was insufficient to accommodate trucks. While not stated directly in response to this line of discussion, the construction equipment manufacturing representative had previously stated that his company would use alternate facilities and even SH 130 if it was economically viable. However, they currently have to make a lot of “through” stops in metro areas, and alternate facilities to I-35 would not help them.

In terms of funding any future improvements, it was suggested by several participants throughout the session that diversions need to be eliminated or at least reduced. “Legislative” diversions and funding Department of Public Safety with fuel tax revenues were specifically mentioned by one of the transportation funding advocates in attendance. Indexing the fuel tax to account for inflation was also recommended by one participant.

CONCLUSIONS

Many businesses along the I-35 corridor see increasing congestion as a serious problem that has or will impact their businesses and/or employees. There is no clear consensus of what should be done to address this problem. There is some support for increasing alternative modes such as rail but this is primarily in the San Antonio area.

There is frustration in the DFW area with what is perceived as a “roadblock” by TxDOT. In this area many feel as if they have been left to develop their own solutions, including financing solutions, and now that they have done that they are being thwarted by TxDOT and others.

In the Austin area many participants felt as if more should be done to utilize existing infrastructure such as SH 130. Participants in this session said a more system-wide approach was needed because they felt that improvements to I-35 were not likely, although they did support adding HOV/HOT lanes to I-35.

In the San Antonio area, several people insisted that design issues with I-35 were a major contributor to the congestion. Like the Austin area, the San Antonio session participants expressed concern over the number of trucks on the I-35 facility and suggested separate facilities.

Participants in the Laredo business session do not see congestion on I-35 like in the other sessions but they do recognize that improvements need to be made now to prevent congestion like they experience in other cities such as Waco and Austin. The concerns of this group

focused on expanding the existing I-35 corridor rather than developing a new corridor, and increasing trade with Mexico.

As with the general public focus groups, these participants suggested some short-term fixes such as improving and/or providing more traveler information, improving utilization of alternate facilities, and making geometric fixes. Although these participants had a much greater understanding of transportation funding and financing, they too, felt the problem was overwhelming. There was unanimous support for ending diversions and strong support for increasing and/or indexing the gas tax. A few people mentioned that the gas tax would not be sustainable in the future and that other ideas such as VMT fees should be explored now.

APPENDIX A. BUSINESS LISTENING SESSION DISCUSSION GUIDE

Business Community Listening Session
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.

Part 2 – Welcome and Introductions – 15 minutes

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.

The purpose of the listening session is to find out your thoughts, opinions, and ideas on the I-35 corridor. We ask that you be open and honest. Don't worry if your opinion differs from others. We will be recording the session today but that is only for our own note-taking. Your responses will all remain anonymous.

I'd like to begin with introductions. Please give us your first name and what type of business you have.

Okay, 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' and businesses' perspective. They and TxDOT want to know what you think.

We have a few goals for this session today. We want to:

- identify what is or isn't working now in the I-35 corridor,
- identify the needs for the future, and
- discuss strategies for meeting the identified needs.

Part 3 – Current Perceptions – 30 minutes

I want to spend just a few minutes asking you about your travel on I-35. I want to focus primarily on what we're calling segment 2. This is the area that stretches from around the Temple area to south of San Antonio. I realize that travel all along I-35 may impact your business and that's fine too.

How does travel on I-35 impact your business?

How do you/your business use the corridor?

Does traveling on I-35 affect your employees? How so?

Do you know/has your business done any studies to find out where most of your employees live?

Do you know how many miles they commute?

Do you know how your employees commute?

Do you offer incentives for carpooling or taking other modes? (free parking, transit passes, vanpools, etc.)

What do you think IS working in the I-35 corridor?

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, with what do you disagree?

Does anything about them surprise you?

Part 4 – Future – 40 minutes

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.

APPENDIX B. BUSINESS LISTENING SESSION NOTES

I-35 Corridor: Austin Business Listening Session

Participants:

1. Texas State University San Marcos
2. Flynn Construction, Vice Chair for Transportation, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce
3. Staff, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce
4. Heldenfels Enterprises (pre-cast concrete)
5. Senior Project Manager, Heldenfels Enterprises
6. Seton Hospital System
7. HEB
8. Pape Dawson Engineers
9. Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce
10. ABC Home and Commercial Services
11. Real Estate Development
12. Engineering Firm
13. HDR

Business Use of I-35

7. We are a major user with over 52 million miles, 165 thousand store deliveries, and 225 thousand trailer loads per year. Twenty percent of our outbound loads are on I-35 and this number may actually be more. We have about 45 thousand truck loads on I-35 and a large portion of these come back for a total of around 400 to 500 thousand loads per year. Therefore, we are interested in anything that frees up traffic. We currently have large facilities in Houston, San Antonio, Weslaco, and San Marcos, and are building a new facility in New Braunfels.

2. We are currently working to direct traffic off of I-35 in peak periods. We wonder why HEB (participant 7) would not use the 45 and 130 toll roads, as it seems like these facilities would save time.

7. There was a study done regarding use of 45/130, of which I was not involved, but we don't think that those facilities would be cost effective given the number of loads we ship.

2. What if tolls were reduced or subsidized in some manner?

7. We would love to consider this and work on it.

Moderator: Is there a policy at HEB regarding when trucks travel?

7. Trucks run 24 hours a day, and there is no peak time.

3. So there is no increased cost associated with traveling in the peak?

7. Drivers are paid on an “activity based” system, and congestion does not affect this. We use toll facilities where it makes sense, such as in Harris County.

2. What “price point” do you need? Getting trucks off the road would increase flow, which would reduce fuel costs.

4. We ourselves are limited because 95 percent of our loads are overweight. We also can’t travel during the peak period. Congestion is bad in the area and it makes it very difficult to get up north.

2. SH 130 indeed has restrictions on weight and axel loads. The bond restrictions on the facility mean that the owners want to reduce wear and tear on the facility.

Moderator: So are trucks the issue?

6. We have four facilities on I-35 with a lot of workers and patients, so having an I-35 facility that is “flowing and not clogged” is very important to us. We would also like to see accidents and the associated “trauma” decreased. It would be nice to have traffic diverted to 130. We also have a sister facility in Waco.

8. We drive I-35 mostly to Georgetown and sometimes to San Antonio. I was at the commission meetings and “Meadows” wanted a report in 60 days on incentivizing trucks to use 130.

Moderator: We did a study on this subject but the 45 connection was not completed yet. It would be nice to revisit the study now.

8. From my viewpoint the commission staff was “emphatic” about moving trucks to 130.

Moderator: The primary incentive identified in our study was reducing tolls.

10. Are there any numbers on utilization of 130? It looks empty to me.

(Over-talking)

3. 183, 45 North, and Mopac are ahead of traffic projections. 130 is behind.

12. There are a lot of trucks on I-35, and this points to a disconnect between road user costs. Everyone recognizes this but in practice it does not factor into people’s “calculus.” There is a need to make costs more transparent and visible, either through tolls or incentives.

3. What becomes interesting is the disconnect between use and cost as traffic in that traffic has become accepted as a part of doing business. This is a surprise. There needs to be a dialogue about driving down these costs.

2. I have identified three things:

- In terms of tolling trucks on I-35, this simply can't be done.
- Load restrictions and covenants on 130 need to be removed.
- The pricing system needs to be changed to induce trucks to use the facility.
Perhaps try a 6 month trial period.

6. Congestion also increases air pollution, which affects the region in terms of non-attainment and other various health issues.

11. We travel to Dallas a lot. Trucks are not the main problem: residential development is, such as in Kyle. Kyle supplies a lot of workers to the area, and it is very cheap to live there. A lot of people are moving there and houses generate up to 10 trips per day and most of those will touch I-35. Right now we are trying to keep up with demand for services. It takes 45 minutes to go 18 miles into downtown sometimes, and taking trucks off of 35 will just put more cars on the roadway. HOV lanes would be beneficial. I have used them in Harris County. We need to "look globally" for solutions.

10. We run small vehicles into and around Georgetown. Most of our employees cannot afford to live around here. They live in Kyle and Buda. They always have to come into the office and we are exploring the use of GPS technology so that workers do not have to come in all the time. We often try to route them near their homes at the end of the day. We do not provide reimbursements for use of toll roads in the area, but we are looking into that. It may allow us to make more deliveries. We pay on a commission basis.

1. We have a Round Rock campus, so our faculty that teaches there has to go back and forth to San Marcos. They are reimbursed for the miles they travel and the provost added a stipend for the cost of TxTags when the 130 facility opened. 130 could save our faculty up to an hour on their trips and it is better than wasting time and missing classes. Faculty only get the stipend if they use the toll facilities.

2. In the construction industry foremen often make up to \$20 to \$30 an hour. It is not a good use of resources to have them sitting in congestion. It is often cheaper to have them use the toll road.

Moderator: Have any of you done studies to see where your employees live?

1. We have done this for our students, and about 16,000 come from outside of San Marcos. This is only a "drop in the bucket" however. We have tried running shuttles and have a 42-bus fleet. I saw a study that noted that three of the biggest bottlenecks are in San Marcos.

6. We have worked with CapMetro before. If we are talking about I-35 we also need to be talking about Mopac as part of the system. There needs to be a "system wide" evaluation.

1. The bus system is supported by fees, and we are working with federal and state entities to acquire funding after the census. San Marcos should be designated an urban area after the 2010 census, which would mean more money for us. An Austin to San Antonio rail corridor might be a good solution.

3. We avoid I-35 “like the plague.” Mopac is getting bad as well. Major reconstruction on I-35 is going to be needed.

12. There is simply not enough infrastructure along I-35 to meet demand. TxDOT has to be a part of the solution. I-35 is the best option (the only option, really), as TxDOT does not have a rail division. This is a wasted opportunity. We need to look at all options.

11. We have twice surveyed employees, and over half live north of Mopac and 183. We keep moving out. We need to let employees figure out how to deal with this. We have given them flexibility but people want to live where they work. Good planning is required. We don’t want to force them to use Mopac and I-35.

(Moderator passes out handout.)

13. I agree with the numbers here. A temporary fix will only cause the new capacity to fill with cars in the absence of trucks. What is TxDOT doing in the short term to deal with trucks? I-35 has a lot of problems between Ben White and 183.

Moderator: Is it possible (and worth it) to expand I-35, or should other options be pursued?

8. In looking at future congestion, 130 should perhaps be “redesignated” as I-35 and shift traffic through that facility. We could then use managed lanes along the primary I-35 in the problem areas such as Austin and San Antonio.

2. Our leaders say that there is no money, so we need to maximize available resources. This would include moving trucks, using HOV lanes, and trying to get more money for I-35.

3. It seems like a new MIS on I-35 is needed so that the public can understand what is needed and can actually be done. It seems like in the short term businesses should work on commuting issues. “Everything needs to be on the table” given the cost of fixing I-35.

7. There are a lot of potential solutions. These include:

1. diverting traffic;
2. getting more trucks off the road, such as through lengthening trailers;
3. using long chain vehicles (these have been studied and safety can be maintained); and
4. implementing a freight shuttle system (long term).

Moderator: So where does freight fit into all of this? Would you use rail?

4. We cannot use rail. We don't go near any rail facilities for our jobs and our equipment won't fit on rail.

7. We use rail but it is not a significant part of our operations.

3. Ninety-three percent of truck traffic in the area "terminals" here.

10. Ben White to 290 is the worst part of the area for us. We would like to know how much of that traffic is local.

2. An HOV lane would get a lot of that local traffic.

3. Could TERP funds be used to offer incentives for trucks? What about using ramp metering?

Moderator: So there has to be a "pot" of options. But what about expansion of I-35?

4. I-35 is part of the business. Our big problem/concern is safety. We deal with a lot of different problems. All of the on-ramps, for example, cause a problem. Trucks have to slow down for vehicles getting on the roadway and then it takes a while for them to get going again. 130 would be a great alternative as it is wide open and has fewer on-ramps. All of our axle weights are legal, but often our gross weight puts us over the limit.

3. There need to be studies to show what the added maintenance cost would be for trucks on 130. This would allow businesses to make decisions in support or opposition of allowing trucks on the facility.

2. I-35 is maxed out in terms of expansion. It will be cheaper to "go out on dirt" as opposed to elevating. Bond restrictions on 130 should be reevaluated.

13. 130 will eventually be developed due to the lack of development restrictions.

8. But 130 has no access roads. Hopefully it will stay that way.

2. Once public infrastructure is placed in the area, such as water and wastewater, development will occur.

10. Developers in the county direct development. Development and utilities follow each other. This does not occur in urban areas.

11. State and local entities can do a better job of directing growth.

9. There were no incentives to grow out east, which is what the city wanted.

11. Problems have already been created in Buda and Kyle. Austin "never did utilities" and we are now trying to catch up.

12. I worked on the I-35 MIS study. Improvements such as adding a lane and HOV would not have significantly improved level of service.

13. There were certain areas that were “off limits” such as the State Cemetery but right of way was not as big of an issue.

2. 130 was just built. We need to look at how to utilize that and not at how to expand I-35. We might be able to get HOV on I-35.

Moderator: The public says that 130 doesn’t help commuting, especially downtown trips.

11. There are not a lot people touching I-35, but lots on 183. HOV and multimodal solutions need to be explored.

2. But we can’t do those things without getting trucks off of I-35.

10. But there are not as many trucks on I-35 during the peak.

13. There needs to be good ITS infrastructure. Travelers who might use 130 need to know how bad it is on I-35 going through Austin.

12. Those signs are there but are not being used. Seems expensive.

Moderator: We’ve discussed HOV lanes. What about HOT lanes?

8. That is what I was getting at before.

2. But we can’t toll on I-35.

Moderator: There are programs for that.

13. If it takes 10 years to get it done then it is not much of a solution.

11. Removing truck traffic may be good, even though only 10 percent of traffic is trucks. This would reduce acceleration time and would require less road space.

2. I still think we need to get 130 “working and maximized.” Trucks are all over the place and getting them off the road would reduce idling time for all drivers.

3. Maybe the focus should be on maximizing 130 in the peak period and not just focus on trucks.

12. The signs at 45 and I-35 can be simple enough...they just need to say “congested.”

11. Origin and destination is an issue on 130. Not everyone is going all the way through.

8. The Texas Transportation Commission is trying to up the speed limit on 130 to 80 mph.

7. Not all trucks will go faster with a higher speed limit, such as HEB. We limit our speeds.

Moderator: So how should these fixes be paid for?

8. Raise gas taxes.

Moderator: Does everyone here know what they pay in gas taxes?

(Mostly yes.)

Moderator: So the solution is to raise the gas tax?

(Mostly yes.)

8. This assumes that there is the political will.

12. Why is raising the gas tax considered the “third rail” of Texas politics?

2. It is mostly due to “political imagery.”

Moderator: Does all money go to transportation?

(Group seems generally aware of diversions, specifically the 25% to transportation.)

Moderator: So you would be alright with an increase in the fuel tax but the increases would need to go to transportation?

8. Indexing should be done to avoid this problem in the future. The sales tax addresses this with its structure.

10. A substantial increase would help in other ways, such as by reducing trips and pollution. Infrastructure needs to be invested in.

3. There needs to be a lot of solutions.

7. Our approach is how to make money by lowering price and increasing volume. Perhaps we should look at 130 in this light.

10. 130 was supposed to be closer to Austin but it got moved out due to politics.

8. Allowing local option taxes is another option. Tolls should also be expanded.

3. Diversions should be ended.

8. Carona has said that diversions are a “smoke screen.” Other taxes would need to be increased for the offsets from the diversions. Diversions are not a big part of the total need.

2. The gas tax is not sustainable due to hybrids. Within 10 years the revenue stream will be declining. What about having a quasi-state agency, like the LCRA, that could generate a cash flow and revenue stream. This might allow for maintenance and expansion of infrastructure.

Moderator: How has the tolling situation in San Antonio been proceeding?

8. "Politics in that arena are dicey."

Moderator: Perhaps the business community should help educate the public. In Jarrell we found a massive amount of misinformation permeating the group's participants regarding toll roads.

12. Leaders have trouble grasping this, too. They don't seem to recognize that a fuel tax increase is the best way to go.

9. Politics and getting reelected will not permit this. Politicians don't want to raise taxes.

2. I am stunned to learn how little we actually pay for use.

9. What about expanding local alternatives (like 620 and 360) since most traffic is local.

8. Managed lanes are coming to Mopac with lots of other developments. What about VMT fees? These need to be discussed. We need to change the way we charge people and I like the idea.

Moderator: What do you all think about the concept?

(Not much disagreement.)

3. I personally pay a lot in tolls. Fuel taxes are negligible compared to that cost.

Moderator discusses concessions...

3. The only locally owned toll road is 183A. Would incorporating other toll facilities into CTRMA improve efficiency and address some of these problems? It would certainly increase the leveraging potential.

Closing Comments

2. Regional planning is an issue. There are too many agencies. We are developing goals for regional planning.

9. Watson's bill dies quickly.

3. We need a "united front."

10. I'm surprised that local option does not generate more enthusiasm.

Dallas Business Listening Session: April 14, 2010

In Attendance

Ft. Worth “Geotech” Company

Denton County

Tarrant County Judge’s Office

DeSoto Printing Company

Mercantile Partners

University of North Texas

Ft. Worth Chamber of Commerce

Armstrong Development

- We are located in DeSoto, about a block off of I-35 E, and we have weathered the recent construction of I-35. I know that there is more construction coming and I live in Midlothian and the recent construction has made my commute easier. From what I have heard the new plans from TxDOT have more of a rural feel to them and are not representative of the growth that is going to occur in the area. I have seen the growth in congestion occur so I am very interested in seeing what kind of plans are being developed in this effort.
- There needs to be a focus on maximizing throughput and taking care of local access. There are a lot of vacant tracks along I-35 W in Ft. Worth and development is stagnant because of the congestion. It is difficult to attract occupants even within a few miles of downtown because it is so difficult for people to get down there if they need to visit their clients. Ideally, the solution is to maximize throughput somehow, such as through expanding the lanes. And without local access, such as u-turns, you cut off all that development because people can’t get to businesses. It is a twofold problem and you can’t focus on one without the other.
- In the DeSoto area, the plan that came out to widen the road was focused more on the road itself and not the access, and the community said to go back to the drawing board. That pushed the project back ten years but it was worth it. Improving the thoroughfare and the access (having an exit point just past one street so that you would have total access along that stretch and the entrance ramp that was just before the next intersection) was a great improvement.

- That is called an “X” ramp configuration and they are moving toward that in new development. If you remember back in the day they used diamond ramps but we are now back to x-ramps. In Denton County we have a lot of experience in these issues. We get in early and participate financially with the state in planning the projects. We are going to start working on I-35 W around the Tarrant County line. We get with all of the cities along the corridor and then go to the state with their issues. We can do this because we have an engineering firm on hand that can help with incorporating these issues into the plan.
- At 820 and 35 we had a local exit and entrance issue because of the interchange and a couple of exits were going to be eliminated. We suggested putting in new exits farther down and TxDOT had no interest in that.
- (Denton) But that is the Ft. Worth District. For the longest time they were in the “stone age” on mobility issues. But most of the trouble we have had has been from administration in Austin. The problem with I-35 isn’t access and mobility. And it isn’t coming up with the money. The problem with TxDOT and the State is that all of the delivery methods we can use for a project of this magnitude have either been taken away or are going to be taken away through legislative processes. We can design a road everyone wants and come up with the money but we can’t deliver it. Right now the state does about \$4 billion statewide, not counting CDAs. We are currently pursuing pass-through financing but it is probably going to be taken away by the folks in Austin because there is some phobia about a private firm making a profit. But everyone makes a profit when roads are built. The issues are, with \$3 to \$4 billion in road projects a year statewide, you have one road from 635 to 380 that is over \$4 billion, and you have I-35 W that is another 4 billion, the funding scenario requires innovation. There is no courage to raise the fuel tax by the legislature. The feds will not help. They want us to first study mitigating business impacts along the corridor. That is how they start putting their nose in this. They ask a question and the answer is to start promulgating regulatory processes. From the time you see cones go up on a road it could have been 16 to 20 that someone like us has been working on it and most of that time is eaten up with state and federal processes...making sure there aren’t going to be any warblers affected and doing crap like environmental justice. And you are still seeing increases in congestion over that time. We need better project delivery, and I know TxDOT is trying, but they have never been good at working with the legislature. They need to let the locals use the chambers and local businesses to help out. Either help us or get out the way. The CDA has gotten a bad rap, but at every turn in the project whoever is working on it has profit built into their contract. There is value added at every transaction and profit is already in the system, but the legislature seems focused on the private sector not being able to make profit. We have had three CDAs up here and they all returned a profit of around 11 to 13%. When the

North Texas Tollway Authority (NTTA) does a project they charge a 135 coverage ratio, and that is above what it costs to build the road. Fifteen to 35 is what is known as system risk, but we would call that profit. We expect 15 cents to come back on the dollar.

Moderator – But couldn't that be a requirement of the bond market?

- (Denton) It could be, but NTTA is actually at about 150 coverage ratio. My point is that everyone makes a profit. The difference between public and private, in a concession, is that if the revenue is not generated the developer is at risk. They go bankrupt if they don't generate the revenue and you still have the road. This happened in California. But the Texas legislature thinks it is bad for the private sector to make a profit on this risk and so they are taking away CDAs. So now all we have is pass-through financing (PTF), which means the state owns the risk. The state then asks the private sector what can be built for an assumed amount of revenue. But the state does not like risk Fund 6 funds, so they assume there will be less revenue, meaning that less roadway can be built. We were trying to get the commission to change their rules on PTF to be more like CDAs (to pay financing and coverage and to go out for longer times) but Nichols did not like that, so the commission let the comment period expire and now we are starting from scratch. This will affect those folks in DeSoto and south Tarrant County who cannot "self develop." Those who can develop, will. We in Denton are focused on 635 to 380 and from the Tarrant County line to Denton. The delivery tolls we have are going to innovate on 35 E and 35 W can be used corridor wide. In order to get anything done, you have to have a plan that everybody likes, you have to have one that carried the traffic, you have to have a financing scheme, and you have to have buy-in from the locals on that scheme. A CDA has several components. There is private finance and private debt. NTTA does not have equity; they are 100% debt. The private sector can bring equity to the table. When you have equity, you can get better debt coverage because you have "skin in the game." We (the county) have authority to incur debt, contract with private companies, and build facilities. So why do we need the state? Well we have to deal with the federal government, and the people in the Grier building don't want us solving our own problems because they then become irrelevant. The county has a better bond rating than the state. We can take money and leverage it with private companies to reduce risk. But we have to go backward now to convince people that this isn't "alchemy" and have to convince the Grier building that we are not trying to supplant their usefulness, and we have to convince the federal government that we are consistent with their methods. If we can do as well as 121 was done, there is no reason this can't be done all the way between Laredo and OK.

Moderator – So you are saying that the current plans for 35 are fine; it is just the delivery method that is a problem?

- (Denton) We are bringing in our own engineering firm to develop the corridor plan for our area that is consistent with what the I-35 corridor coalition wants. TxDOT is doing the eastside, “the North Early,” because it is not viable as a managed lanes facility. That part will come up just short of the confluence of 35 E&W. We know what the interchange will look like but we are not committing to building that. We are leaving that alone, but if we do a concession model it will be from 380 to 635 and will include the interchange but TxDOT has committed to doing the plans and funding , the short part from loop 288 to south of (inaudible). But what I am trying to say is that whatever innovation we do in Denton will work corridor wide and statewide. We believe that because of that we will have problems with TxDOT and the feds.
- I have had the opportunity to drive to Oklahoma several times and the need is clearly there. If there is one wreck traffic backs up. Between 635 and Denton it is bad.
- Talking about risk and profit...what are the assumptions on cost and what about inflation factors for cost? And how are the revenues estimated. Seems like you need to be very conservative so you are not building in a lot of “fat.”
- The public sector has to be conservative and do the worst case scenario and will not move forward if there is substantial risk. Not so with the private sector. They are going to be more flexible with their assumptions in how they deliver the project. TxDOT had about 30 phases for the JBL freeway. Cintra suggested it be dropped to five phases when they came because they don’t make any money until it opens. I was told that on federal projects that cities within the corridor are eligible for 100 percent reimbursement on utility relocation. But that money goes through TxDOT in lump sums; all reimbursements statewide. But Austin does not give the areas all of the money they need for letting. Denton County is being asked to lend the region 57 million for the ROW on the LBJ freeway.

Moderator – Does everyone agree with all of this?

- I think it makes a lot of sense. It seems to me that this is a project that has three levels of interest: the metro areas, the state, and interstate. You also have to look at the projections of growth within 15 to 20 years—it is going to double. The roads won’t be able to keep up, so there has to be a focus on mass transit. There is no political will for the gas tax, and I think there needs to be discipline to not spend the money we get on other things. There needs to be an “escalating element” in there that increases revenue and reduces driving.

- (Denton) I think I-35 E is as close as you are going to get to what the vision of the TTC was supposed to be. As part of the federal requirements we have other modes (rail) within the corridor. We are implementing the state's vision of the future for transportation but they won't raise the gas tax and help out.
- Somehow you need to form a coalition so that everyone is on the same page moving forward.
- I see no problems with what has been discussed.
- This all comes back to funding. If we had funding we would not be in this situation.
- (Denton) Not so. Our facility is just as much about managing demand.

Moderator – Does everyone know what managed lanes are?

- General - yes.
- It just seems that you can't talk about cross sections and all that without also discussing the funding situation. If we had unlimited funds you could build facilities with limited access that work to manage demand without tolling.
- (Denton) The state really did push what you are talking about in their managed lanes development but the way it was done it was worthless. It was not until Cintra came in that at-grade access and slip ramps were introduced and the public got on board. The funding pushes the facility design.
- But I think that funding is everything. These discussions would not be taking place if funding was not an issue. If you watch, there are already people asking him (Denton) for money.

Moderator – There are all sorts of areas that have had to step forward.

- (Denton) I'm not talking about stepping forward. We have fully funded our projects and it helps other regions but it is not altruistic. I am interested in what the public is saying because we have had extensive public input on I-35 E.

Moderator – So everyone is on board with the I-35 plans that are on the table?

- Well it is still in development.

Moderator –But everyone agrees something needs to be done, right?

- General – Yes.
- When the public is polled, do you ask about what their financial situation is? I imagine that who you are hearing from are people who think that it is their duty to look at these issues and feel it is their task to look forward on these issues.

Moderator – Question to chamber of commerce reps and schools: In terms of development, when you have people who are thinking of moving into the area, does the quality of life as affected by congestion influence their decisions?

- Yes. There is a reason you give helicopter tours on Saturdays, but now even Saturdays are bad. People from California that want to come here are saying we have a traffic problem.
- (UNT guy) I worked for Cap Metro for a while. I have been up here since 2003. What I have seen that is strange is that the reverse commute between Denton and Dallas is worse than the regular commute. The numbers are not huge but it is surprising. We are pushing for our students and commuters to live closer to where they work. Our rail will be finished late next year. Numbers will be small but there are concentrations here that will use it. We tell people to not bring their car to school and ride the bus. We are building a new stadium and I can see that in ten years it will be a problem area. Where I-35 E & W come together is more important for us than getting back and forth to Dallas.
- (Denton) What we are doing is trying to partner with TxDOT and UNT to build pedestrian walkways. Denton County is earning 7 million a month in toll money.
- In Fort Worth we won't be able to attract businesses and they will get frustrated in the future. They are not so much frustrated now but they will be. We would like to move with rail.

Moderator – (Handout) So can you build your way out of congestion? Is transit a viable alternative.

- I have experience in this as I am called to visit our various franchises across the nation. We have a franchise in Chicago, and I took the blue line into town from the airport. At five o'clock that city shuts down, and everyone gets on the train. I got on the train, and the guy I was seeing had a nice house about an hour down the train and was close to the station. People would use that here.

- (Denton) What you have to keep in mind is the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The Chicago MSA is one fourth of the size of DFW, so it's a much larger scale and a much larger task.
- Well, it had a certain appeal. And it's not to say they didn't have highways there.
- (Denton) You can build a line mile for about \$5 million. You are talking twice that if not more for transit. We have 56 K cars that get off of 1171 and turn south on 35 in Lewisville. That's a lot of people.
- (UNT) Trains don't carry that many people. They are glitzy. I'm a bus guy. We increased ridership tenfold with a million dollar investment in vehicles.
- And I know people are trying to tie trains in with buses and integrate.
- (UNT) Well we will have a nice little train system with the DCA but you will have to utilize multiple different modes to get where you want to go. I think people are more likely to just use the bus and not have to switch modes.
- What makes rail so expensive? Seems like the rail is there.
- They are not the right kind of trains and railroads control the lines.

Moderator – Let's talk about highway expansion. Do you assume that all expansion will be managed?

- (Denton) We are adding both managed and GP.
- I have heard the expanded free capacity will never get built.
- (Denton) We know that in a few years the 18 lanes we are trying to build will be at capacity. But if you've got four managed lanes in there it cuts down on congestion and increases travel times. When you put in managed lanes, an auxiliary lane, and a functioning frontage system six GP lanes will carry a lot of traffic.
- Well I agree, but Tarrant County on the N Tarrant Expressway is coming back with four GP lanes and four ML.

- (Denton) The state has never been good at projecting future volumes. They are always under project. We built on 2499 and their 2010 projected volumes were current traffic in 1999.

Moderator – (Discusses public research we have done....transit....mileage fees....)

- Need to just index the fuel tax. Keep it simple. We have a system in place.
- But what about electric vehicles who are not paying anything.
- A lot of this relates to elected officials. They don't want new taxes (referring to mileage fees) being levied on their constituencies.

Moderator – Discusses mileage fees a little more.....Austin focus groups.

- I want to go back for a minute... We have one of the largest “urban knots” in the nation, but how many have access to transit? Maybe half? What does that say about our cars and our roads. We have been successful with a lot of piecemeal solutions here in this region. Other areas of the nation have had trouble, but we have at least been able to somewhat move forward. But to me, we lack an integrated plan that incorporates all modes. I think it is great that we are talking about rail in the I-35 corridor. We are going to have to raise the gas tax and we are probably going to have to do mileage fees. I just got back from Toronto, and they have a very old subway system. They also have streetcars and we were all over that city without having a car. I don't know if we are dense enough here to do that but we should start to approach solutions like that. We have tried for three legislative sessions to do local option and got slapped around for trying to find our own solutions. They are not going to have the guts at the legislature to do the things that need to be done. We are having delay after delay on finding solutions. When I started here there were no homes north of 820, but now it's jammed up there. So how are you going to resolve this without an integrated plan.?

Moderator – Doesn't the long range plan address this?

- (Denton) It has to be fiscally constrained. The frustration I have is that the people who are supposed to be doing their job (TxDOT, FHWA, the legislature, EPA, others) are not doing their job and are keeping those of us who want to do our job from doing it.
- What is supposed to be the output of this effort here?

Moderator discussed the research effort.

- Where is Joe Citizen in all of this?

Moderator – We are doing those focus groups separately.

- My experience with TxDOT is that it takes up to four months to get a permit out of them for a driveway. We are talking about these mobility issues but it's pathetic that it takes so long for a driveway permit. All we wanted to do was to fix ruts from trucks entering our facility and pour some concrete. We submitted in December and did not hear back until April.
- We spent a quarter of a million dollars redesigning the Meacham Exit and the district finally accepted our design and then asked how we planned on paying for it.

(Moderator discusses trust issues with TxDOT.)

- You have the issues of diversions always coming up; the withholding of funds. Education is obviously going to be a huge issue.

Moderator – Who is going to do the education?

- We (chamber rep) are doing that. We do a “Budget 101” and have done so with healthcare issues. Things like that need to be done at the state and the federal level.
- Instead of cost per mile has this all been discussed in terms of cost per minute?
- (Denton) We do that at the COG. We take our maps from 1985 to current and show what the effect of congestion will be on travel times if funding is not received. But we all know the public is ignorant...so we are going to have ignorant people coming up with the plan. We have to find a way to get through the crap. In the meantime, somebody has to find a way to get these roads built, and what I need is for everyone to get out of my way. We have people getting killed on I-35 because it is a safety issue. Whenever the state tries to solve its problems it's because of a federal lawsuit. But that is the only way the transportation problem is going to get solved...a federal lawsuit.

Closing Comments

- I think people will take to transportation if you put it there. If transit is there they will use it. Buses are cheap. There is a new buzzword out there “active transportation.” It is basically walking and biking. Things like that can be done for cheap. The loneliest people in the world are driving around in their car, alone and angry.

- You guys (UNT) have done a good job. It takes some people 2 hours to get to our business park on other systems. You have to go pick people up and drive them around after that. Without a well set up system people are not going to ride it.
- We have to look at the sheer volume of SOV. We have to change that.
- Look at California. There was a lot of growth. As soon as there was an economic downturn they all came here. We can continue to ignore our problems but how much talking can we do? We need to get things done. It is up to a small group of people to do the right thing. We are really going to hurt from not making these decisions.
- (Denton) Redistricting is going to take the attention of the legislature, so this is not going to get solved. That is why I discuss delivery methods. We asked TxDOT that if we start tolling in our area we wanted an assurance that our funding would not be cut but TxDOT did cut our money and now they want us to fund everything ourselves.

Laredo Business Listening Session: April 6, 2010

Moderator: How do your businesses utilize I-35?

7. We own several warehouses along the corridor, so speed and safety are big issues. State and federal authorities don't understand the importance of the corridor. It is important to traffic from point a to point b. We should look to expand I-35 with perhaps more lanes and expand access roads. Truck traffic is coming back from the economic downturn, especially here in the past few weeks.

Moderator: Do you get congestion in the area?

7. Yes. There is new development and infrastructure at the World Trade Bridge that has helped things. The Texas Transportation Commission was trying to forego access roads but that was not popular as it limits access to farms and ranches.

8. I just made a delivery to Dallas and was worried about going through Austin but had no problems. Waco, however, was a problem. The inside lane truck restrictions helped and were a "big part" of making the trip manageable. I also live off of I-35 and at night it is "solid lights" down the highway from all of the trucks coming up from Mexico.

Moderator: What are your thoughts about a truck only lane?

7. That would likely get some result.

8. But then they would still be passing each other, which would cause problems.

7. There are problems from San Antonio through Waco, and adding a lane would likely get a lot accomplished. (Also, the Trans Texas Corridor is not very popular.)

8. The right of way is already there, so lanes should be added.

1. I support the idea of lane expansion. We are growing globally and it will keep expanding. Another facility would be expensive but an additional lane could work.

10. The Trans Texas Corridor is not supported by ranchers. The problem with adding lanes is the interchanges. You have to take property like businesses and cemeteries.

Moderator: So what should be done in the long term?

11. I-35 needs to be expanded but what are the downsides to this?

9. I have taken the 130 toll road before. "I love it."

8. San Antonio put a u-turn at 290 because people were making left hand turns, which was backing up traffic. The u-turn was a good fix. The biggest problem with the Trans Texas

Corridor was the taking of land to build something new when there is already lots of available right of way.

7. Loop-type roads are a good option so long as I-35 is not utilized for it. However, this causes ROW issues and land takings. It becomes a problem for land owners to donate land because land value goes up because of the new road but the landowner loses the ag exemption. There needs to be legislation to address this issue.

8. What about offering a tax abatement?

7. There needs to be 10 to 20 years of locked in value, unless use of the land has changed (such as putting in a gas station.) People are currently “disincentivized” to donate land.

Moderator – Do you have employees that are affected by congestion on I-35?

7. We have service crews that maintain the lines along I-35. When Loop 20 was constructed it was an actual loop but now it is all lights. That project has been going on for 10 years or more. The I-35/Loop 20 interchange should have already been done but it is now causing traffic problems.

Moderator – Why do you think these types of projects take so long?

7. I don't know. Perhaps bureaucratic maneuvering resulting in all the money going to other places with more well connected people. I have had problems in Austin so that's not to say that other areas don't have problems, too.

3. We have employees that go up to Encinal and Cotulla occasionally, but it's not really a commuting issue for us. TxDOT often has to coordinate with us on utility placement and they do things backward. For example, they extended 59 but did not do the overpass at that time.

1. It depends oftentimes on the equipment and trade authorities. We are not often affected by the corridor but we do support expansion.

10. The ranch community wants to know if the Trans Texas Corridor is dead. That is what we are concerned about. Also, our area has a lot of oil activity so there is a lot of new truck traffic.

8. I agree. There will be a lot of oil exploration in the Cotulla area.

Moderator – So how do you propose to deal with the increased truck traffic?

8. The feeder roads are already “breaking down.”

(Someone) Did the check point affect you? (to 1 and 8)

1. No, not really.

8. We move a lot of product in August and September. A lot of that goes to HEB. Time sensitivity varies.

Moderator – Is congestion a problem here? How about in the future?

10. It depends on Obama and his “amnesty” program. That is likely to make things worse.

8. We are time sensitive in the produce industry. There are a lot of agricultural products moving along I-35 that are time sensitive. For us it is very seasonal and it does affect traffic. It tends to be worse during harvest time.

(Moderator passes out segment information sheet.)

10. This shows that in the future there will be level of service (LOS) D in places where there is nothing, such as I-35 and LaSalle County Line. There is no place for traffic to get on that area, so I don’t see why the LOS should be dropping in that area.

8. Yes. It should be green all the way down. There is no new traffic.

7. There may be areas where work is ongoing (and green) but in the future nothing is planned but it goes to yellow.

8. And why not just improve the road all the way down?

Moderator – That is a funding issue.

7. I would like to reiterate that people do not know how important this corridor is. Our leaders do not pay attention to Laredo. The improvements needed down here are not just for us. They would serve everyone.

Moderator – Are there any surprises in this or is there anything you disagree with? Have you all seen the population growth that is consistent with what is being shown here?

General “Yes”

9. Growth is coming from oil and gas. There have also been increases in tourism. However, it could “be all over” by 2023 because resources have been developed.

11. Roads need to be good but they shouldn’t “break the back” of people in the area. Rail roads and high speed rail could be good options but we need to be using I-35 more efficiently along with other existing ROW.

6. Yes. We need to make better use of medians and shoulders.

8. People have been saying this for a long time and TxDOT did not listen to them. It made people angry as the Trans Texas Corridor would have removed entire communities. We should look to make better use of existing facilities.

Moderator – So you think that needs can be addressed with existing resources and ROW through 2035?

Yes (6,8,10) explicitly, others nod in agreement.

Moderator – So what about the funding situation?

11. The state and federal government are in debt.

Moderator – How is transportation funded?

7. Not really sure but will say the gas tax. However, the money may go elsewhere. The Texas Transportation Commission makes a lot of these decisions and there are four to five members, appointed by the governor.

Moderator – How much is the gas tax?

6. Twenty cents per gallon, or that's what I heard it is.

11. And how much of that gets used on roads?

Moderator discusses funding.

6. So there's been no increase in the gas tax since 1991, but gas consumption has gone up. It seems that that should offset the declining revenue.

Moderator discusses effect of fuel efficiency on revenues.

10. "Taxes are taxes" and no matter what you call them that's the source that is available. Users should pay and we are all going to pay. Trucks also pay these taxes but the cost gets passed on to the consumer.

9. Why can't money from toll roads be used to address this?

Moderator explains pay-as-you-go financing and toll financing.

9. Once the bonds are paid off why can't the toll revenues go to other, non-toll facilities?

7. What about other fees like vehicle inspections and registrations? Couldn't these fees be increased? I pay \$50 to \$60 to register my vehicle and it doesn't seem that that has gone up recently. Just increase the registration fees and direct the money to highways. Also, counties should somehow manipulate their fees. Maybe that would take pressure off of the state.

11. Or what about some kind of EZ Tag type system that would use zip code information. A scanner would then be used to determine if drivers are not from the area and then charge them for use of the roadway system. It would be like a toll system that exempts locals.

Moderator – But doesn't this violate the "user pays" principle?

11. Maybe.

6. People around here will get several times under that type of system because they make a lot of short trips. You have to have a "buffer zone" where outside of that you are "using" the roadway and should be charged. Do that or simply subject locals to a lower fee.

Moderator – So going back to the gas tax... how much do you think you are paying per year? (No answers.) You are paying on average \$250. Does that surprise you?

3. Why has it not been increased? And why has TxDOT not gone to the legislature and asked for an increase?

7. It's because politicians want to be reelected.

11. We are taxed too much as it is.

7. What about ending this 25 percent diversion to education?

10. One hundred percent needs to go to roads. It's hiding an education fee in the gas tax. If we need money for roads the money should go to roads.

1. Where do customs duties go? In Mexico a large percentage goes to the state.

7. What about the federal fuel tax. Where does that money go?

Moderator discusses transportation apportionment and Texas as a "donor" state.

Moderator – So what about a 1 to 2 cent increase in the fuel tax that was dedicated to transportation?

(Not much support, if any..)

7. It's difficult to say. In the private sector you have to take money from other sources, so where will this come from? Politicians want to get reelected and don't want to make the hard decisions.

6. What taxes do fuel companies pay?

10. It will just be passed on to the consumer anyway, so it doesn't matter.

8. Where do truck fees go? And how can you make sure that money is going where it is needed.

CLOSING COMMENTS

10. We don't want the Trans Texas Corridor and I just don't trust the government.
7. TxDOT comes to public meetings and doesn't listen.
8. I agree. I was at those meetings.
1. There are a lot of goods coming through and going out of the country. This affects not just Texas. Therefore there needs to be more federal money invested here.

San Antonio Business Listening Session: April 30, 2010

1. Zachry Construction — manage government relations.
2. Oversee used car lots; four are along I-35.
3. City council.
4. Barton Murrieta materials, operations.
5. Holt Caterpillar, move parts out of the warehouse in Waco
6. Leukemia Foundation, 90 counties along the corridor.
7. ESI Unlimited consulting. Also government liaison for Team USA marketing company that distributes tires between New Braunfels and Seguin.
8. SAMCO, advocates for transportation funding.
9. Alamo RMA.
10. City of Selma, also represents Northeast Partnership for Development.
11. McCoy's building supply, handles real estate.
12. Regional Mobility Advocacy Coalition.
13. Charles English, English Consulting, especially concerned with 281, represents various businesses; really need to pay attention to 281 area.

Business use of I-35, how it affects business, employees

2. We have a lot of employees that live in New Braunfels (NB) and work in San Antonio (SA) stores and we have a lot of employees that live in SA and commute into SA. Coming from NB to SA (northbound)...those people have a long commute. But the folks heading from SA to NB do not have it that bad. The folks heading into SA from NB have really bad commutes and it is worse if there is a wreck; they are going to be late.

M - How do you handle lateness by your employees?

2. You can't do anything about it. And it adds an hour to their day... it affects quality of life.

12. I drive from Austin to San Marcos and I have noticed a lack of information, especially with regard to wrecks. It is easy to miss exits. We need to have information on conditions along I-35

prior to hitting 130 when coming north. I was in SA a couple of weeks ago and there was a wreck at a certain intersection... it was on the sign, but there was no other information provided.

6. We have people commuting on a regular basis up to Austin and we often have to spend non-profit money on hotel costs. I agree that there is a lack of information along the roadway. Perhaps one way to convey needed information would be to say that a wreck has occurred at mile marker "X."

8. I agree. If you are doing business in Austin and it is early in the day you often have to just make arrangements to stay there because traffic backs up at 6 in the morning. It affects a lot of people who have to do business in Austin.

7. Another thing to keep in mind is that real time information is good but a lot of the people on the roadway are not local. They will not know what the alternate routes are and so on. The location of wrecks alone does not do much good. Traffic does not affect my business much directly but there is a domino effect from businesses having to interact with each other.

9. We are worried about the degrading congestion levels and increases in wrecks. We also have to be aware of the new employees coming into the area, as most of them will be using I-35.

6. I-35 is a definite barrier for us. We have about 8 to 10 that run in different sections of 35 and if we are unfortunate enough to be there when there is a wreck it affects our delivery windows and affects the next day's deliveries. We run a shuttle type system where delays for trucks affect the other trucks on the schedule.

1. We typically build roads and we need to have heavy equipment delivered. That affects work schedules.

10. We sit at the confluence of three major highways here and there is a bottleneck at 410 and 1604. It is packed even on the weekends with cars going both north and south... five lanes in either direction completely blocked and it backs up to 3009. That has to be a priority. Yes, 130 will take some through traffic but with our growth the truck diversion will be offset by the new cars coming in. We are going to have 1600 new cars in Selma in the next year. There was a recommendation to restrict trucks to one lane and we need to clear accidents. Accidents cause onlooker delays. The use of signs to tell people to move over or take alternate routes would be beneficial.

11. Signs are good but maybe a dedicated AM station for traffic information might be better.

9. There is a "federally signed" station.

11. In the Kyle and Buda area there were no access roads and that caused real backups when there was an accident

10. There also needs to be better coordination between the corridor committees and TxDOT. Everyone including the MPOs are having meetings on this.

13. There is a disconnect with TxDOT and the various planning agencies in working on these problems.

7. Everything we have talked about is an issue between personal vehicles and commercial vehicles. I have lived in Asia and NYC, and it seems to me that generally what you are looking for in a business perspective are solutions that offer mobility, flexibility and timeliness. We need to find new ways to separate all of this traffic in the future when there is an incident and we know that they are going to occur. We need to find ways to manage things so that everything does not shut down when there is an accident. It would be good to have viable alternatives, especially when traveling to other cities, so that you don't need your car. In Japan I could cross the island by walking, going to a subway, then a train, and then in reverse on the way back. I lived up in DC and NY and I drove 95 once while I lived there. It was easy to transition to other modes of travel and still do business. I had no excuses to not do so. With alternatives you don't have to mix with 18 wheelers. When I talk about alternatives what I am saying is that I am not even a part of the system when there is a breakdown. Most taxpayers are not going to fight money being spent on transportation so long as there is a "light at the end of the tunnel" and that there will be a solution. I get the freedom, but there are practical reasons to explore rail.

M - Who agrees?

8. I think it is a great goal but I have fought for rail funding at the legislature and there is a big gap between what we want to do and the available resources. It is a great goal but money is going to be the biggest issue. If the system is designed well people will use it. Look at DFW. We have to assume that pricing will be right and that the quality of the system is good. One problem is that you can only charge people about 20 percent of what it costs to operate.

10. Lone Star rail is working on a rail system and they are thinking 12 bucks from SA to Austin. We also have the 130 toll facility.

12. Rail is more than theory. Look at Lone Star rail: if UP would get off the line it would free things up. The reason a lot of towns out west and up north exist is because of the rail. A rail system in the area will dictate where development will occur.

Mod - Is rail going to help commuters?

12. It could.

2. But then how will they get to the office?

12. Well it will allow for development for other companies. Systems will develop .

2. We have millions and millions tied into our location. We are not going to move for rail.

7. His employees don't have to do a thing. Some other traffic being removed might still help him even if they are not using the facility. The money should not come from the government completely. We need to have buy in from the cities and those that will benefit from the rail development.

Mod - Sounds like you are talking about a lot of different types of systems: light rail, commuter, etc...it would all have to fit together.

3. On the idea of freight rail...I remember having a meeting with HEB and they were looking for freight rail options. They had a concept for the freight shuttle. Even something like that would help as HEB knows their numbers and they run all day. It would be a lot of vehicles.

10. I have noticed that we have a park and ride lot that is full. People are starting to get together. I did this back in the '40s when I was growing up. There are more people commuting in those 12-passenger vans. We also just opened up around 36th Street at the port of San Antonio and we have a lot of traffic coming in from Mexico; trucks will also be able to take 130.

M – What is the biggest problem with 35?

6. Bottlenecking. You can't go all the way through mainly due to volume, which is mainly cars.

13. Trucks, too.

2. It is a design issue as well. At 1604 there are bad on- and off-ramps. They cause congestion. There is always congestion through there.

11. It is frustrating to see ramps (northbound 183 at 35 for example) that are just opening and you know they are poorly designed.

7. A lot of that is caused by people just getting used to the new facility. If after a while it is still bad then yeah... it is a poor design. You have to look at who it was designed for.

8. I believe that with 410, 1604 and 281 (not the new, the old one) there were reasons that there were slow downs and as a result we had solutions that were not optimal. This happens all the time. The real problem is not the engineers but the people funding these projects. We have to acknowledge that.

7. People would rather talk about the problem. It becomes difficult to talk solutions because there is a funding issue. The reality is that I could care less about the funding issue for the purposes of this group.

12. The lack of options (routes and modes) and the lack of information about those options are the big problems on 35. If you don't know that you can spend \$5 to save 1.5 hours then it is not an option.

13. We also plan without consulting the people who will use the system. We need to have the people who will be benefiting on-board to go get funding and do the planning. We also need to get information out there like what (12) said.

2. What I would love to see in a perfect world is rail and an elevated highway for all through traffic (upper is for through traffic, lower is for local). The facility at Hilderbrand is great.

9. I agree. If we can separate trucks from passenger vehicles and buses, have different speed limits, have rail in the corridor...but then that sounds like the TTC. Talking about planning...we don't have a unified plan like Houston. We don't have a plan for the whole community.

M- Isn't that the MPO's job?

9. Not really. We have four modes all vying for their own money. Nobody is getting together, which increases the hope of getting more money.

HANDOUTS – Let's talk about solutions. You want alternate routes and modes....

10. We have a problem getting money, so let's consider what happens if we don't get money. When we have an accident out here the police do not move traffic. They need to keep it moving. And let's educate the people on ridesharing.

M – So build more park and ride lots?

13. Yes .

M – What about incentives for carpooling?

9. Yes, free rides for HOT.

7. These things are designed based on how people are going to use it. They are population specific. But the key incentive is time. These facilities are not being designed based on what people will do. What gets the people's attention? Time? People in New Jersey and NY will pay to save time. I am not saying that will work here but up there they were cognizant of what people's nature is.

13. We need to remain cognizant that non-attainment issues are here. The EPA has told us that we are close and they are going to be more aggressive and SA needs to have a plan.

M – Let's talk HOV. Are you taking a lane for that?

9. No. It is tough to take GP. It has to come along with an added capacity construction project. HOT lanes would be better as it is a benefit to have use of that lane for free. That type of project helps with attainment issues.

3. I think we have almost gotten the public into a reactionary situation. A lot of decision makers know growth is coming (look at “Brack”). That 410 N and I-35 north is way inadequate. We are going to be having new troops coming in; that interchange will be unbearable. And it relates to light rail. Light rail was shot down many years ago but now people think it is a good idea because conditions have changed. Right now people are just reacting to things.

Mod – It all goes back to information. All people know is that things are bad and it is someone’s fault and it needs to be fixed.

7. We are talking about two types of information. There is information about road and traffic conditions and there is information about what the area is going to be like in 5 or 10 years.

13. You have a lot of truck traffic in that exchange. You have rest stops and warehousing and it is going to increase.

Mod – So what about separate lanes for trucks?

13. I have been working with “El Star” (?) about using freight tracks that are in the area.

7. I think what this touches on is about protected interests. Bill Gates said, and it relates to mobility, that if Santa Fe railroad in the 1800s would have realized that they were in the transportation business and not the railroad business then we would be flying Santa Fe Airlines. If I am John Q Public I think it is asinine that I do not have rail options here. They don’t care about the fights between railroads and everyone over the rails. This handout is not a problem; it is a data element, you have to use the data or you get a problem later on. The public has trust issues because they have been burned even if the government is right. Interests need to come together in order to overcome trust issues.

12. Two things: population increase is coming so it seems that integrated solutions (rail, park and ride) will help determine where the growth occurs. Second: we have companies here who send trucks on I-35 but they haven’t spoken about 35.

11. We have around 80 trucks. We are embracing more and more technology like GPS. Technology is a much cheaper and more immediate solution than rail. A lot of people are focusing on this but there is no silver bullet solution to this. One solution is getting the gas tax back to paying for roads. There is also a problem with TxDOT caving to political pressure such as shoehorning ramps where they do not belong.

5. We would use alternate facilities if they were economically feasible but we have through stops. We have to make stops in Austin so 130 doesn’t help us.

13. We are a military capitol...I have seen lots of caravans and are they being considered for these types of discussions?

9. They are not even required to let locals know about what they are doing.

11. Krusee said that we need to be charging people moving freight through Texas via Laredo. I would love to hear about some mechanisms for doing that.

7. But what are we charging for...wear and tear or are we charging as a deterrent?

M – A double-decker (DD) facility was mentioned...

2. Such as through towns...

M – Is there a need for some parallel facility?

1. There is a need but DD would be very expensive, way more than what the Trans Texas Corridor was going to be.

7. We need to address these issues based on what the needs are. Go out, where space is available, and go up or parallel when appropriate. People fight over changes to what they are used to. That is why tolling and usurping general purpose facilities for tolling are such a big issues. Adding capacity gets an easier time of it publicity wise.

6. I was very impressed with Chicago's transportation system and they have very limited access through the city. They have opportunities for exits and entrances and they also have rail. The Chicago type system to me makes sense from SA to Denton.

8. I too spent a lot of time in Chicago. What you really have there on the 95 corridor is for many miles a combination of traditional highway with a parallel toll road with a transit system... often in the middle of the highway. And next to that is commuter rail. All of this is parallel. All of them are at maximum capacity but can you imagine if you had that here? That is why we support all modes. Chicago is a great example.

M – But are you not describing the TTC?

8. But what I'm talking about is not out in rural areas.

7. And it all evolved together.

M – So what do you do in downtown (DT) SA?

7. Depends on ROW.

9. I would suggest removing through traffic from the mix by building a nice expanded facility along 410. Leave DT SA to the locals. Or you could expand 1604.

12. Making 410 easier to use for trucks would be beneficial. It is too thin for truckers.

7. The reality is that it just shifts the problem from DT out to the bypass area.

12. NY has lots of modal options but it is not corridor style. You have alternatives.

M – So you want to expand capacity?

Yes.

13. All of the above. HOV, lane expansion,everything.

10. Are we looking at what we can do now? Separate traffic, have police move traffic during accidents (most important) and inform about ridesharing. We need to talk about cost savings of ridesharing. Employers can help with that. Different modes of transportation need to be looked at. The traffic we see in Selma is only going to go farther out into the rural areas. I know the MPO is looking to build inside 1604. But there are likely to be restrictions on that type of development.

M – Let’s talk about paying for all of this.

2. Quit diverting the gas tax.

M – Talks about fuel taxes...

7. It shocks me that our decision makers do not grasp this. Assessing on purchase price fixes that inflation problem. And yes, there are diversions but if you raise the gas tax by 10 cents today it could pay for everything that everyone has an idea on. And it would be cheaper than toll options to the consumer.

8. A lot of folks do not realize how much of that is tied into debt repayment. We are advancing transportation projects like a credit card. There is also not a lot of knowledge about maintenance expenditures. There is a huge investment requirement for maintenance. I love the 10 cent increase but it gets you another 2 billion and you need in the hundreds of billions. This would not fix problems even here in SA. That is only a piece of the solution.

(Most seem aware of 25% to education.)

M – What are the “other options”?

8. Need to look at phasing out diversions; mainly the legislative diversions and DPS. We also support local option taxes.

7. I think any one of those could work but it all comes down to having an overall plan. Without one it makes it tough to prioritize how things get spent.

M – Should you match your funding with the types of projects you are funding?

9. The public needs to know what is going on to identify the main problems. Then fill in the gaps. Congestion relates to safety and addressing congestion addresses safety. But you will never get enough money to fix everything.

M – So are you better off doing it piecemeal or doing it all at once?

7. You can't confuse piecemeal with actually doing the plan.

12. I think that tax is a bad word. You would never be able to get that done. You need to convince people that the fuel tax is not a tax but a user fee.

M – What about paying by the mile

12. Heavier vehicles do more damage and need to pay more. There are also too many opportunities to evade a tax like that.

7. But don't heavy vehicles already pay more at their registration? Doesn't that offset the damage they do?

12. And there are other mechanisms for funding for other alternatives, such as for rail you can get a TIF

1. I think private equity needs to be considered for a lot of the large capital projects. It is not a one size fits all solution, but it is good for projects like the DFW Connector.

8. The problem is that that, private equity, is the first level of distrust with regard to the public acceptance.

2. Yeah, people always assume there is going to be a scandal.

1. The fee does not have to be set by the private entity. TxDOT sets many of the fees.

7. Things need to be addressed before hand; and people don't do so because they get lazy. I believe that it is our responsibility to educate, and I do that in open forums.

Closing Comments

4. You have to figure out a way to pay for these things. We have not talked about conserving the resources that are there. I think that carpools and so on are a good and easy thing to do right now while we wait for other things to come up.

11. We have a lot of employees who come in their own vehicle because they often need to run errands. I believe that if we had a company car to use it might encourage carpooling.

3. There is a mistrust issue when you have three entities coming up with three different plans.

2. Yeah, I don't understand why we need all these bureaucracies. We didn't used to have all of this.

13. It's a result of lobbyists and consultants. And I think that it is a result of doing things piecemeal. That has to go. The good old boy program has failed. Grant programs get nicked and dimed to keep the funding coming and there is an attainment issue and we have spent the money foolishly and we need a plan.

6. The one thing we have not talked about is having more avenues to get people off of the road. I like to bike and there are not a lot of opportunities for that. I think all of these roads should have a shoulder and it is a cheap way of getting people off of the road. It doesn't have to be a bike lane.

12. I like the idea of an integrated plan but it needs to have all of the options on the table. There are a lot of real simple things that can be done right now. Park and ride, bike lanes... over time people will start to adopt these strategies. It removes cars.

11. We need to just make I-35 safer. I know that there are restrictions on small towns ticketing on 35...the disparity on speed on I-35 is bad and patrolling I-35 would really help.

6. Accidents on 35 are what really slow things down and there is no consistency on how accidents are handled. Minor accidents are handled like major accidents.