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Turnout low for 2nd Outer Loop meeting

By Eric Weilbacher

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Less than 40 members of the general public turned out to attend the second meeting of the Outer Loop Task Force, in stark contrast to the more than 200 people who turned out in April.

Much of Monday night's meeting, like the first one, was spent determining how the meeting should be conducted, with little substantive progress on the major issues that created such an outcry.

Public comments were relegated to the last 15 minutes, but only three people stood up to comment for three minutes each.

The meeting itself was used to determine how to receive and review public comments, whether to have the public comments period before or after the meetings and whether or not to lump written comment cards together as "opposed."

After establishing some guidelines for working together seemed to take up more of the meeting than actual issues, Task Force member Tipton Ross voiced some frustration with the process.

"We're going over all this procedural stuff, and I think we need to just get to the heart of the matter," Ross said.

Due to his and other comments, a subcommittee tentatively was established to hash out the rest of the procedural rules before the next meeting. The subcommittee will consist of Task Force members Ross, Rod Smith, Donna James, Connie Krause, Sharon Levett and Laura West.



A presentation by Rudy Rivera, of RJ Rivera Associates Inc., the San Antonio consulting firm facilitating the Task Force meetings on behalf of Texas Department of Transportation, illustrated the lengths to which public comments have been collected and documented from each meeting since the Community Work Group in 2007. Little was said, however, what sort of feedback was gleaned from all the public input.

Clay Smith, TxDOT's director of Transportation Planning and Development for the San Antonio District, which includes Comal County, wanted to emphasize that before any actual groundbreaking on the loop begins, development reflecting projected population growth already would have to be underway.

"Whatever form this transit area takes on," Smith said, "the areas will have to be developed as projected, because the development comes before the corridor."

When asked about what kind of funding would be available for the project to get underway, he said "no state, federal or county money is available at this time, but it's important for smart growth that this Task Force restrengthen the study, making sure everything is sustainable and that the corridor reflects that aesthetic needs and transportation modes needed at that time to move people."

Dr. Martin Levett, of the Citizens Alliance for Smart Expansion, or CASE, contested some of the data being used in the study, and would like the Task Force not to just be an addendum to the study, but rather re-open it all together.

"We found multiple changes in data, fluctuations in data and fraud on the part of TxDOT," Levett said. "Rather than having CASE elect from its members, TxDOT hand-picked them. ... This is a form of censorship."

When asked about his comments, Levett implied that there must be ulterior motives for building a loop of this size for such a low-population center.

"If you look at Harris County's Loop 610 when it was built and when 410 was built in San Antonio, their populations were around 600,000. At our rate of growth, by 2040 Comal County's population will be around 160,000. It would take 158 years for us to have a population that justifies a loop of this size."

Perhaps, he suggested, the loop's intent is to divert traffic away from San Antonio, coming from El Paso through Boerne and the expanding Highway 46 to the Outer Loop, functioning as a toll road.

The next Task Force meeting will be on June 15 and will address environmental processes.

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