



Spotlight on New Braunfels Loop

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NEW BRAUNFELS — The biggest priority in finding a route for a proposed outer loop here should be avoiding taking people's homes, a gathering of mostly public sector representatives told Texas Department of Transportation officials Wednesday.

TxDOT sponsored the "Agency Coordination Conference" at the New Braunfels Civic Center to get input on how to develop a route for the highway and whether to build it as a minor or major arterial or as a parkway or expressway.

The group included representatives of the city, Comal and Guadalupe counties, area school districts, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Federal Highway Administration, the Edwards Aquifer Authority and others.

"I think the priorities have to be anything to do with environmental or archaeological sites," Comal County Commissioner Jan Kennady said. "Those are the show stoppers. If you run into any of that, you just can't build that section."

Kennady said getting the outer loop built in a timely manner is vital.

"It's going to be absolutely needed by the time it gets done," she said.

Rivera Associates, an engineering firm assisting TxDOT in the route study, has identified a swath of land, 2 1/2 miles wide and 3 to 5 miles outside the existing Loop 337, as the place to develop a path for an outer loop.

The study area contains many subdivisions.

"There is no open area," Rudy Rivera of Rivera Associates said. "There is going to be something, a home, warbler habitat, a cemetery, something, on that land. We probably won't be able to avoid all of the homes, but it is a priority."

The attendees Wednesday were asked to rank 15 constraints on the route according to their importance. Avoiding homes was the top priority, followed by archaeological/historical sites, natural vegetation/wildlife habitat, wetlands and floodplains and displacing commercial businesses.

Aja Edwards, a member of the New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee, said residential displacement was the main thing to avoid.

"When you are doing anything that affects people so personally, they will make it your No. 1 priority,"

she said.

The public will be invited to two meetings, where the same exercise will be held. Their times and locations will be announced next Wednesday.

Rivera Associates representatives stressed that no decisions will be made before public input is taken, and that federal guidelines required the Agency Coordination Conference be held before the public meetings.

No funding for the New Braunfels Outer Loop project has been identified, so construction is likely decades away. But by identifying a route now, officials said they can ensure that homes, schools and businesses are not built in the road's path.

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