

# NEWS from the Bridge

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A Newsletter from the  
Texas Department of Transportation  
Corpus Christi District  
July 2012

## Harbor Bridge Project Moves Forward with Four Alternatives

The news from the Harbor Bridge project is that the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have completed an initial review of six alternatives, or corridors where a potential replacement for the Bridge might be located (see map on pg 2). The Tunnel and Blue alternatives have been eliminated from further consideration after a process that analyzes how all six possible alternatives meet the project's Purpose and Need statement.

### How did we get to this point?

In August and October of 2011, TxDOT held two public "scoping" meetings on the Harbor Bridge Project. These meetings were part of the scoping process for the project, which is part of the environmental review (in this case, an Environmental Impact Statement or EIS) required for projects that will receive federal funding. Scoping is an open process that gives the public and other Federal, state, and local agencies an opportunity to suggest alternatives for the proposed project, and to identify important issues that should be considered during the preparation of the EIS document. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is the law that describes how an EIS must be developed and documented.



Public scoping meetings held in 2011 gave the public and agencies a chance to suggest project alternatives and identify important issues.

As a result of the 2011 scoping meetings, members of the public suggested two new alternatives for replacing the Harbor Bridge: a West Alternative and a Tunnel Alternative, as shown on the map. These new alternatives were added to the existing alternatives (green, blue, orange and red) already under consideration.

### Alternatives compared to project Purpose and Need

After all of the alternatives were identified and mapped, TxDOT's/FHWA's next task was to complete the project's Purpose and Need Statement, and analyze each alternative to see how well it met that statement. Any alternative that didn't meet the project's Purpose and Need would not need to be considered during the environmental review pro-

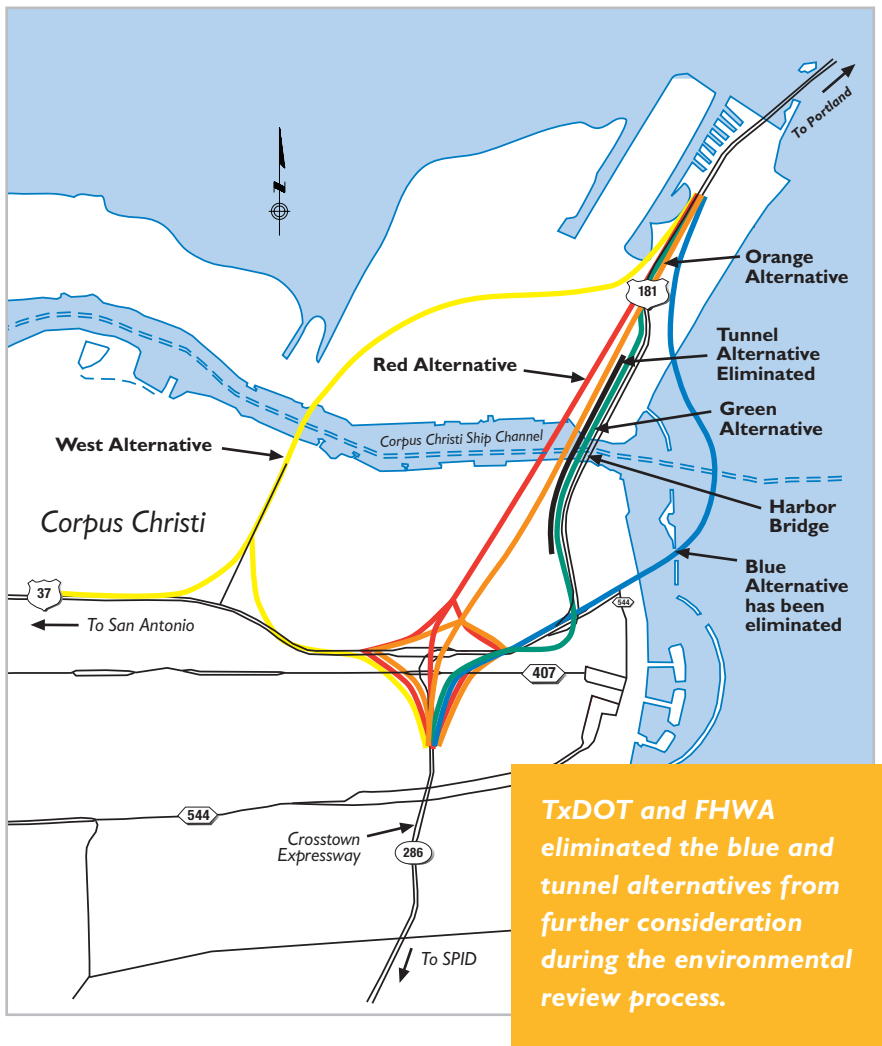
cess. The project's Purpose and Need statement must clearly identify the need(s) of the proposed project and the problem that the project is to correct, and justify why federal funds should be spent on the proposed project.

TxDOT and FHWA used input from agencies and the public in preparing the Purpose and Need statement for the Harbor Bridge Project. The two primary needs are defined as follows:

#### ***1. To maintain the long-term operation of the Harbor Bridge.***

The current bridge is constructed of steel and requires routine cleaning and painting to minimize the corroding effects of salt-laden air, year-round windy conditions, and warm temperatures. In addition, the

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Harbor Bridge is what is called a fracture critical structure, which means that the key structural elements are not supported by any additional or redundant elements. This doesn't mean that the existing bridge is unsafe, only that there is no second line of protection in the bridge's design.

The structural rehabilitation needed to extend the life of the existing Harbor Bridge another 15 – 20 years began in 2010. Over the past 30 years, maintenance costs have exceeded \$70 million and at least \$50 million (along with the need to close the bridge for an indefinite time for rehab work) is needed to keep the bridge in operation another 40 years.

## 2. To minimize safety risks caused by design deficiencies.

The Harbor Bridge doesn't meet current FHWA and TxDOT roadway and bridge design standards. For example, the existing Harbor Bridge and US 181 approaches do not have shoulders. Thus, traffic does not move freely even when minor traffic crashes and breakdowns happen on the bridge. In addition, the US 181 approaches to the Harbor Bridge are on a 5% vertical slope (five feet of rise for every one-hundred feet travelled). The current design standard is set at a maximum of 4% slope. When combined with curves on both the north and south ends of the existing bridge, this steep grade cre-

ates a situation where vehicles are travelling at downhill speeds and entering sharp "S" curves at faster-than-posted speed limits.

Certain ramp lengths do not provide enough adequate speed-up or slow-down distances to meet current design standards. In addition, US 181 southbound just south of the Harbor Bridge does not meet current design standards. While approaching downtown Corpus Christi on southbound US 181, motorists must decide whether to travel to downtown Corpus Christi, I-37/SH 286, or Staples Street from the same point on the highway. For drivers unfamiliar with the Corpus Christi area, this need to make a quick decision increases the likelihood of accidents.

Additionally, both US 181 (including the Harbor Bridge) and I-37 in the project area are designated major hurricane evacuation routes. US 181 is the primary evacuation route for San Patricio County and an alternate route to I-37 for the city of Corpus Christi. Given the design deficiencies just described, US 181 could become congested in the event of an accident or vehicle breakdown during an emergency hurricane evacuation.

## Four alternatives to be analyzed in draft EIS process

When all of the alternatives were analyzed by how they well they met these needs, both the tunnel (which would be located beneath the Ship Channel) and the Blue Alternative (which would be a crossing of the Ship Channel extending out into Corpus Christi Bay) did not meet the second need listed above. Neither of them would address the need to minimize safety risks because neither would meet TxDOT's requirements

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for hurricane evacuation routes. Therefore, TxDOT and FHWA concluded that only the red, orange, west, and green alternatives would be evaluated further during preparation of a draft EIS document.

This decision, along with the completion of the Purpose and Need statement, concluded the scoping process for the project. Although additional alternatives may be suggested at any time during the EIS

process, the current plan is to move forward with evaluating potential impacts of the four remaining alternatives and the No-Build Alternative (the alternative that would leave the existing Harbor Bridge in place).

In addition to the two needs described above, the Purpose and Need statement also includes three objectives that will be used to analyze the reasonable alternatives in the draft EIS. These objectives are:

- Provide the transportation infrastructure to expand the economic opportunities in the area;
- Consider the connectivity to the local roadway system; and
- Meet design-year capacity standards on US 181, including the Harbor Bridge, and consider projected future traffic demand.

## Advisory Committees meet twice so far in 2012

In January and then again in June 2012, the Harbor Bridge Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) and Harbor Bridge Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) met to learn more about the project and to offer their opinions and ideas to TxDOT and FHWA.

The two advisory committees were established at the end of 2011 and will meet about three times a year at the Oveal Williams Senior Activity Center. Members nominated themselves or were nominated by others, and were approved by TxDOT.

The two groups have slightly different missions. The CAC was established to represent neighborhoods and neighborhood-based organizations, and advocacy groups, as well as regular Harbor Bridge commuters. CAC members promote awareness of the Harbor Bridge Project and keep TxDOT and FHWA informed about local community concerns and information needs regarding the project.

The TAC, on the other hand, is made up of individuals who represent the local municipalities, civic organizations, professional groups, and elected

officials. They provide community feedback as well, but also offer additional insight into some of the more technical aspects of the project.

At the January CAC and TAC meetings, members learned about the status of the project and about the process being used to evaluate possible project alternatives. They offered suggestions about how TxDOT and FHWA can most effectively engage the local community.

At the June meetings, members were the first to learn of TxDOT/FHWA's decision to eliminate two project alternatives after they did not meet the project's Purpose and Need Statement, and to hear about the finalized project Purpose and Need statement. Committee members voiced their opinions on the alternatives and requested additional information.

The next round of CAC and TAC meetings will take place this Fall. At that time, members will be able to view and react to preliminary drawings of the remaining four alternatives. These drawings will give more detail on the footprint of each potential bridge replacement corridor. To



*Citizen's Advisory Committee members offer community insight and opinions about the Harbor Bridge Project.*

read more about CAC and TAC meetings (including meeting minutes and PowerPoint presentations), please visit our Harbor Bridge website at [www.ccharborbridgeproject.com](http://www.ccharborbridgeproject.com).

All CAC and TAC meetings are open to the public. Individuals are welcome to attend and are given an opportunity to make comments at the end of each meeting. A notice of the next CAC and TAC meeting date will appear on the Harbor Bridge website once that date has been set.

# What's coming up next?

- ▶ **TxDOT continues to prepare the draft EIS.** This document will provide a detailed description of the proposed project, the purpose and need, reasonable alternatives, and the social, economic, and environmental setting as it now exists in the project study area.

One of the most important portions of the document is the analysis of anticipated beneficial and adverse environmental, social, and economic effects of the reasonable alternatives. The "no-build" alternative is always included as a benchmark against which the impacts of other alternatives can be compared. The draft EIS is scheduled for completion by 2013.

- ▶ **Public involvement activities continue.** The Harbor Bridge website is updated whenever new information becomes available. The CAC and TAC will continue to meet about three times a year.
- ▶ **Community "listening sessions" will be held as part of the community impact assessment.** CAC members have been asked for names of groups that might be interested in communicating with TxDOT regarding neighborhood concerns about bridge replacement. Please contact Victor Vourcos if your organization would like to participate in these sessions, which will begin this Fall.
- ▶ **A public meeting will be held in the late Fall of 2012 or early Winter of 2013.** Check the next newsletter and the Harbor Bridge website for the announcement of that meeting.
- ▶ **TxDOT is scheduling presentations to local neighborhood associations, civic groups, or other organizations.** If you would like to schedule a presentation and question/answer session, please contact Victor Vourcos.

For more information on the Harbor Bridge Project, or to be added to our mailing list, visit our website at [ccharborbridgeproject.com](http://ccharborbridgeproject.com) or contact Victor Vourcos at [Victor.Vourcos@txdot.gov](mailto:Victor.Vourcos@txdot.gov) or at 361-808-2378.

Victor Vourcos  
TxDOT Corpus Christi District  
1701 S. Padre Island Drive  
Corpus Christi, TX 78416