



## United States Department of the Interior

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Division of Ecological Services  
17629 El Camino Real #211  
Houston, Texas 77058-3051  
281/286-8282 / (FAX) 281/488-5882



August 29, 2003

John Mack  
Federal Highway Administration  
Texas Division  
300 East 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 826  
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Mr. Mack:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is providing the following comments in response to the notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for proposed US 290 Corridor Improvements from IH 610 to FM 2920 (including the Hempstead Highway Corridor and the connections to the IH-610 West Loop), Harris County, Texas (ER 03/0629). The corridor extends a distance of approximately 38 miles, and is within the city limits of Houston, Jersey Village, Cypress, Hockley, and Waller. Proposed alternatives include general-purpose lanes, managed lanes (possibly toll), and a reserve for high capacity transit (light rail/rapid bus transit).

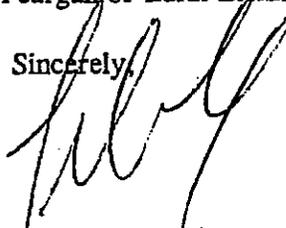
Populations of the endangered plant, Texas prairie dawn (*Hymenoxys texana*), are known to occur in the vicinity of the US 290 and Hempstead Highway Corridors. Prairie dawn is a small annual reaching a height of up to 4 inches that is traditionally found in poorly drained depressions or saline swales around the periphery of low natural pimple (mima) mounds in open grasslands. However, many of the prairie dawn sites around rapidly developing urban areas have been disturbed by the leveling of the mounds. Often brush and other woody vegetation have invaded the area surrounding the small, mostly barren areas where prairie dawn occurs. Normally, these small areas are sparsely vegetated and the soil is covered with a blue-green alga, but prairie dawn has also been found in the mowed areas of public parks. Areas of suitable habitat within and adjacent to the US 290 Corridor project area should be surveyed by a qualified individual to determine the presence or absence of prairie dawn. The best time to conduct the survey is late March to early April. The plants are flowering at this time and thus are more conspicuous. General information on prairie dawn has been enclosed.

Within this study area, the Service recommends that the proposed improvements follow existing rights-of-way or other previously disturbed areas. In addition, the Service supports the development of high capacity transit (light rail and/or rapid bus transit) within the corridor. Although the actual areas converted by highways, railways, and power line right-of-ways may cover only a small proportion of a region, the fragmentation of habitats caused by these projects is often severe, especially in forested environments and along riparian corridors. These disturbances can cause (1) dramatic physical disruption to the continuous vegetative community; (2) disruption to the structure and function of habitat; and (3) impacts to resident wildlife, which must negotiate, tolerate, and cope with the habitat barriers.

John Mack  
NOI for EIS/US 290 Corridor Improvements  
ER 03/0629  
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. If you have any questions or if we can be of further assistance, please contact Catherine Yeargan or Edith Erling at 281/286-8282.

Sincerely,



Frederick T. Werner  
Assistant Project Leader, Clear Lake ES Field Office

Enclosure

cc:

Regional Office, Dean Watkins  
BFA (Environmental Review Technician), Stephanie Nash  
Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance, Ethel Smith

August 10, 2004

TC&B Project No. 052311392.0011

Ms. Edith Erfling  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
17629 El Camino Real #211  
Houston, TX 77058-3051

Re: Threatened and Endangered Species Coordination for US 290 Corridor EIS

Dear Ms. Erfling:

The purpose of this letter is to advise you that the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is evaluating the potential environmental effects of proposed improvements to the existing US 290 and Hempstead Highway in Harris County, Texas. Three preliminary alignments for US 290 and four alignments for Hempstead Highway are being analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Below is a brief description of the US 290 and Hempstead Highway Alternatives.

**US 290 Alternatives**

- From western limit of project (Farm-to-Market [FM] 2920) to State Highway (SH) 6: A maximum of 155 feet of additional right-of-way (ROW) is required.
- From SH 6 to Gessner Road: A maximum of 155 feet of additional ROW may be required
- From Gessner Road to Interstate Highway (IH) 610 interchange: a maximum of 64 feet of additional ROW may be required
- The US 290 and IH 610 interchange will be reconstructed with additional ROW required on each side of the existing IH 610 interchange

**Hempstead Road Corridor**

- A maximum 191 feet of ROW would be required located south of the Hempstead Highway corridor.

Attached is an exhibit (*Exhibits 1*) that presents the study corridor. All alignments are within this study corridor, which will be analyzed in the DEIS. The DEIS will evaluate the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the proposed action on the physical, biological, and socio-economic environments including, but not limited to the following impact areas: biotic communities, including threatened and endangered species; water resources; noise; air quality; land uses; cultural resources; transportation and waterway navigation; water and land containments; and other areas.

To aid in our studies, we request that your agency identify any specific information, issues, or concerns that should be included in the DEIS. We also request that you provide us with specific habitat locations for any of the listed threatened and endangered species, including any species of concern, that may be found in the project area.

# TurnerCollie&Braden Inc.

Ms. Edith Erfling  
August 10, 2004

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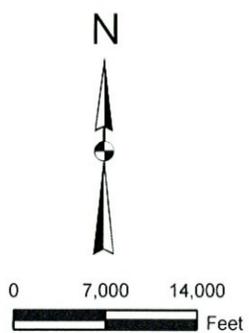
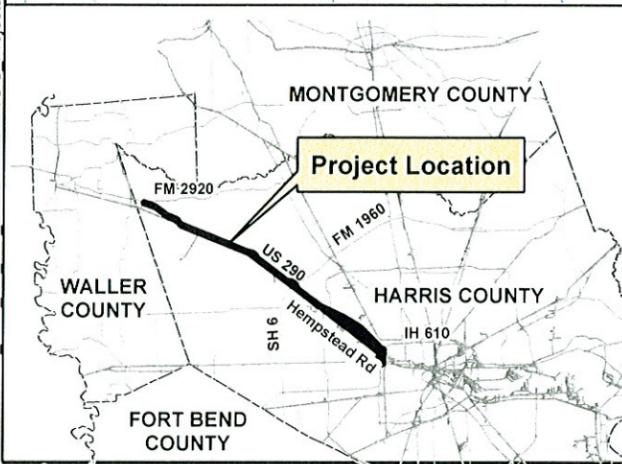
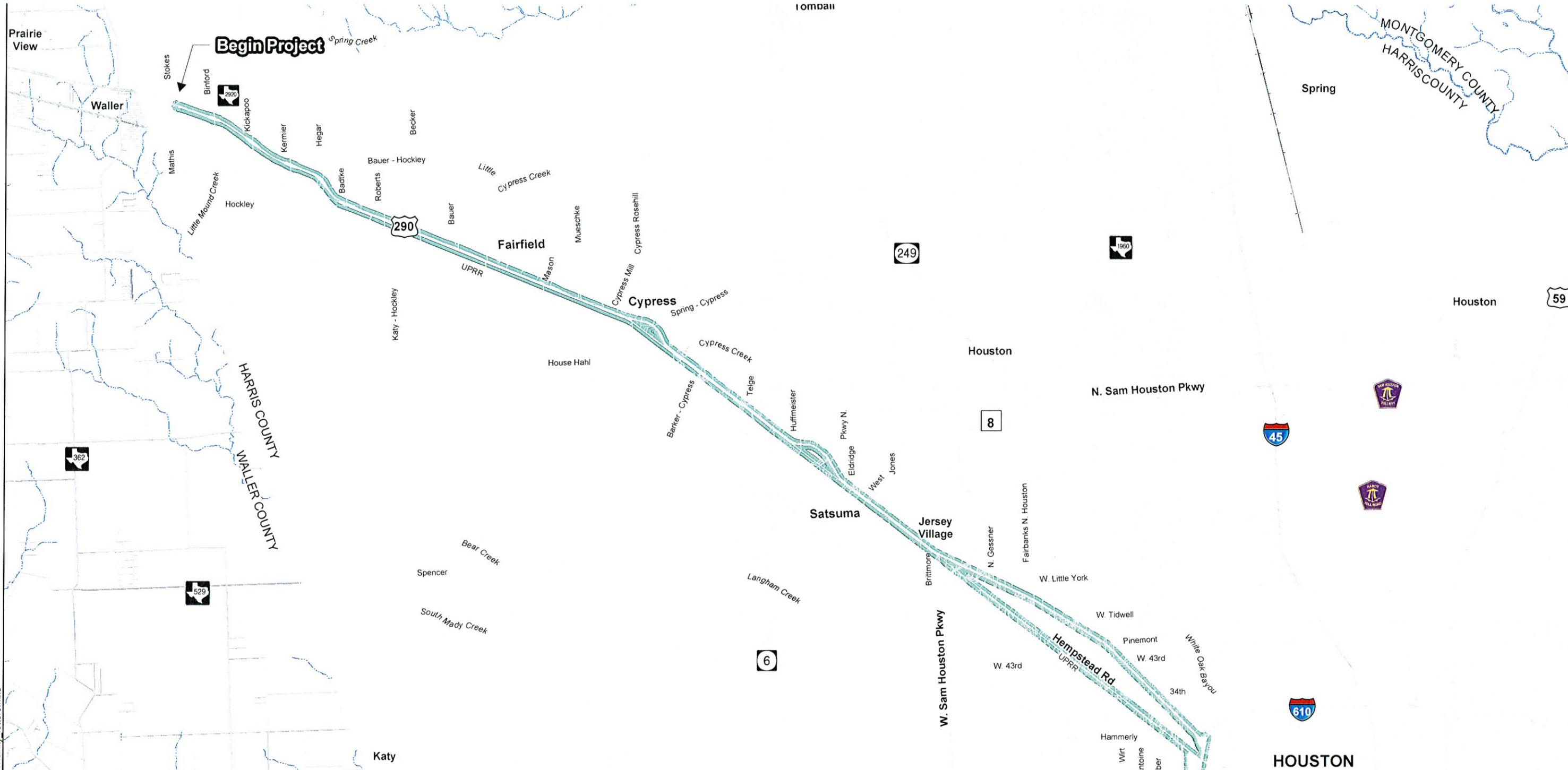
Should you be contacted by TC&B personnel or TxDOT in connection with preparation of the DEIS, your assistance and cooperation would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (713) 267-2781

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patricia A. Matthews", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Patricia A. Matthews, P.E.  
Associate Vice President

Attachments (1)



Legend  
 Mainlanes Corridor and Managed Lanes and High Capacity Transit Corridor

Draft Environmental Impact Statement  
 US 290 Corridor

Project Location Map



CSJ 0912-00-142 Exhibit 1

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