

State Highway 16 Project

Feasibility Study Nears Completion

The State Highway 16 (SH 16) and Farm-to-Market Road 649 (FM 649) Feasibility Study is nearing completion. The purpose of this study is to determine the feasibility of upgrading SH 16 from Poteet to Zapata and FM 649 from Randado to Roma.

The Texas Department of Transportation will host a round of public meetings May 8-10, 2001 in Zapata, Hebbronville, andourdanton. The study team will present the results of the traffic projections (forecast) and the benefit-cost analysis on each of the alternatives. Based on the results of these analyses and public comments from the meetings, a final report, including a recommended improvement plan, will be prepared. The back page of this newsletter provides additional information on these important public meetings.

Three different alternatives are being analyzed. These are:

- A base case, or "no build," alternative against which other alternatives are measured;
- A complete upgrade of SH 16 to four lanes from south of Poteet through Zapata County; and
- A complete upgrade of both SH 16 and FM 649.

If complete upgrades to SH 16 or SH 16/FM 649 do not meet the benefit-cost requirements, then the study will identify operational and safety enhancements to the existing corridor, including targeted enhancements to specific locations that would improve driving conditions.

The traffic projections and background information on the benefit-cost analysis are presented inside this newsletter. However, the results of the benefit-cost analysis will not be available until the public meetings.

This is the third in a series of four newsletters to be distributed during the feasibility study. All newsletters may be accessed on the TxDOT website, www.dot.state.tx.us, in the section on Major Investment Studies.

For additional information on this study or to be added to the mailing list contact: SH 16 Study, Olivarri & Associates, Inc., 719 South Shoreline Blvd., Suite 200, Corpus Christi, Texas, 78401, or call toll-free 800-945-2156.

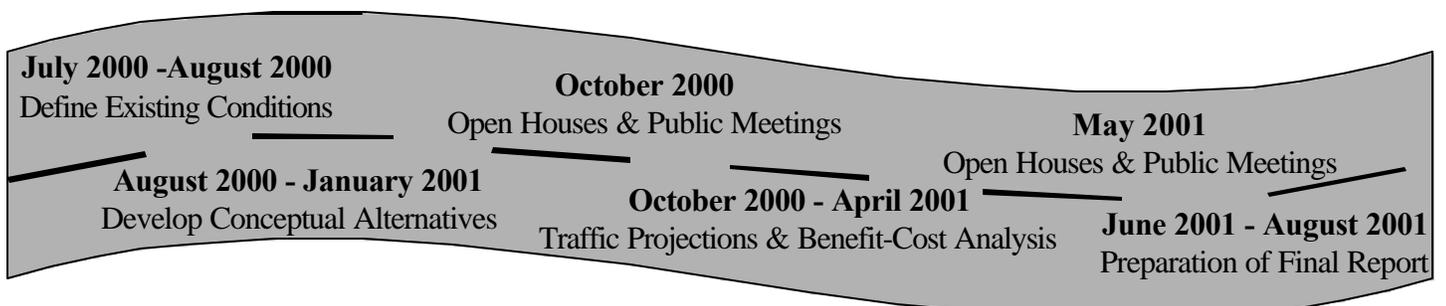


Typical rural section of FM 649



Typical rural section of SH 16

Project Schedule



Traffic Projections

Traffic projections are a major factor in determining the feasibility of upgrading SH 16 and FM 649. To develop traffic projections, the study team gathered historical traffic data for the area, reviewed future trade projections resulting from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and considered the traffic for other NAFTA roadways [Interstate 69 (IH 69) and Interstate 35 (IH 35)]. Projections were developed for the base case alternative, which forecast traffic in the year 2025 with no major improvements to the roadways. Then, projections were developed for two conceptual alternatives - the SH 16 Four Lane Alternative and the SH 16/FM 649 Four Lane Alternative.

The process of developing a traffic forecast is complicated. Historical growth of traffic on a specific roadway is only one aspect. (*Key Steps in the Traffic Projection Process are summarized below.*) In the period 1991 through 1998, average daily traffic has increased on SH 16 and FM 649 by 42% and 56%, respectively. These are substantial increases, but other Texas roadways have experienced much larger rates of increase.

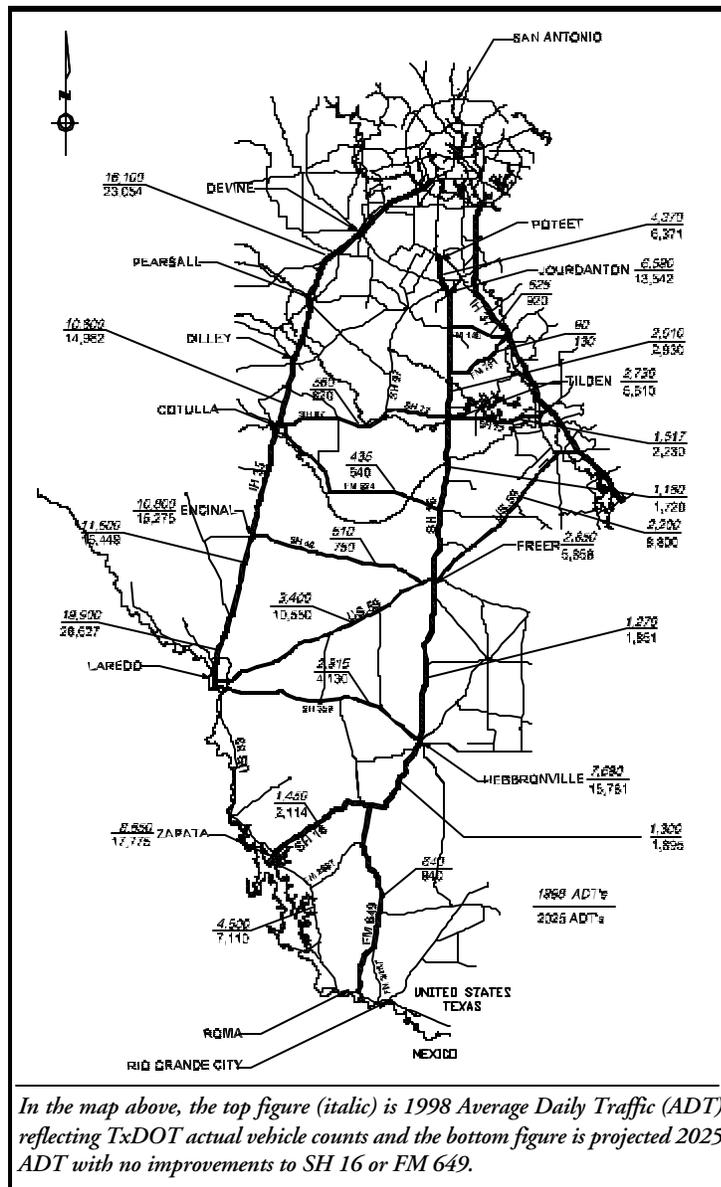
Particularly in Texas, NAFTA has had a major impact on traffic and roadways. In 1990, trade between the United States and Mexico was just over \$58 million. In 2000, trade between the two countries is estimated at \$253 million, a more than 230% increase. Economists estimate that NAFTA trade will continue to grow at an unprecedented rate, doubling over the next 25 years. This growth in trade produces corresponding increases in truck traffic, which is the major means used to transport trade goods.

Seventy-nine percent of all US-Mexico trucks cross the border at Texas ports of entry. A 1996 study reported that truck traffic on IH 35 comprised 20% of the total average daily traffic (ADT). Another study stated that NAFTA-related truck travel accounts for 17% of the 31 million truck miles traveled daily in Texas. Over 30% of those truck miles are logged on IH 35.

Traffic on IH 35 and other NAFTA roadways are linked to this study. If travel times can be reduced, then some traffic shifts to the faster route. As an example, the implementation of IH 69 may attract some vehicles away from IH 35 because of reduced travel times. Border crossings and the condition of Mexico roadways connecting to SH 16 and FM 649, however, are also important. For the purposes of the study, no improvements were assumed in the Mexico roadway system.

According to the analysis done for this study, improving SH 16 or SH 16/FM 649 to four lanes would attract some vehicles from IH 35. The majority of those vehicles are projected to be northbound. The results of the traffic projection are shown in the two maps to the right and will be discussed in greater detail at the public meetings.

1998 Traffic Volumes and Year 2025 Base Case Traffic Projections



Key Steps in Traffic Projection

Analysis of Historical and Existing Traffic Counts

All historical and existing traffic data is collected and analyzed to determine traffic patterns and growth.

Development of Methodology for Traffic Forecasting

A standard method for projecting traffic volumes along segments of the corridor is developed utilizing the analysis of historical and existing traffic counts.

Development of Methodology for NAFTA Adjustments

A method for making adjustments to the traffic forecasts due to anticipated effects of NAFTA is developed, taking into consideration recent, documented effects of truck traffic and anticipated continued growth in the trucking industry. This methodology also includes any changes to traffic patterns on IH 35 from Laredo to San Antonio as a result of improvements made to SH 16 and FM 649.

Forecasting of Traffic Counts for Each Alternative

Traffic forecasts are developed using the above information for each alternative.

SH 16 STUDY
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Corpus Christi, Texas 78401

Public Meetings Scheduled

Public outreach and involvement is an important aspect of this project. In order to provide opportunities for the public to learn about the project and to make comments, a round of open houses and public meetings will be held in May.

The public is invited to attend the open houses and public meetings to discuss the conceptual alternatives, traffic forecasts, and benefit-cost analyses of the project in an informal setting with the project team.

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend the public meeting in your area. If you are unable to attend, you may send comments to:

SH 16 Project
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E-mail: leah@olivarri.com

Please submit comments by May 24, 2001.

Contact Olivarri & Associates to be added to the project mailing list.

**Open Houses 5:30 P.M.
Public Meetings 6:00 P.M.**

TUESDAY, MAY 8, 2001

Zapata

Zapata Community Center, 607 North Highway US 83

WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 2001

Hebbronville

First National Bank, 305 North Smith
(on SH 16 across from Jim Hogg County Courthouse)

THURSDAY, MAY 10, 2001

Jourdanton

Atascosa County Courthouse, Circle Drive 41
(One Block East of SH 16 on SH 97)

Spanish translation services will be available at the meetings in Zapata and Hebbronville. Persons with disabilities who plan to attend one of meetings and need auxiliary aids or services or who will require Spanish translation at the Jourdanton meeting are requested to contact Olivarri & Associates, Inc. at 800-945-2156 by May 1.

Servicios de traducción serán ofrecidos en las reuniones de Zapata y Hebbronville para aquellos que lo soliciten. Así mismo, aquellas personas minusválidas o con impedimentos auditivos que deseen asistir a las reuniones y necesiten asistencia especial o requieran ayuda para movilizarse, favor comunicarse con Olivarri & Associates, Inc. al número 800-945-2156 antes del 1 de mayo.