



**SH 249 in Grimes County  
Public Meeting Summary Report**

**From FM 1774  
To SH 105**

**CSJ: 0917-17-069**

**Prepared for  
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## **PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY**

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) conducted a public meeting concerning the proposed construction of SH 249 in Grimes County from FM 1774 to SH 105 on October 29, 2013, at the Grimes County Expo Center located at 5220 FM 3455 in Navasota, Texas. The purpose of the meeting was to gather public input on the SH 249 project.

The proposed improvements are intended to improve safety, address traffic growth, improve regional connections and address emergency evacuation needs. The project includes constructing a two-lane roadway with a passing lane in alternating directions and shoulders within a right-of-way that would accommodate future widening to a four-lane divided roadway. Tolling is a consideration. The proposed improvements would require additional right-of-way, potentially on new location. An alignment for the proposed project has not yet been identified and the acres of additional right-of-way required for the proposed project are not known. The proposed project construction is anticipated to begin in 2015.

The Notice of Public Meeting was published on October 2, 2013, and October 19, 2013, in the Navasota Examiner and on September 30, 2013, and October 19, 2013, in the Bryan Eagle newspapers. The notices and the affidavits of publication are attached (see Appendices A and B). Individuals and organizations who had expressed interest about the proposed project were notified of the public meeting. The Public Meeting Contact List used for notification is attached in Appendix C.

The public meeting was held, from approximately 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in an open house format. A brief presentation addressing common concerns voiced by meeting attendees was made by Bob Appleton, TxDOT Bryan District, at 6:30 p.m. Common concerns were collected during one-on-one conversations and using flip charts located next to exhibits. These common concerns are summarized in the following section of this report. A registration desk was located at the entrance of the Expo Center where attendees were invited to sign-in. Each person was provided with a pre-addressed comment form to share their thoughts regarding the proposed project, and a program, which contained a brief description and purpose of the proposed project. Handouts provided at the public meeting were available in English and Spanish. Eleven elected officials, one representative from the media and 219 members of the public signed in at the meeting. The programs are included in Appendix D and sign-in sheets are included in Appendix E.

Citizens were given an opportunity to view the various exhibits that were on display (see photographs in Appendix F). Exhibits included a welcome board, study area, purpose and need, project description, typical sections, estimated project timeline, how to make comments and large-scale aerial of the study area of the project. Flip charts and markers were located next to each of the large-scale aerials for recording questions and comments (see photographs 25 and 26 in Appendix F). Additionally, project management staff was available to provide information and answer questions from citizens regarding the proposed project.

## **Public Comments**

The public was encouraged to ask questions and make comments. All verbal questions and comments were immediately responded to at the meeting. Twenty public meeting comment forms and three letters were submitted at the public meeting and fifteen comment forms, two letters and four e-mails were submitted after the public meeting.

The comment form asked the question, “Are you in support of this project?” Meeting attendees had the opportunity to answer “yes,” “no” or “undecided.” A majority of the respondents (66%) marked that they did not support the project. Detailed question results can be seen below:

Yes	4	11%
No	23	66%
Undecided	5	14%
No Response	3	9%
Total	35	100%

It should be noted that one of the comment forms responding “no” to the question of support had a petition with 109 signatures attached to it. Opposition to the project increases to 92% if each signature is counted as a “no” in response to the question of support.

The comment forms, letters and e-mails received during the comment period following the public meeting are included in Appendix G. Although several comments stated support for the proposed project, many of the comments received expressed opposition to the project. Common reasons for opposition included impacts to private property, impacts to the quality of life in this rural community, increased noise, visual impacts, loss of vegetation and wildlife habitat, little benefit to Grimes County residents, unnecessary use of limited public funds, etc. Four common themes were expressed in the comments received and each is summarized below:

*1. Many commenters asked where the proposed roadway would be located.*

Many commenters recalled discussions of a SH 249 route from the late 1990s and others referenced the study released by the SH 249 Working Group that identified a generalized area of potential construction. At this time, no roadway alignments have been developed. The project is in the early development stage and the project team is collecting information and identifying environmental constraints in the project area. As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, an Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared to document the nature and extent of social, economic and environmental impacts of the proposed project. This public meeting was part of the NEPA process and intended to gather information and public input on what improvements should be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment and where the improvements might

be located. Based on the input received and data collected, the project team's next step is to develop alternatives, including the alternative of no action.

- 2. Improvements to existing roads (FM 1774 and SH 105) were suggested as an alternative to a new-location roadway.*

As part of the Environmental Assessment being prepared for this project, improvements to FM 1774 and SH 105 will be evaluated along with new-location alternatives. Alternatives will be evaluated with respect to the magnitude of environmental impacts and how well they satisfy the Purpose and Need of the project. As previously stated the purpose of the proposed project is to improve safety, address traffic growth, improve regional connections and address emergency evacuation needs.

- 3. Tolling of the proposed project was a concern to many commenters.*

Many commenters opposed the construction of a tolled facility in Grimes County. A common reason stated was that the toll road would not benefit local residents, but would benefit communities at either end of the roadway. Some were concerned about the effects a tolled facility would have on emergency vehicle response times and access. Many believed that limited construction dollars should be spent elsewhere on more critical projects. Currently, due to transportation funding shortfalls, toll funding may be a viable mechanism for the timely construction of the SH 249 improvements in Grimes County. However, funding has not been identified for the project at this time.

- 4. Commenters expressed concern about the acquisition of right-of-way from private property, community impacts and access relating to a new location alternative.*

As part of the Environmental Assessment, new-location alternatives will be evaluated based on many criteria, one of them being the amount of right-of-way necessary for construction. The assessment will focus on minimization of impacts balanced with meeting the purpose and need of the project. The new-location alternatives would be designed so that they do not divide or isolate communities. Access to property and local communities as well as emergency vehicle access would be maintained via the existing local roadway system. Although it is not anticipated that new-location alignments would connect to all local roadways, regional connectivity is a purpose of the project and regional and local connections will be studied in the Environmental Assessment.

All comments submitted at and after the public meeting have been made part of the official project record and are being used to guide the development of project alternatives. TxDOT anticipates conducting another public meeting in early 2014 to present project alignment alternatives. The actual meeting date and venue are to be determined and will be announced in local papers and on the project web site:

[www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/bryan/sh249.html](http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/bryan/sh249.html)