

Revised Final Project Coordination Plan

Environmental Impact Statement

**Loop 375 Border Highway West Extension Project
From Racetrack Drive to US 54
El Paso County, Texas
CSJ: 2552-04-027**

Texas Department of Transportation

June 2012

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Revised Final Project Coordination Plan

Loop 375 Border Highway West Extension Project From Racetrack Drive to US 54

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)'s rules require the development of a coordination plan for any project for which an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared. See 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §2.103(b)(1). A coordination plan is a plan for coordinating public and agency participation in and comment on the environmental review process for a given project. *Id.*

TxDOT previously prepared a draft coordination plan for the Loop 375 Border Highway West Extension Project (Project) and presented it at public scoping meetings held on October 23 and 30, 2007. At that time, the Project was envisioned as extending from US 54 to SH 20 (Mesa Dr.), and as a federally funded project that would be a joint effort between the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and TxDOT. On September 7, 2007, FHWA published in the *Federal Register* a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS for the Project. On September 21, 2007, TxDOT published a NOI for the Project in the *Texas Register*.

However, due to the availability of State funding, TxDOT later made the determination to move forward with the Project as a state funded transportation project. On October 3, 2011, FHWA published in the *Federal Register* a notice that the September 2007 NOI to prepare a federal EIS for the Project was rescinded in recognition of TxDOT's determination to proceed with the project without federal funding. Additionally, on September 23, 2011, TxDOT simultaneously published in the *Texas Register* both a notice that it would no longer pursue preparing a federal-level EIS, and a notice that it would continue with the preparation of the EIS as a state-only EIS.

TxDOT presented the approved coordination plan for the Project in final form at a second public scoping meeting held on December 8, 2011. At that time, the Project was envisioned as being approximately 8 miles long, extending from Park Street to Racetrack Drive (which was shorter than the approximately 13-mile length of the Project envisioned when the federal NOI was published in 2007). However, after considering input provided at the December 2011 meeting, TxDOT has determined to extend the eastern end of the project limits by approximately 1 mile to US 54 and to include the Coles Street interchange. Without changing the western project limits, TxDOT also determined to make changes to access to one or more of the Project alternatives on the western end. The project limits are now from Racetrack Drive to US 54, a distance of approximately 9 miles.

TxDOT has prepared this Revised Final Project Coordination Plan (1) to account for the change in the project limits made after the final coordination plan was presented at the December 2011 public scoping meeting; (2) to reflect TxDOT's adoption of new environmental review rules, which took effect April 16, 2012; (3) to more accurately reflect the fact that the Project is now envisioned as a state transportation project as opposed to a FHWA transportation project (see 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §2.5(22) & (36)); and (4) generally update and revise the plan, including making it more concise.

The purpose of this Plan is to set forth the minimum requirements for public participation and coordination for the Project. Nothing in this Plan shall be construed as precluding any appropriate additional public participation or coordination activities not described herein.

2.0 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The sections below provide a brief overview of the Project.

2.1 Purpose and Need

The proposed Loop 375 Border Highway West Extension Project is the result of several previous studies which have identified a need to complete a loop or southern connection around the City of El Paso. Loop 375 currently ends at Santa Fe Street near downtown at an existing rail yard located to the west of Santa Fe Street. In order to make this connection, a new alignment would be required to extend to the west beyond Santa Fe Street to connect with United States Highway 85 (US 85).

The Project is needed for the following three reasons:

- (1) to complete Loop 375 to provide better connectivity around the City of El Paso;
- (2) to provide additional infrastructure to accommodate future growth, aid in congestion relief, and improve access to the University of Texas El Paso ("UTEP"), downtown, and medical centers; and
- (3) to provide better incident management and provide a safer roadway in order to lower crash rates.

The purpose of the Project is to improve system connectivity, to accommodate future growth by providing improved mobility and congestion relief through improved access to UTEP, downtown and the medical centers, and to improve safety and provide incident management for I-10.

2.2 Description of the Project

The Project would add capacity and upgrade the existing facility by providing a new four-lane, controlled access facility that may follow portions of the existing Loop 375 or US 85. The Project would close the gap on Loop 375 that exists from Santa Fe Street downtown to US 85. Tolling would be considered as a funding option for the primary facility; however, all current non-tolled lanes would remain non-tolled.

Comments received at the December 2011 public scoping meeting indicated the need for additional access from the proposed facility into the central business district of downtown El Paso. Both residents and businesses in the southern portion of the central business district utilize the existing Loop 375 Cesar Chavez Highway as a connection to the regional transportation network. TxDOT studied various options to provide access and determined to extend the eastern end of the project limits to US 54, approximately 1 mile (total project length approx. 9 miles), to include the Coles Street interchange. This connection would provide a new, non-toll access point between US 54 and Santa Fe Street.

Changes to alternatives at the eastern and western project limits were necessary to avoid impacts to areas where International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) is currently

proposing improvements to the existing Rio Grande Levee system at the western limits of the project area, and to insure access to downtown in the eastern limits of the project area.

A graphical depiction of the Project is provided at Appendix A: Range of preliminary alternatives for the Project. Additional information about the Project is available on TxDOT's website: http://www.txdot.gov/project_information/projects/el_paso/border_highway_west.htm

3.0 COORDINATION WITH PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

3.1 Definition and Purpose

TxDOT's rules require the identification of "participating agencies" for a given transportation project. See 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §2.12(a). A "participating agency" is any agency, department, or other unit of federal, state, local, or Indian tribal government, including a local flood control authority that may have an interest in a transportation project, or that is a regulatory agency with jurisdiction over an aspect of the project. *Id.*

Identification of participating agencies takes into account the nature and extent of the project, the jurisdiction and interests of the agencies, whether the agencies have previously expressed interest in similar projects, and any laws requiring coordination with specific agencies. See 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §2.12(b). At a minimum, participating agencies will include the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the Texas Historical Commission (THC), and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to the extent provided for in the respective memoranda of understanding between TxDOT and those agencies. *Id.*

The purpose of coordination is to solicit and consider participating agencies' input on the following:

- (1) the characteristics of the project;
- (2) alternatives meeting the project's established purpose and need, including evaluation of the no-build alternative;
- (3) potential social, economic, and environmental impacts; and
- (4) project features, mitigation measures, and alternatives that might avoid, minimize, or compensate for adverse environmental impacts. See 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §2.12(e).

3.2 Identification of Potential Participating Agencies

TxDOT identified the following potential participating agencies for the Project:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- National Park Service
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- International Boundary and Water Commission
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection
- U.S. Department of the Interior
- Federal Railroad Administration
- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- Governor's Division of Emergency Management
- Texas General Land Office
- Texas Historical Commission/State Historic Preservation Officer
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Camino Real Regional Mobility Authority
- El Paso County
- City of El Paso
- El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization
- El Paso Historical Commission
- El Paso County Water Improvement District No. 1

3.3 Overview of Coordination Activities Conducted To-Date

The following is an overview of coordination for the Project conducted as of the date of this Revised Final Project Coordination Plan:

- Agency Scoping Meeting #1

On October 23 and 30, 2007, TxDOT conducted scoping meetings with potential participating agencies in the El Paso International Airport Board Room. Letters were mailed to each of the above potential participating agencies inviting them to attend the meeting. TxDOT representatives followed-up with a phone call to each agency and follow-up letters were over-nighted or hand delivered.

The primary focus of these meetings was receiving input from the agencies regarding the study area limits, environmental and engineering constraints, draft project coordination plan, draft purpose and need statement, goals and objectives, process and methodologies for alternatives development and evaluation, and proposed project schedule. Comment forms solicited input on the materials presented including the draft Coordination Plan and Need and Purpose.

- Agency Scoping Meeting #2

On December 7, 2011, TxDOT conducted a second scoping meeting with potential participating agencies in the El Paso International Airport Board Room. Letters were sent to each of the above potential participating agencies inviting them to attend the Agency Scoping Meeting #2, and become a participating agency for the Project. The letters requested the potential participating agencies to accept or decline the invitation to become a participating agency by responding on or before December 1, 2011.

At the Agency Scoping Meeting #2, TxDOT representatives made a formal presentation to agency representatives, and answered their questions. The primary focus of this meeting was to discuss the range of alternatives and the known or

potential significant impacts, the approved need and purpose statement, approved project coordination plan, and the schedule leading to completion of the EIS. Methodologies for alternatives development and evaluation criteria were presented to the agencies and comments were solicited on the presented material. Comment forms solicited input on the materials presented.

The following agencies accepted TxDOT's invitation to be participating agencies for the Project:

- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality accepted on 11/29/11
- Texas General Land Office accepted on 11/14/11
- Texas Historical Commission accepted on 12/8/11
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department accepted on 11/21/11
- El Paso Historical Commission accepted on 11/8/11

TxDOT will consider all of the agencies listed in paragraph 3.2 above as participating agencies, and will continue to give each of them notice of the opportunities to comment on the Project. As described above, TxDOT has determined to extend the eastern end of the project limits, and without changing the western project limits, TxDOT also determined to make changes to one or more of the Project alternatives on the western end. After TxDOT gives notices of these changes to the Project, an entity may give written notice to TxDOT that they do not wish to be a participating agency. But TxDOT will otherwise continue to consider all of the entities listed in paragraph 3.2 as participating agencies.

3.4 Future Coordination Activities

TxDOT will notify the Participating Agencies of this Revised Final Project Coordination Plan for the Project, will make the plan available electronically and on TxDOT's website and will invite them to comment on the plan. TxDOT will also invite each of the participating agencies to attend any public meetings or hearings held on the project. TxDOT will provide a full copy of a document to a participating agency that requests it.

TxDOT will again notify the Participating Agencies and the public of any further revisions to the Final Project Coordination Plan and will make the revised plan available electronically and on TxDOT's website if changes result in response to comment made during the comment period (described below concerning Public Scoping Meeting #3). TxDOT will provide a full copy of a document to a participating agency that requests it.

TxDOT will directly transmit a copy of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) to each of the participating agencies when it publishes notices of their availability for public review. For a lengthy document, TxDOT may provide alternative circulation processes, including the circulation of a summary. See 43 Tex. Admin. Code §2.103(e). In any case, TxDOT will provide a full copy of a document to a participating agency that requests it.

Unless otherwise provided by law or by a written agreement between TxDOT and the participating agency, TxDOT will require each participating agency to provide to TxDOT comments on the DEIS and FEIS (or other documentation, if applicable) within 45 days of receipt. If a participating agency provides comments on the DEIS or FEIS (or other

documentation, if applicable) later than 45 days after receipt (or other deadline provided by law or written agreement, if applicable), TxDOT will consider those comments only to the extent possible given the stage of completion of the environmental review when the comments are received.

4.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 Applicable Requirements

TxDOT's rules governing public participation for an EIS are codified at 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §2.103. They require (1) publication of an NOI, (2) development of a coordination plan, (3) two public scoping meetings, (4) a public meeting under 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §2.107, (5) publication of notice of and opportunity to comment on the DEIS, (6) a public hearing on the DEIS, (7) publication of notice of and opportunity to comment on the FEIS, and (8) publication of notice of the record of decision ("ROD").

4.2 Overview of Public Participation To-Date

The following is an overview of public participation for the Project conducted as of June 2012:

- FHWA's publication of federal NOI and TxDOT's publication of an NOI

On September 7, 2007, FHWA published in the *Federal Register* a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS for the Project. On September 21, 2007, TxDOT published in the *Texas Register* a NOI to prepare an EIS for the Project. On September 23, 2007 and October 14, 2007, TxDOT published in *The El Paso Times* and *El Diario de El Paso* (Spanish language periodical) an NOI to prepare an EIS for the Project.

- FHWA's publication of rescission of federal NOI

On October 3, 2011, FHWA published in the *Federal Register* a notice that the September 2007 NOI to prepare a federal EIS for the Project was rescinded.

- TxDOT's simultaneous rescission of NOI to prepare federal EIS, and publication of state-only NOI

On September 23, 2011, TxDOT simultaneously published in the *Texas Register* both a rescission of the previous NOI to prepare a federal EIS, and a revised NOI showing the ongoing environmental review process would lead to a state-only EIS for the Project. The revised NOI also gave notice of the revised Project limits, being Park Street, near downtown El Paso, to Racetrack Drive at its intersection with Doniphan Road, running approximately eight miles.

- Public Scoping Meeting #1

On October 23 and 30, 2007, TxDOT conducted public scoping meetings at the Hilos de Plata Senior Center and at the Westside Regional Command Center. Notices of the meetings were published in *The El Paso Times* and *El Diario de El Paso*. Notices were also mailed to potential participating agencies as well as individuals

and entities on TxDOT's mailing list of names and addresses used for disseminating the public meeting/hearing notices.

These meetings were held in an open house format to allow for discussion, and addressed the following subjects:

- a Draft Purpose and Need Statement, together with backup materials and a request for comments on it;
- a Draft Coordination Plan for the entire environmental review process, and a request for comments on the Coordination Plan was included on the comment form;
- the range of alternatives, and the known or potential significant impacts;
- a proposed method of alternatives analysis specifying the level of detail for each alternative proposed by the project sponsor, and a request for comments;
- information for issue identification and resolution, including information regarding the environmental and socioeconomic resources located within the project area and the general locations under consideration; and
- identification of the potential participating parties.

A Public Meeting Summary Report was prepared detailing information presented at these meetings. The report included a meeting summary, meeting handouts, meeting exhibits, public involvement summary, sign-in sheets, meeting photographs, comments received, and comment responses. The report was made available for review or purchase at the TxDOT El Paso District Office.

- Public Scoping Meeting #2

On December 8, 2011, TxDOT conducted a public scoping meeting at the University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso Natural Gas Conference Center. Notices of the meeting were published in *The El Paso Times* and *El Diario de El Paso*. Notices were also mailed to potential participating agencies as well as individuals and entities on TxDOT's mailing list of names and addresses used for disseminating the public meeting/hearing notices.

This meeting was held in an open house format to allow for discussion, and addressed the following subjects:

- the approved Coordination Plan and approved Purpose and Need Statement;
- the range of alternatives based on the approved purpose and need; and

- the method and level of detail used for the alternatives analysis, after taking into consideration input given during the initial public scoping meeting.
- information for issue identification and resolution, including information regarding the environmental and socioeconomic resources located within the project area and the general locations under consideration; and
- identification of the potential participating parties.

A Public Meeting Summary Report was prepared detailing information presented at these meetings. The report included a meeting summary, meeting handouts, meeting exhibits, public involvement summary, sign-in sheets, meeting photographs, comments received, and comment responses. The report was made available for review or purchase at the TxDOT El Paso District Office.

4.3 Future Public Participation

The following is an overview of additional public participation for the Project that TxDOT intends to conduct:

- Publication of revised state-only NOI

TxDOT will publish in the *Texas Register* on June 22, 2012 and in *The El Paso Times* and *El Diario de El Paso* (Spanish language periodical) its revised NOI to prepare a state-only EIS for the Project with revised project limits to reflect the extension of the eastern termini to US 54 including the Coles Street interchange to one or more of the Project alternatives, and to advise of changes in access to one or more of the Project alternatives near the western termini. As explained above, the changes to the Project were made in response to input provided at public scoping meetings.

The revised NOI will provide notice that this Revised Final Project Coordination Plan will be made available for review and copying at TxDOT's El Paso District Office, and that the public may submit comments on the revised Plan for 30 days following the publication of the revised NOI (July 22, 2012).

- Public Scoping Meeting #3

TxDOT is scheduled to hold a third public scoping meeting for the Project on June 20, 2012 and published notice of the meeting in *The El Paso Times* and *El Diario de El Paso* on May 20, 2012 and June 10, 2012.

This meeting will be held in an open house format to allow for discussion, and will address the same subjects addressed at Public Scoping Meeting #2:

- the Revised Final Coordination Plan and Revised Purpose and Need Statement;
- the range of alternatives based on the approved purpose and need; and

- the method and level of detail used for the alternatives analysis, after taking into consideration input given during the initial public scoping meeting.
- information for issue identification and resolution, including information regarding the environmental and socioeconomic resources located within the project area and the general locations under consideration; and
- identification of the potential participating parties.

Project materials will again be exhibited at the meeting for attendees to review.

- Simultaneous holding of required public meeting

The Public Scoping Meeting #3 described above will also serve as the public meeting to be held under 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §§2.103(c) and 2.107. The meeting will serve to not only explain the scoping matters described above, but also to take comment on the drafting of the DEIS.

Comments received by the deadline date of July 2, 2012 will be included as part of the formal record. A Public Meeting Summary Report will be prepared and will include written responses to public comments.

- Notice of availability of the DEIS

After the department delegate completes technical review of the DEIS for the Project, TxDOT will publish in the *Texas Register* and in *The El Paso Times* and *El Diario de El Paso* a notice of its availability that will set a 45-day period for public review and comment. The DEIS will be made available for viewing or for purchase as a hard copy or on a CD. The notice will specify how the DEIS may be reviewed and copied, and where comments may be sent.

- Public hearing on the DEIS

After the department delegate completes technical review of the DEIS for the Project and approves it for circulation, TxDOT will also hold a public hearing on the DEIS under 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §2.109. TxDOT will make the DEIS available at a designated location for the general public at least 30 days before the date of the public hearing and for a minimum of 10 days following the hearing for a total 45 day review and circulation period. Notices of the hearing will be published in the *The El Paso Times* and *El Diario de El Paso*. The first notice will be published at least 30 days before the date of the hearing. The second notice will be published not more than 20 days or less than seven days before the date of the hearing. If impacts to public land, parks, recreational areas, wildlife refuges, historic sites, or scientific areas are anticipated, two additional notices would be published. These notices would be published in between the 30 and 7 day publications.

TxDOT will mail notice of the hearing to landowners abutting the Project as identified by tax rolls, and to affected local governments and public officials. TxDOT will also

mail notice of the hearing to a list of elected public officials, individuals, and groups that have expressed interest in the project.

The focus of this hearing will be to present the DEIS, including both the recommended preferred alternative and other reasonable alternatives, and to encourage and solicit public comment. An exhibit viewing session will be held prior to the formal presentation.

Comments formally made during the hearing and mailed comments that are postmarked within 10 days of the hearing will be included as part of the formal record for the Project. A Public Hearing Summary Report will be prepared and will include written responses to public comments.

- Notice of availability of Final Environmental Impact Statement(FEIS)

After the department delegate completes technical review of the FEIS for the Project, TxDOT will publish in the *Texas Register* and in *The El Paso Times* and *El Diario de El Paso* a notice of its availability. TxDOT will also provide the notice to the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization/Transportation Policy Board and to the local media through press release, and will transmit the FEIS (or a summary if it is lengthy) to any person, organization, or agency that made substantive comments on the DEIS or that requests a copy. The published notice will also include information on obtaining copies of the FEIS. The notice will also state that the public will have 30 days after publication of the notice in the *Texas Register* to submit comments, and will explain how the public may submit comments.

- Public comments

TxDOT will consider all timely public comments submitted on this Revised Final Coordination Plan, the DEIS and the FEIS. TxDOT will further document the number of positive, negative, or neutral public comments received regarding the Project as expressed by the public through the public participation process, and will present the information to the Texas Transportation Commission in an open meeting and report the information on TxDOT's website in a timely manner.

- Notice of ROD

TxDOT will publish notice of the ROD in the *Texas Register*, and will publish notice of its availability in *The El Paso Times* and *El Diario de El Paso*.

5.0 SCHEDULE FOR COMPLETION OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

TxDOT has established a schedule for completion of the environmental review process for the Project. The following factors were considered in establishing the schedule:

- the responsibilities of participating agencies under applicable laws;
- resources available to participating agencies;

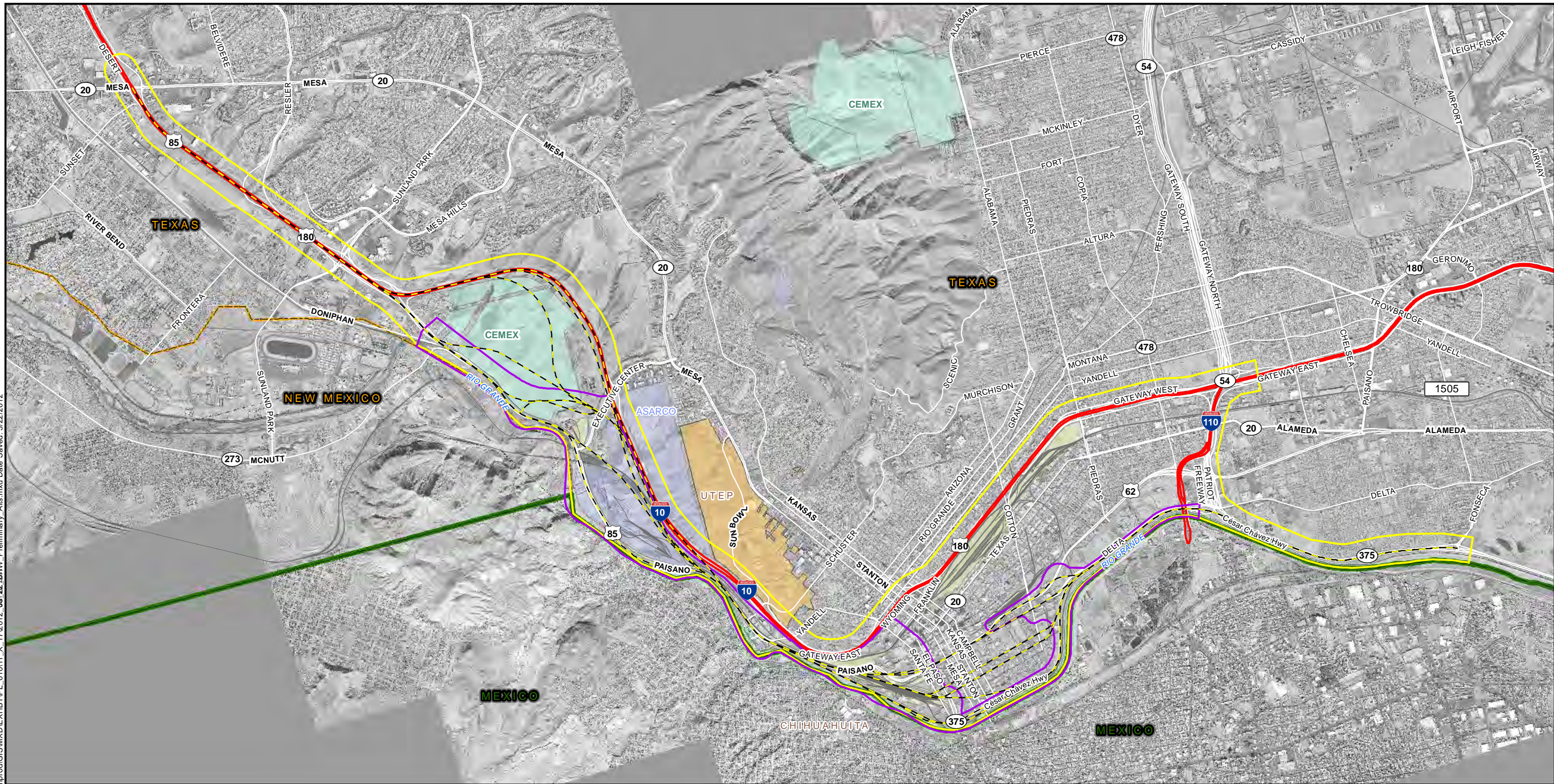
- the overall size and complexity of the Project;
- the overall schedule for and cost of the Project; and
- the sensitivity of the natural and historic resources that could be affected by the Project.

The schedule will be posted on the TxDOT El Paso District website:
http://www.txdot.gov/project_information/projects/el_paso/border_highway_west.htm

The schedule may be revised for good cause.

Appendix A
Range of Preliminary Alternatives for the Project

Path: \\A:\usw00\jobs\42085 Border Hwy West\Technical\GIS\MXD\EXHBTPL_01011_X_172012_06_28_28HW_Preliminary_Alt.mxd Date Saved: 5/22/2012

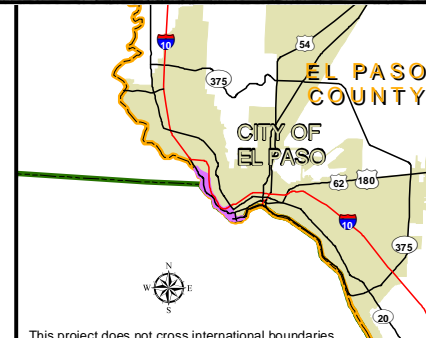
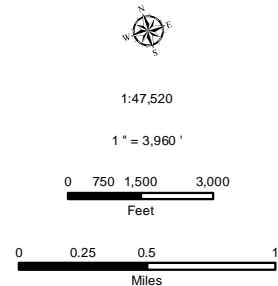


Data Source

ASARCO and CEMEX: TxDOT, 2010
 Railroads: City of El Paso, 2005
 Railroad Yards: TxDOT, 2010
 Study Area: HNTB, 2011
 Alternatives: Half Engineering, 2010

Legend

- Preliminary Alternative 2010
- International Boundary
- Railroad
- Study Area 2012
- Study Area 2010
- University of Texas El Paso
- Railroad Yard
- ASARCO
- CEMEX
- State/County Boundary



**Loop 375 Border Highway
West Extension Project**

From Racetrack Drive to US 54

Appendix A
Range of Preliminary Alternatives 2010 for the Project

El Paso County, Texas
CSJ: 2552-04-027

DISCLAIMER: This map was generated by HNTB Corporation using GIS (Geographic Information Systems) software. No claims are made to the accuracy or completeness of the information shown herein nor to its suitability for a particular use. The scale and location of all mapped data are approximate.