



Best Practice

District Communication with Historical Organizations

Overview

The Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) ongoing commitment to public involvement usually falls under the standard outreach strategies set forth by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). By integrating history-focused groups into the NEPA involvement process, TxDOT can also accomplish public participation requirements established by the National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106) and streamline project coordination. While TxDOT's main partners in this effort are the Texas Historical Commission (THC) and County Historical Commissions (CHCs), other historical organizations include city landmark commissions serving as Certified Local Governments (CLGs), Main Street programs, and local heritage non-profits. Environmental Division's Historical Studies (ENV-HIST) staff can assist in identifying potential historic preservation oriented groups early in the project scoping process.

TxDOT regards CHCs as the primary local partners and experts in local history. TxDOT typically consults CHCs when performing historic property identification surveys and when planning the replacement of certain historic-age bridges. TxDOT districts should aim to develop a broader relationship with CHCs to improve communication and develop strong partnerships. While the following best practices can also be applied to other historical organizations the focus of guidance is district communication with the CHC.

When to Communicate with County Historical Commissions

1. It is recommended that the district meet with local CHCs at least annually. District staff should also consider attending meetings of the local CHCs and requesting to present information regarding upcoming TxDOT projects. At a minimum, district staff should ensure that CHCs are included on all TxDOT public notice and other distribution lists.
2. For projects:
 - a. Contact CHCs when planning a bridge replacement for all non-truss bridges constructed between 1865 and 1945. Consult the [Historical Studies Review Procedures](#) for more information on this type of communication.
 - b. Contact CHCs when performing historical studies surveys. The CHCs may have information about the history of an area that is not readily apparent to TxDOT.
 - c. Contact CHCs when historic properties are identified in a project's area of potential effects. CHCs generally wish to know that a TxDOT project may impact a historic property in advance of official public meetings. CHCs may receive calls from members of the public or from state regulatory partners at the THC asking about a historic property.
 - d. Contact CHCs when a project is large and/or controversial.
3. Consider inviting CHCs to project site visits. Many CHCs visit project areas based on maps TxDOT provides and it may be beneficial to have TxDOT staff on hand to answer any questions.



How to Communicate with County Historical Commissions

1. For formal project communication, send a letter to the CHC Chair on TxDOT letterhead. Consider following the letter with an e-mail or phone call.
2. ENV-HIST provides letter templates for district use. Letter templates are available for:
 - a. General CHC communications
 - b. Planned bridge replacements
3. All letters/communications should include:
 - a. Purpose and need of the project
 - b. Project development timeline or schedule constraints
 - c. Project website, if applicable
 - d. Information about identified historic properties
 - e. Project maps indicating the location of all alternatives
 - f. TxDOT contact information

Keep in Mind

1. Remind the CHCs that [TxDOT Project Tracker](#) is available on TxDOT.gov and is updated daily.
2. A 30-day response time may not be adequate for a CHC. Many CHCs do not meet frequently (or at all in the summer) and wish to discuss responses at meetings. Responses from a CHC may come after TxDOT's 30-day request period and must still be considered as part of the environmental process.
3. Follow up with the CHC if there are changes to the project design. Note previous communications in the letter to the CHC.
4. Avoid jargon when communicating with CHCs. Explain TxDOT or road construction terms.
5. Track CHC communications in ECOS under the "Coordination" tab.
6. Remember most CHCs are volunteers. Thank them for their input and participation in TxDOT's environmental processes.



Appendix A Document Revision History

The following table shows the revision history for this guidance document.

Revision History	
Effective Date Month, Year	Reason for and Description of Change
October 2016	Version 1 was released.