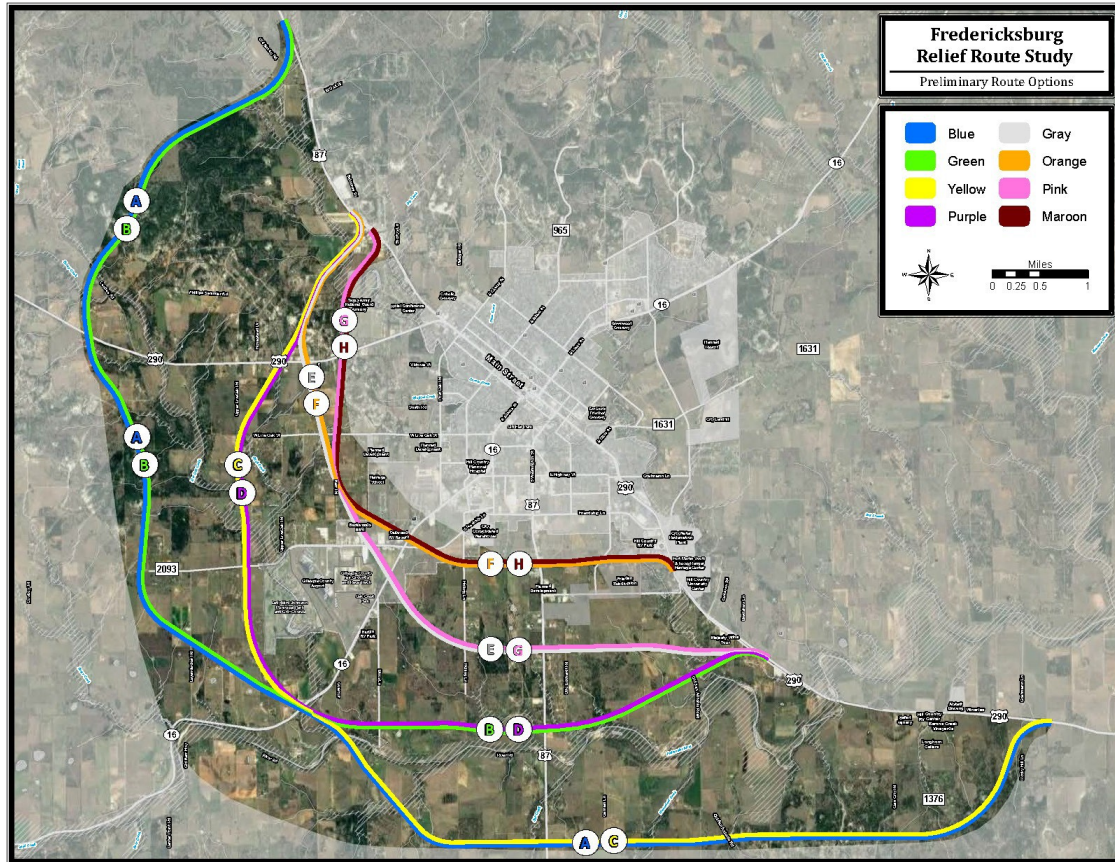


FREDERICKSBURG RELIEF ROUTE STUDY

Frequently Asked Questions



The City of Fredericksburg and Gillespie County, acting through the Gillespie County Relief Route Task Force and with support from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), are conducting a feasibility study to explore a potential US 290 relief route around Fredericksburg. The relief route would give people the option to travel around, rather than directly through, the city.

US 290 is an east-west highway that passes through downtown Fredericksburg and its Main Street tourist area. Discussions about a possible relief route have been ongoing in the Gillespie County area for many years. As traffic volumes and congestion continue to increase, the need for a relief route has become an important safety and quality-of-life issue for the community.

Using the input and feedback received at the September 2018 workshop, over the last few months the study team has worked to refine the routes and reduce the number of options being considered. That effort has led to the identification of the eight “preliminary route options” that were presented at the January 2019 workshop for public review and comment (see route options map above).

The January 2019 workshop had 430 participants and received 146 written comments, as well as more than 1,300 online survey responses.

The following are the most commonly asked questions by workshop attendees:

Updated 3/6/19

Fredericksburg Relief Route Study

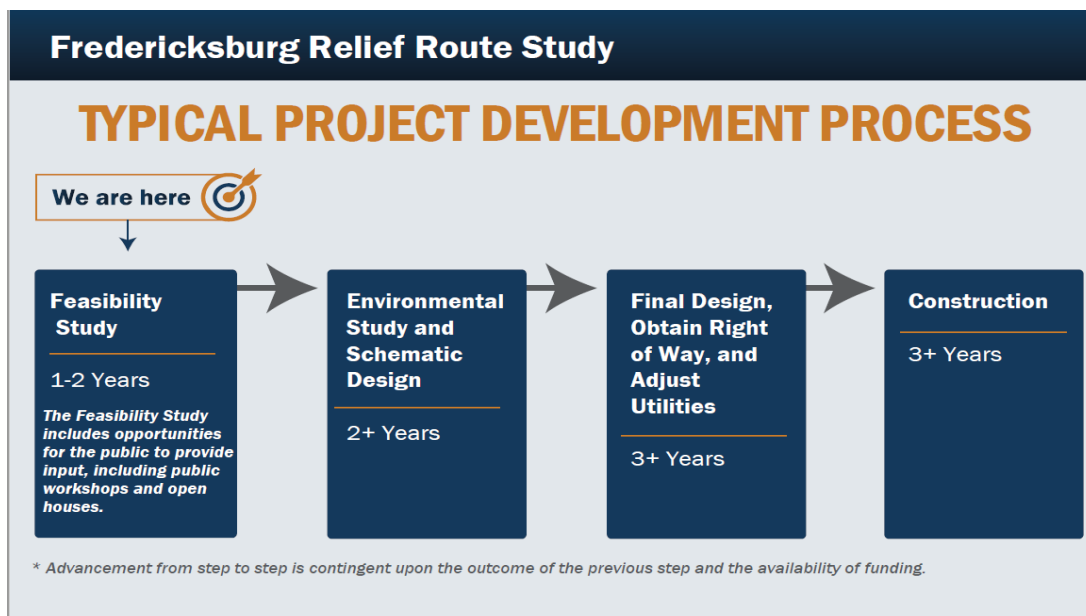
For more information, contact Joe Muck at Joe.Muck@txdot.gov or 512.715.5702

Fredericksburg Relief Route Study
Frequently Asked Questions
(Updated: March 5, 2019)

1. What is the purpose of the Fredericksburg Relief Route Study (Relief Route Study)?

The local community has requested assistance from TxDOT to address congestion problems on US 290 (Main Street) in Fredericksburg. The Fredericksburg Relief Route Study was initiated in response to the community’s request. The purpose of the study is to determine if there is a viable and publicly-supported route that addresses Main Street traffic concerns.

It should be noted that if the study indicates that the relief route is supported by the community and a locally-preferred option is identified, that option would become the starting point for future phases of project development. Future phases would include detailed environmental studies (conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969), schematic development and final design. The table, below, depicts the typical project development process.



During each phase, the relief route would continue to evolve and be refined. The exact location and right-of-way footprint would not be established until after environmental studies are conducted and the design is complete.

2. Why does the study area go south of Fredericksburg?

Computer-based preliminary traffic analysis conducted last year show twice as many vehicles would use a relief route connecting US 87 north of Fredericksburg to US 290 east of Fredericksburg if the route is located south (rather than north) of town; thus, a southern route would provide the most relief for Main Street traffic.

3. Why do we need to relieve Main Street?

Main Street through the City of Fredericksburg is plagued by congestion. Some of this congestion is made up of cars and trucks that are just trying to get through Fredericksburg. Preliminary traffic analysis conducted last year showed that approximately 6,500 vehicles per day would use a southern relief route, rather than Main Street, if a relief route was available. 1,000 of those vehicles would be trucks. This accounts for approximately 60% of the existing truck traffic. If we don't do anything, the number of cars and trucks using Main Street will continue to increase.

4. Why are we studying routes so far outside the City limits?

The Fredericksburg Relief Route Study is evaluating multiple routes at a high-level for viability, mobility benefit and impact avoidance. Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, the Gillespie County Fairgrounds, and the airport are major constraints that need to be avoided. A large study area was developed to allow flexibility to consider routes on either side of these important community landmarks. The southern limit of the study area reflects the approximate point at which it would become less efficient (due to longer drive time) to travel on the relief route than remain on existing US 290 and contend with the traffic, lights, and congestion on Main Street. In other words, routes outside the study area are becoming so long that they are no longer an effective alternative to Main Street and the benefit is lost. Before a locally-preferred route option is identified, a more detailed traffic analysis will be conducted to assess and compare mobility benefits of the final route options.

5. Shouldn't TxDOT first determine where the trucks on Main Street are headed before determining a relief route?

At the beginning of the Fredericksburg Relief Route Study, a preliminary traffic analysis was conducted using Bluetooth technology. The data shows where vehicles come into the City and where they leave the City. The data also showed how long they stayed in the City.

A southern study area was established because the traffic data indicated that twice as many vehicles would use a relief route connecting US 87 north of Fredericksburg to US 290 east of Fredericksburg if it was located to the south (rather than to the north) side of the City. The traffic analysis showed that a relief route would divert approximately 6,500 vehicles away from Main Street per day. Of the 6,500 vehicles, 1,000 are trucks which accounts for about 60% of existing truck traffic.

6. Who will pay for the construction of the relief route?

Prior to initiating the current Relief Route Study, TxDOT, the City of Fredericksburg and Gillespie County agreed upon a set of conditions to guide the planning effort (assuming the project advances beyond the current study and ultimately comes to fruition). One of the agreed upon conditions is that the City and County will provide 100% of any needed right-of-way. In addition, the City and County will contribute toward the cost of construction. At this point in the process, we do not yet know what the total construction cost will be. A preliminary construction cost will be developed as part of the Relief Route Study. The cost will be refined, over time, as more detail about the design and construction is learned. In the future, when a more final construction estimate is developed, TxDOT, the City and the County will develop a plan for funding the project and establishing the local (City and County) contributions.

7. Will there be access off the relief route?

It is anticipated that portions of the route would have frontage roads with access ramps from the frontage roads to the main lanes. In areas without frontage roads, connections would be provided from certain (yet to be identified) cross streets to the relief route. And, in some cases, access may be provided to individual properties. Toward the end of the Relief Route Study process, a project layout (called a “preliminary schematic”) will be developed. During development of the preliminary schematic, the study team, working with the City and County, will conduct an initial assessment of frontage road needs, access locations and the access needs of individual properties. It is important to understand that if a frontage road is required to maintain or provide access to adjacent properties, the amount of right-of-way required is affected. In areas that do not require frontage roads, the right-of-way may be reduced. The detailed decisions regarding access would be made during development of the final schematic and the environmental process (which are not part of the current study).

8. Why do we need 400 foot of Right-of-Way?

The relief route must meet federally required criteria for a multi-lane, rural highway. A rural four-lane divided highway should include 12-foot wide travel lanes, 4-foot wide inside shoulders and 10-foot wide outside shoulders for a total pavement width of 38 feet in each direction of travel. A desirable design also includes a wide grassy median for increased safety and to accommodate slopes for elevation differences between the directions of travel. Studies indicate that wider medians between directions of travel reduce the occurrence of head-on crashes and the severity of such crashes. Wider medians also reduce the effect that headlights have on the vision of drivers in the opposing direction. TxDOT design criteria call for a desirable median width of 76 feet for divided rural highways.

In addition, the project would require frontage roads where needed for local access. The frontage road in each direction would typically consist of two 12-foot lanes, a 4-foot inside shoulder and an 8-foot outside shoulder. Separation of 50 feet or more between the main lanes and frontage roads would be provided for increased safety and to accommodate access ramps to connect the main lanes to the frontage roads. Additional width of 30 to 40 feet would accommodate drainage ditches and slopes for elevation differences between the pavement and adjacent existing ground. The combination of these various components of the proposed highway facility results in a right-of-way planning width of about 400 feet.

9. Can TxDOT require trucks to detour around Fredericksburg?

No. TxDOT does not have the legal authority to prohibit the use of any highway by any class of vehicle (such as trucks) provided the vehicle complies with weight and size limits and other provisions established by law.

10. Why is cost not a consideration for the relief route at this juncture?

Right-of-way cost and construction cost estimates will be developed as part of the Relief Route Study. Instead of developing right-of-way cost and construction cost estimates for all of the conceptual route options, many of which will be eliminated from consideration, estimates will only be prepared for the most viable route options. This approach stretches available study funding and ensures we are using taxpayer dollars responsibly.

The eight preliminary route options presented at public workshop #3 are now being refined to reflect input received from the public. The next step will be to evaluate the route options. The evaluation will be conducted in two steps. During the first step, a wide range of factors will be considered and the impacts of each route compared. Factors to be considered will include environmental impacts, the amount of right-of-way required, the number of creek/river crossings, and the number of anticipated displacements – all of which provide insight into the overall project cost. The routes with the best results will then be carried into the second step.

The second step includes detailed traffic analysis, an operational analysis of each of the remaining options, and development of preliminary cost estimates. With this additional information, the routes will once again be compared and the results used to identify the locally-preferred route option.

11. Will the cost of constructing over hills and building bridges over streams be a factor in selecting the locally preferred route option?

Yes. When developing the initial route options, efforts were made to avoid the most difficult terrain, but in the hill country, hills and streams cannot be entirely avoided. Right-of-way cost and construction cost estimates will be competed as part of the Relief Route Study and will reflect the need for bridges and other terrain-related costs. Instead of developing right-of-way cost and construction cost estimates for all the conceptual route options, many of which will be eliminated from consideration, estimates will only be prepared for the most viable route options. This approach serves to stretch available study funding and ensures we are using taxpayer dollars responsibly. Once produced, the cost estimates will be made available to the public.

12. Will you consider noise and light pollution in the feasibility study?

No. Noise studies and consideration of light impacts are not within the scope of the current Relief Route Study. The purpose of the current study is to identify a locally preferred route option that will address the traffic and safety issues on Main Street. If the community and TxDOT decide to take the locally preferred route option to the next phase of project development, then noise and light issues will be reviewed and addressed as part of the federal environmental study. Although noise and lighting issues will not be evaluated in the current study, the number of residences located within 250 feet of a route is one of the criteria that will be used to evaluate the options. This number provides an indication of the number of homes that could potentially be impacted by noise, light and other conditions associated with being close to the roadway.

13. Why must the relief route be built to accommodate 60 mph?

US 290 is part of the United States highway network and therefore must meet federally required criteria for a multi-lane, rural highway. These criteria require a minimum 60 mph design speed, but establish 70 mph as the desirable design speed for this roadway type. During the planning process, the project team uses the higher desirable design speed to allow for flexibility to provide for the best design possible later in the detailed environmental study and schematic design phase. The design speed for the Fredericksburg Relief Route Study is 70 mph.

14. Who are the members of the Gillespie County Relief Route Task Force (Task Force)?

The Task Force is comprised of individuals representing the following entities: City of Fredericksburg, Gillespie County, Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce, Gillespie County Economic Development Commission, Fredericksburg Convention and Visitor Bureau, and the general public.

The members include:

Farm Bureau Appointee:

Peggy Matli

Fredericksburg Convention and Visitor Bureau Appointee

Dan Mittel

County Appointees:

County Commissioner Donnie Schuch
County Commissioner Charles Olfers
Cord Switzer

City Appointees:

Kory Keller, Chairman
Linda Langerhans, Fredericksburg Mayor
Kent Myers, City Manager
Clinton Bailey, Assistant City Manager
Bobby Watson

Chamber Appointee:

Jim Jarreau

Gillespie County Economic Development Commission Appointee

Tim Lehmberg

15. What constitutes a historic property?

“Historic property” means any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places maintained by the Secretary of the Interior (National Park Service).

To date, efforts to identify potentially-historic properties in the study area have included reviewing records maintained by the Texas Historical Commission to identify study area properties currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, information from TxDOT’s files (collected through previous historic resources surveys conducted in or near Fredericksburg) has been reviewed to identify properties within the study area that have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register, but which are not currently listed. A comprehensive Historic Resource Survey would normally be conducted as part of the future environmental study should the relief route advance beyond the current study phase; however, because of the number of potentially-historic properties in the study area and the level of public interest in those properties, TxDOT has decided to conduct an historic resource survey in conjunction with the current study. The historic resource survey is expected to be conducted during the summer of 2019.

16. Under what circumstances will TxDOT use eminent domain?

First and foremost, the City and County are years away from talking to property owners about purchasing their property for a relief route. Generally, right-of-way acquisition does not occur until after required environmental studies are complete and “environmental clearance” is secured.

At this time, the study team anticipates identification of a locally-preferred route option and completion of the Relief Route Study in late 2019 or early 2020. Upon completion of the study, TxDOT and the community will determine if and when to initiate the required environmental study. Once started, it is expected that the environmental process (which will include additional opportunities for the public to provide input) will take two to three years to complete. During the environmental study, the route may be further refined and modified. Not until the environmental study is complete will the City and County know what property will be needed to construct the relief route.

The goal would be to reach an agreement with affected landowners. Acquisition of right-of-way through the eminent domain process would be a last resort when an agreement cannot be reached. The City and County would be responsible for providing the needed right-of-way.

For more information, visit www.fbgtx.org and search “Relief Route Task Force.”