LOOP 360 PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – OVERALL PROGRAM

1. What is the purpose of the Loop 360 program?

Loop 360 is a major transportation corridor for the capital area region, serving as a north/south route and functioning as a connector between US 183 and US 290/SH 71. The 14-mile corridor acts as a commuter route and a local thoroughfare for residents and businesses. Loop 360 also provides access for other citizens, including bicyclists, photographers, geologists, hikers, and visitors to Lake Austin. The purpose of the Loop 360 program is to upgrade multiple intersections along the corridor. The program team will involve stakeholders throughout the community in selecting the best option for each intersection to improve safety and mobility along the Loop 360 corridor.

2. Why are improvements needed?

Increased traffic congestion along Loop 360 has resulted in a lack of mobility and increased safety concerns. Three sections of the corridor are listed on the state's Most Congested Roadways list. Unless something is done, traffic conditions along Loop 360 will worsen as our population grows. More than two million people live in the Austin area today, and that number is expected to double by 2040.

3. Who will benefit from the projects?

Ultimately, we hope that all residents, pedestrians, bicyclists, businesses, commuters, and others who use and rely on Loop 360 will benefit. The goal of the program is to work with stakeholders to identify solutions that optimize safety and mobility, while balancing local accessibility and corridor-wide mobility, bike/pedestrian/transit use, environmental impacts, and other important issues for all Loop 360 users. Specific benefits for each user group will depend on the solutions that are recommended for further development.

4. Will the projects consider pedestrian, bicycle and transit needs?

Yes. The projects will consider a wide range of transportation modes. The degree to which alternative modes are incorporated into proposed solutions will depend largely on the initial needs identified through stakeholder input and technical analysis. TxDOT is coordinating with representatives from the bicycling community, Capital Metro, and local neighborhoods to identify these needs and opportunities for alternative transportation improvements within the corridor.

5. What is the program timeline?

The Loop 360 program began in summer 2018 and is comprised of separate projects, each with their own timeline. Each project will include an environmental, design, and construction phase estimated to take seven to ten years to complete.

6. What is CAMPO and how does it impact the planning process?

The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Bastrop, Burnet, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson counties. MPOs are federally required throughout the country in areas with a population of 50,000 or more and are required to produce a 20+ year transportation plan, called a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and a four-year planning document called the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

A 20-member Transportation Policy Board made up of 18 elected officials and representatives from TxDOT and Capital Metro governs CAMPO.

For a project to move forward in to the environmental phase, CAMPO includes the project in the RTP and TIP, and the agency sponsor, in this case TxDOT, chooses to move forward into environmental phase.

7. What types of improvements will be considered in the projects?
Improvements will vary by intersection. Overpasses (where the Loop 360 mainlanes go over the cross streets) or underpasses (where the Loop 360 mainlanes go under the cross streets) will likely be constructed at eight of the intersections along the corridor. A Diverging Diamond Intersection will likely be built at RM 2222. Visit Loop360Project.com/divergingdiamond.htm to learn more about Diverging Diamond Intersections.

8. Why aren't improvements at other intersections along the corridor included in the Loop 360 Program?
The Loop 360 program uses an incremental approach based on cost-effectiveness. TxDOT is using limited funds to have the greatest impact on mitigating traffic congestion and increasing safety between US 183 and south MoPac. Currently, the program includes improvements at several signalized intersections along the corridor. Improvements to the remaining intersections are not currently planned or funded, but may still be considered as part of future projects as the program moves forward.

9. Why aren't improvements at Loop 360 at US 183 or Loop 360 at south MoPac included in the Loop 360 Program?
Traffic forecasts predict near-capacity demand during peak hours at both US 183 and south MoPac even after the planned improvements to both highways are complete. While flyovers from Loop 360 would help during off peak hours, more benefit would be gained if signals on the mainlanes were first removed and replaced by overpasses (where the Loop 360 mainlanes go over the cross street) or underpasses (where the Loop 360 mainlanes go under the cross street). Once these improvements are complete, future projects may include adding flyovers to US 183 and south MoPac.

10. Why is TxDOT adding shared-use paths along Loop 360?
TxDOT is working to build a safe and reliable transportation network for all Texans. This is why TxDOT looks to include shared-use paths in new construction projects, accommodating bicyclists and pedestrians. This not only expands access to communities, but can improve quality of life.

When developing a project that is federally funded, TxDOT is required to follow guidelines mandated by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). These guidelines require transportation agencies to make bicycle and pedestrian accommodations a "routine part of their planning, design, construction, operations and maintenance activities" and to make accommodations for persons with disabilities in accordance with civil rights mandates, unless there are exceptional circumstances, which prohibit agencies from doing so.

Guidelines must be followed in order to ensure federal project funding. Visit https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/guidance/design.cfm to review the FHWA requirements.

11. How did you decide in what order intersections were being improved?
Based on the results of the Loop 360 feasibility study, priority was given to the most congested intersections. The Loop 360 at Westlake Drive/Cedar Street project will move into construction first, followed by the Lakewood Drive/Spicewood Springs Road, Courtyard Drive/RM 2222 and MoPac to

RM 2244 projects. The City of Austin included funding for projects at Westlake Drive, Lakewood Drive, Spicewood Springs Road and Courtyard Drive in their 2016 Mobility Bond because they were the most congested. Improvements for the RM 2244 intersection are still under development, and TxDOT continues to study the remaining intersections along the Loop 360 corridor.

12. Why isn't TxDOT adding lanes or widening Loop 360 or the Pennybacker Bridge?
TxDOT looked at options for additional lanes as part of our Loop 360 feasibility study, which ended in 2016. The study found that adding lanes would be beneficial, but more benefit would be gained if signals on the mainlanes were first removed and replaced by overpasses (where the Loop 360 mainlanes go over the cross street) or underpasses (where the Loop 360 mainlanes go under the cross street). Once these improvements are complete, future projects may include adding an additional pair of lanes to Loop 360, which could be connected directly via flyovers to US 183 and south MoPac.

13. Will the projects impact the Pennybacker Bridge?
No. The bridge will remain intact as built. The bridge can accommodate six continuous lanes, but the current projects do not include these improvements. The Pennybacker Bridge is currently undergoing routine maintenance work.

14. How will selected improvements be financed?
The improvements in the Loop 360 program are funded by TxDOT. The City of Austin will contribute $46 million in funds from the 2016 Mobility Bond.

15. What intersection improvements are funded by the 2016 Mobility Bond?
The 2016 Mobility Bond includes $46 million to improve four Loop 360 corridor intersections. Those intersections are Westlake Drive, Courtyard Drive, Lakewood Drive, and Spicewood Springs Road.

16. How will TxDOT ensure that the beauty of Loop 360 is maintained?
We have heard a clear message that the community wants to maintain the beauty and character of Loop 360, regardless of which improvements are ultimately identified for the corridor. The project team will consider this important factor in its analysis of all proposed improvements. We will share any potential visual impacts associated with each scenario as part of this project. Aesthetics will continue to be an important factor as Loop 360 improvements move through the project development process.

17. What is a diverging diamond intersection?
Diverging diamond intersections (DDIs) are proposed for intersections with a high volume of left-turning traffic. DDIs allow vehicles to travel more quickly through an intersection by temporarily shifting traffic to the left side of the road. This allows through-traffic and left-turning traffic to proceed through the intersection simultaneously, eliminating the need for a left-turn arrow. To help drivers navigate, DDIs are designed with overhead signs, pavement markings and traffic signals. Visit Loop360Project.com/divergingdiamond.htm to learn more about DDIs.

18. How is stakeholder input being incorporated into the program, and how can I get involved?
Stakeholder involvement not only helps identify the issues experienced by Loop 360 users, but helps shape the solutions and potential visual, economic, environmental, and community impacts. Input received to date has helped the program team evaluate and refine the originally proposed scenarios, identify new scenarios to be studied, and refine the criteria by which all scenarios will be evaluated. Ongoing stakeholder involvement is necessary to support and promote solutions for the

corridor. Throughout the process there will continue to be opportunities to provide feedback, concerns and ideas. Comments are welcome at any time, and may be submitted through the online comment form. TxDOT will also meet with stakeholder groups along the corridor, in addition to other interested stakeholders throughout the greater Austin area, to discuss both local and corridor-wide issues.

19. How does TxDOT respond to stakeholder comments and inquiries?

The Loop 360 project team values stakeholder feedback and typically responds to all stakeholder questions and comments within a 24-hour period. The exception to this is during the official 15-day comment period for a public workshop, open house or hearing. Any comments received during the 15-day period are included in the comment/response matrix for each public meeting summary. This allows the team to consider all comments and concerns, evaluate any potential changes to the project, and offer consistent responses to stakeholder concerns. The meeting summary is typically posted on our website 3-6 months after a public meeting.

20. Why can't TxDOT just synchronize the traffic lights along the corridor?

Improving traffic signal synchronization will help, but not solve the congestion issue on Loop 360. Currently, the corridor's traffic signals are manually configured and do not "talk" to each other. Therefore, any timing tweaks must be made on-site to each individual signal, and any tweaks to one signal do not affect any other signals along the corridor. The program team is currently working to identify potential signal upgrades and timing improvements that would provide some relief in light to moderate traffic conditions. However, such improvements would have little to no effect during peak traffic times unless they are accompanied by more significant design and/or capacity improvements – there are simply too many cars trying to move through each intersection to avoid sitting through multiple signals. All proposed improvements, including intersection and additional capacity improvements, will assume that traffic signals will be upgraded and synchronized to the greatest extent possible.

21. What is Dark-Sky lighting and will the Loop 360 projects include it?

Dark-Sky lighting is a design approach that preserves and protects the nighttime environment by using properly-shielded outdoor lighting equipment that reduces light pollution outside of right of way.

The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) is the recognized authority on light pollution worldwide and is the entity who determines whether a certain area qualifies as a "Dark-Sky Place." There are currently only three Dark-Sky Places located near Austin, including the town of Dripping Springs, and the River Hills and Lost Creek neighborhoods.

In the fall of 2018, the Loop 360 project team began to gather public input on Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) for the corridor. CSS is a collaborative approach to developing roadways that fit within their surroundings, and it includes components such as lighting. Although the lighting specifications under consideration for Loop 360 may not meet International Dark-Sky standards, TxDOT is partnering with the City of Austin to add lighting features that will preserve the natural look of the night skies along Loop 360. The Loop 360 projects must include lighting on ramps and at intersections to ensure safety and security. Lighting options are still being evaluated, but might include low-level, LED lighting that focuses lighting downward, prevents glare, and preserves the nighttime aesthetic of the community.