



## US 290 from Oak Hill to Dripping Springs Environmental Study Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the US 290 from Oak Hill to Dripping Springs Environmental Study?

TxDOT is completing an environmental study of US 290 from Oak Hill to Dripping Springs to evaluate long-term solutions that:

- Improve mobility and safety in the corridor
- Enhance accessibility for residents and businesses
- Improve emergency response times
- Minimize impacts to the community and natural environment

The study will include:

- Engagement with community stakeholders, public agencies and local governments
- Continued analyses of current corridor conditions
- Presentation of the purpose and need for the project
- Evaluation of design options and the No Build (do nothing) alternative
- Evaluation of potential impacts to the community and environment (e.g., water resources, air quality, noise, threatened and endangered species, historical and archeological resources, land use and parkland)
- Recommendation of a design option or No Build alternative

### Why is this project needed?

The project is needed to improve mobility and safety along US 290 between Oak Hill and Dripping Springs. The roadway does not adequately accommodate current traffic volumes, resulting in congestion and reduced mobility. Since 2010, daily traffic increased by up to 50% within the study area and the number of vehicles travelling along the corridor each day is expected to increase by 3-5 times over the next 30 years.

In addition, about one crash occurs every other day along US 290 in the study area. There were 1,245 reported crashes between 2016-2022. 19 of those crashes were fatal, 44 resulted in serious injuries and 323 resulted in other injuries. Five crashes involved people walking or biking, and two people walking died.

The need for mobility and safety improvements is increasing due to the rapid population growth and development occurring along US 290 and the communities around it.

- The city of Dripping Springs has grown over 76% in three years from 2020-23.
- Hays County is one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation, growing by 16% from 2020-23.
- The Oak Hill area (ZIP codes of 78735, 78736 & 78737) grew by nearly 29% from 2017-22.

If we do nothing, about 30 years from now, travel demand along the corridor is expected to increase between 3 to 5 times, creating unreliable routes for emergency vehicles, residents and those traveling east and west through the corridor. Travel times are also projected to increase. The eastbound AM peak period trip that takes about 20 minutes today is expected to take 58 minutes, while the westbound PM peak period trip that takes about 18 minutes today is expected to take 36 minutes.

### **What is the project history?**

Improvements to US 290 in this area were first identified as a need in 2010 in the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) 2035 Plan.

In 2019-2020, TxDOT conducted a planning and feasibility study for US 290 from RM 1826 in southwest Austin to RM 12 in Dripping Springs. The project was then placed on hold due to implications of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as resource allocations.

In 2022, TxDOT began the next phase of the project development process, launching this environmental study.

### **When will the Feasibility Study report be final?**

The feasibility study was completed in 2019-2020 and was temporarily paused (including finalization of the feasibility study report) due to implications of the Covid-19 pandemic and resource allocations. Recent traffic analysis data was incorporated into the report, which is now final and available online. Visit [TxDOT.gov](https://www.txdot.gov) and keyword search, “US 290 from Oak Hill” and click on “US 290 from Oak Hill to Dripping Springs Environmental Study.”

### **What is the study area?**

The study area is US 290 from RM 1826 in southwest Austin to Roger Hanks Parkway in Dripping Springs (Approximately 13 miles in Travis and Hays counties).

Within the study area:

- US 290 from RM 1826 to Rob Shelton Boulevard is in the Environmental Study phase.
- US 290 from Rob Shelton Boulevard to Roger Hanks Parkway is in the Final Design phase. *This breakout project is being expedited by TxDOT based on public input.*
- On the east end of the study area TxDOT is constructing improvements as part of the Oak Hill Parkway project between RM 1826 and Circle Dr/S. View Road.

### **What other projects and studies are occurring in the area?**

Due to significant growth and traffic demand, multiple projects and studies are underway near the US 290 (Oak Hill to Dripping Springs) Environmental Study area, including:

- *Oak Hill Parkway* construction is in progress, with completion anticipated in 2026. The project is widening US 290 to an access-controlled facility, adding lanes for drivers traveling through Oak Hill. The project will also remove traffic signals on the mainlanes, add frontage roads for local traffic, and add new flyovers between US 290 and SH 71.
- *US 290 from Roger Hanks Parkway to Rob Shelton Boulevard* - design is underway to upgrade the existing four-lane divided highway to a six-lane divided highway and include

pedestrian and bicycle accommodations. Construction is funded and is anticipated to begin in 2028.

- *US 290 Feasibility Study (from US 281 to Roger Hanks Parkway in Hays and Blanco counties)* – TxDOT began the study in 2023 to examine various potential improvements to enhance safety and meet future traffic demands. The study will establish an ultimate ROW footprint that could be used to provide setbacks for new developments.
- *RM 12 from RM 150 to RM 3238 Environmental Study* – Based on public feedback, TxDOT will begin a new study later this year for safety and mobility improvements to this heavily traveled corridor. Some near-term improvements identified as part of this study could be constructed as part of the US 290 from Roger Hanks Parkway to Rob Shelton Boulevard project.
- *RM 1826 from US 290 to SH 45 Environmental Study* – TxDOT began the study in 2020 to analyze potential mobility and safety improvements to meet anticipated future traffic demands along 4.4 miles of RM 1826 from US 290 to SH 45.
- *RM 1826 from SH 45 to RM 150 Feasibility Study* – TxDOT began the study in 2023 to assess operational and safety improvements to the 7.7-mile segment of RM 1826 from SH 45 to RM 150 to meet anticipated future traffic demands.
- Hays County is working on a number of transportation projects and planning efforts, including some near the US 290 study area:
  - *Dripping Springs Southwest Connection Study* - to identify a route that will extend RM 150 from the intersection of RM 12 at RM 150 and connect to US 290 west of Dripping Springs.
  - *Fitzhugh Road Safety Study* - to identify potential mobility and safety improvements from RM 12 to the Hays County line. Possible improvements could include additional signage, pavement markings, and intersection improvements.
- *US 290 at RM 12 Local Route Improvements (by City of Dripping Springs)* - The City of Dripping Springs is adding various local routes around the intersection of US 290 and RM 12. The projects are in various phases of design and construction. Funding by others.

### **How long will the Environmental Study take, and what are the next steps?**

The typical environmental study usually lasts between 12-24 months. However, TxDOT has slowed this study down after hearing from the community that more dialogue is needed, so we can't estimate yet when this phase of work will be complete.

This study will be a multi-step process that includes listening to the community, then developing potential project design options. TxDOT will consider technical data as well as public input to inform development and analysis of those potential project design options, as well as the no build alternative. TxDOT will analyze the design options to determine potential impacts to the community and environment and will evaluate them according to the mobility and safety goals of the project. Additional community engagement opportunities will occur during this study.

### **What is the project development process?**

The typical TxDOT project development process can take several years and generally advances through four phases. Stakeholder engagement occurs throughout all phases:

- Phase 1: Planning and Feasibility Study – *This phase was completed for US 290 from Oak Hill to Dripping Springs in 2019-2020.*
- Phase 2: Environmental Study - *This phase was started in 2022 following a temporary project pause due to implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and resource allocations. This phase will result in an Environmental Finding and recommendation of a Build or No Build alternative.*
- Phase 3: Final design, right of way acquisition and utility adjustments – *This phase is not funded. Should a Build alternative be recommended, and funding be secured, this phase would begin next.*
- Phase 4: Construction – *This phase is not funded.*

Advancing from phase to phase depends on the previous phase outcome, as well as funding availability.

### **What environmental resources are being considered as part of the study?**

The study will analyze potential impacts to the community and the environment, including:

- Threatened and endangered species and wildlife
- Water resources, wetlands and floodplains
- Edwards Aquifer and water quality
- Vegetation
- Traffic noise
- Air quality
- Structures (homes, businesses, other)
- Parkland
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Historical and archeological resources
- Visual and aesthetic qualities

### **Will trees be impacted?**

While it is impossible to preserve all trees, TxDOT is committed to preserve as many as possible and will design the project to limit impacts where feasible. If there is a certain area or tree you would like the study team to know more about, please let us know by submitting your input as part of the community workshop, or by sending an email to [US290W@txdotaustin.com](mailto:US290W@txdotaustin.com).

### **How does the study evaluate noise?**

Community feedback received to date tells us that traffic noise is a concern. As part of the evaluation of potential options, the study team will use predictive noise modeling to estimate noise levels. A noise barrier analysis will likely be completed as part of the study, and results will be shared with the community at future meetings.

### **What is Dark-Sky lighting and will the US 290 project 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.

DarkSky International (formerly the International Dark-Sky Association) is the recognized authority on light pollution worldwide and is the entity who determines whether a certain area qualifies as a "Dark-Sky Place." The City of Dripping Springs and areas in its ETJ were designated as a Dark Sky Community in 2014.

Lighting is not addressed as part of the environmental study phase. However, should a build alternative move forward, TxDOT would design the project to be dark sky sensitive. TxDOT is coordinating with the City of Dripping Springs to look at lighting features that would preserve the natural look of the night skies along US 290.

TxDOT projects must include lighting on ramps and at intersections for safety and security. Potential dark sky-sensitive design features could include low-level LED lighting that focuses lighting downward, prevents glare, and preserves the nighttime aesthetic of the community.

### **Will the Edwards Aquifer be impacted?**

Protecting our community's waterways is a priority on all TxDOT projects. A portion of the project under study is within the Edwards Aquifer Contributing Zone, and therefore, should this project be constructed, a Water Pollution Abatement Plan would be developed and reviewed by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). In addition, a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) would be developed to describe the stormwater management plans and Best Management Practices for the project.

### **How will the study consider drainage and flooding?**

We understand from community input that flooding is a concern, and analyses show that flooding is an existing issue in some locations.. As part of this study, TxDOT is analyzing how a project might impact the community and environment, including floodplains and drainage.

Drainage analyses will be performed at cross-drainage structures, upstream and downstream, to determine the potential for adverse impacts resulting from increased impervious cover. Mitigation measures could include detention ponds, re-routing of flows, and erosion protection measures.

US 290 from Oak Hill to Dripping Springs intersects the following FEMA floodplains:

- East of Sportsplex\*
- East of W Mercer St\*
- East of RM 12\*
- Slaughter Creek
- Between Baxter Ln and Oliver Drive
- Devils Pen Creek

*\*Recently defined by FEMA as flood zones.*

The study team is taking this information into account with the design options and will consider if improvements could be incorporated that not only mitigate for additional impervious cover (as required), but also to reduce flood risk.

### **When will the public get to look at project design options?**

The study team will use input collected since the environmental study began to inform development of project design options. This includes public input collected as part of this workshop, as well as property owner feedback and input from the January public meeting. We don't have a firm timeframe yet for when design options will be available for public review, but we anticipate it may be sometime next year.

### **Will the design shared earlier be an option?**

It's likely that at least some iteration of the design that was shared already will be brought forth as an option for review. The data and traffic projections show that at least two additional mainlanes (one in each direction) and frontage roads are needed to adequately serve the number of people traveling along US 290 in the study area. TxDOT must consider what the data is showing and all the growth that's occurring. However, we heard the community feedback and concerns expressed about the original design option, and we are committed to looking at additional possibilities.

### **Has TxDOT looked at other design options?**

During the feasibility study TxDOT developed and evaluated 3 concepts to address the need for improved safety and mobility along the corridor.

- Option 1: Proposed adding one new travel lane in each direction
- Option 2: Proposed adding one new travel lane in each direction + overpasses at some major intersections
- Option 3: Proposed adding one new travel lane in each direction + two lane frontage roads in each direction + grade separated interchanges at all locations + localized improvements in some locations (e.g. longer turn bays and additional turn lanes)

Analysis showed that only option 3 would result in the mainlanes and frontage roads functioning acceptably with moderate delays and minimized queuing.

TxDOT developed four alternative alignments for option 3 using Capital Area Metropolitan Organization (CAMPO) guidance and TxDOT's optimal design criteria. These were examined for potential impacts on homes, businesses, utilities, environmental features, and other factors. They further developed the alternative with the fewest impacts, narrowing the footprint further.

This is the draft design that was initially shared with the community at the beginning of the environmental study. However, we heard the community's concerns and feedback, and we are open to looking at other design options. That is why we are here today and continuing our dialogue with the community.

### **Why are bicycle and pedestrian paths being studied?**

TxDOT must build a safe and reliable transportation network for all Texans.

When developing federally funded projects, TxDOT is required to follow Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines. These guidelines require TxDOT to make bicycle and pedestrian accommodations a “routine part of 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.

The Shared-Use Path (SUP) included in the draft design presented to the community earlier in this study was based on TxDOT’s Roadway Design Manual and guidelines developed by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). However, TxDOT will also evaluate other options for incorporating bicycle and pedestrian facilities required by state and federal standards, including:

- SUP in one direction + sidewalk in the other direction
- Connections to existing trails
- Frontage road design changes
- Reduced widths between sidewalks and frontage roads in some locations

### **Will additional right of way be needed?**

TxDOT’s goal is to construct improvements within the existing state right of way as much as possible. However, the constrained US 290 corridor presents significant challenges, and TxDOT would need to acquire additional right of way should a build alternative move forward. TxDOT has been meeting with the owners of properties that could be impacted by the project to learn more about how the properties are used and other information the study team should be aware of. While one possible project design has been shared with community members for feedback, TxDOT will consider other potential designs as part of the study.

Right-of-way acquisition is not anticipated prior to completion of the environmental study and a project footprint has been determined. At that time, TxDOT could acquire ROW from property owners who are willing to sell.

If you are concerned that your property could be impacted and you have not connected with the study team yet, please contact us at [US290W@txdotaustin.com](mailto:US290W@txdotaustin.com) to schedule a meeting, so we can listen to your concerns and suggestions.

### **Can TxDOT look at underpasses rather than overpasses?**

Based on community feedback as well as ongoing technical analysis, the study is team is evaluating the design presented in January 2024 in a variety of ways, including the size of the highway, intersection design, and underpasses where feasible.

### **When will construction begin?**

Construction is not funded. If a build alternative is recommended at the end of the environmental study, the project would advance next to the Final Design. If the project were to advance to the Construction Phase, it would likely be no earlier than 2032.

### **How is stakeholder input being incorporated and how can I get involved?**

Stakeholder input is critical to this study and the project development process. Input received during the 2019-2020 Feasibility Study phase helped TxDOT:

- identify study goals and objectives
- understand mobility and safety issues people experience on US 290 in the study area
- identify potential roadway improvements
- refine the criteria by which all design options will be evaluated

Public input also helped TxDOT identify a need to prioritize additional efforts, including a separate project along US 290 from Rob Shelton Boulevard to Roger Hanks Parkway, and a new study to look at improvements along RM 12 from RM 150 to RM 3238.

Public input is currently being used to evaluate the initial draft design that was shared with the community earlier in the environmental study phase.

Today, TxDOT is asking for public input regarding the current mobility and safety issues people are facing on the corridor, and to better understand community priorities. This input will inform other design options to be developed going forward.

There will continue to be additional public input opportunities to provide feedback, share concerns and ideas. Please email us at [US290W@txdotaustin.com](mailto:US290W@txdotaustin.com) to get involved, receive updates or ask questions.

### **Can people provide input if they couldn't attend today's workshop?**

Yes. All of the materials from today's workshop are posted online, and input can also be provided through the online survey and mapping tool through June 22<sup>nd</sup>. The workshop information and survey can be accessed in three ways:

- Scan the QR Code (will be placed at check in table and around the meeting space)
- Visit [www.TxDOT.gov](http://www.TxDOT.gov), keyword search "US 290 from Oak Hill" or
- Visit [www.txdot.gov/projects/hearings-meetings.html](http://www.txdot.gov/projects/hearings-meetings.html)

### **Who can I contact if I have questions or comments?**

Please contact the study team by email at [US290W@txdotaustin.com](mailto:US290W@txdotaustin.com) or by calling the study hotline at 512-342-3333.