



Welcome

**US 281 Blanco County Project
(from US 290 to Comal County Line)**

Virtual Open House with In-Person Option
Sept. 29, 2022

Why am I here?

- Review introductory materials and exhibits
- Provide feedback

Sept. 29, 2022

Welcome to the virtual public meeting for the Texas Department of Transportation Austin District’s US 281 Blanco County project. TxDOT is proposing safety and mobility improvements on US 281 from US 290 to the Comal County line.

The virtual public meeting will be available through Friday, Oct. 14, 2022.

The purpose of this virtual public meeting is to inform you about the proposed project and to request your feedback.

Additionally, since this is a pre-recorded, virtual presentation, you will be able to pause, rewind or fast forward this video at anytime.

End the Streak 

HELP
#EndTheStreakTX
End the streak of daily deaths on Texas roadways.

[TxDOT.gov](https://www.txdot.gov) (Keyword: #EndTheStreakTX)    #EndTheStreakTX Toolkit 

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 2

Nov. 7, 2000, was the last deathless day on Texas roadways. That means for nearly 22 years, at least one person has died every single day. We all have a part to play to change that. This message is that reminder – to End the Streak of deaths on Texas highways. We need drivers and passengers to act more responsibly and help us reach our goal of zero deaths by 2050. Texans can play a major role in ending fatal crashes with a few simple driving habits: wear seatbelts, drive the speed limit, put away the phone and avoid other distractions, and never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs. So please do your part and share this message with your friends and family.

Project Overview - Previous Study

US 281 Master Plan Feasibility Study (August 2016)

- TxDOT studied statewide US 281 corridor from San Antonio to Wichita Falls
- Goals:
 - Understand corridor travel characteristics
 - Understand existing conditions and constraints involving adjacent communities
 - Address corridor-level needs related to safety, congestion, economic development, and access to adjacent land uses
 - **Identify potential long-range and localized improvements**

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 **3**


In 2016, TxDOT performed a statewide study of the US 281 corridor from San Antonio to Wichita Falls, called the US 281 Master Plan Feasibility Study.

The goals of the study were to:

- Understand corridor travel characteristics
- Understand existing conditions and constraints involving adjacent communities
- Address corridor-level needs related to safety, congestion, economic development, and access to adjacent land uses
- Identify potential long-range and localized improvements

In this 2016 study, a variety of factors were examined including existing and proposed traffic volumes, crash history, community needs, environmental features and physical characteristics (such as pavement condition, median type, and lane and shoulder widths).

Project Overview - Previous Study



US 281 Master Plan Feasibility Study (August 2016)

Identified two priority projects in the Austin District:

- **US 281 at SH 71 Interchange (Burnet County)**
 - Needed to enhance safety and improve mobility
- **US 281 Corridor Expansion from US 290 to Comal County line (Blanco County)**
 - Growth in Bexar and Comal counties leading to the need for expansion

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 4

From the 2016 Master Plan Feasibility Study, two priority projects were identified within the Austin District.

The first was the US 281 at SH 71 interchange in Burnet County due to the need to enhance safety and improve mobility within the interchange. This is a separate project in the preliminary stages of development.

The second project, and the one being presented in this public meeting, was in Blanco County from US 290 to the Comal County line. This section of US 281 was recommended for expansion due to population growth in Bexar and Comal Counties. The population growth in these counties will increase the projected traffic volume and crash rates, which were already as much as double the rate of comparable roadways in 2016.

The study recommended the initial project be a four-lane divided highway with a wide median to match the existing highway section in Comal County. This is the proposed US 281 Blanco County project.

Project Overview - Study Area

US 281 Blanco County

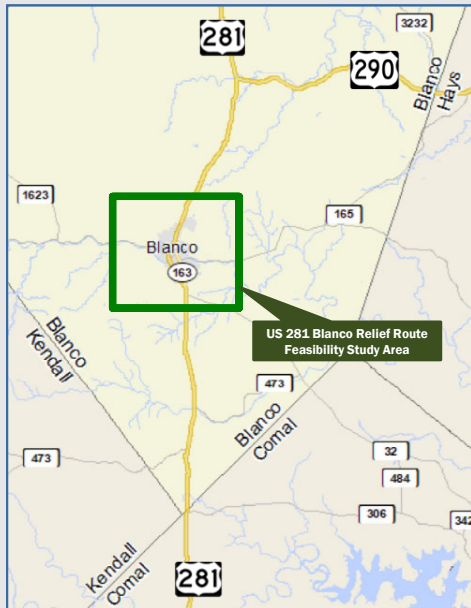
- Project Limits
 - North: US 290 to city of Blanco
 - South: City of Blanco to Comal County line
- Project Intent
 - Enhance safety
 - Improve connectivity and mobility
- Funded project for FY 2027 construction

No changes to the existing right of way will occur through downtown Blanco as a part of this project.

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 5

The US 281 Blanco County project spans approximately 19 miles from US 290 to the Comal County line. The project will tie into the existing four-lane sections north and south of the city of Blanco. No changes to the existing right of way will occur through downtown Blanco as a part of this project. The US 281 at US 290 interchange is included in this project, and it is expected that roadway improvements will extend along US 290. The limits of the improvements on US 290 have yet to be determined. The project is currently funded for construction in fiscal year 2027.

Project Overview – Relief Route



US 281 Blanco Relief Route Feasibility Study

- At the request of the city of Blanco and Blanco County TxDOT is initiating the US 281 Blanco Relief Route Feasibility Study
- This project will evaluate ways to enhance safety and improve mobility along US 281 in the city of Blanco
- Separate from the US 281 Blanco County project
- Public involvement opportunities are expected in spring 2023

At the request of the city of Blanco and Blanco County, TxDOT is initiating the US 281 Blanco Relief Route Feasibility Study to evaluate ways to enhance safety and improve mobility along US 281 in the city of Blanco. The US 281 Blanco County and US 281 Blanco Relief Route are two separate projects with different purposes and needs, but both include opportunities for community feedback and will be closely coordinated with the county and city. The US 281 Blanco Relief Route Feasibility Study will have multiple open houses expected as soon as spring 2023 and other opportunities for community input to develop a solution that addresses the needs of this community. Visit [TxDOT.gov](https://www.txdot.gov) for more information and to provide comment on the US 281 Blanco Relief Route Feasibility Study.

Project Overview – Preliminary Analysis

Preliminary analysis includes:

Safety Analysis

Population Growth

Traffic Projections

Statewide Connectivity

Regional Project Coordination

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting

Sept. 29, 2022 7

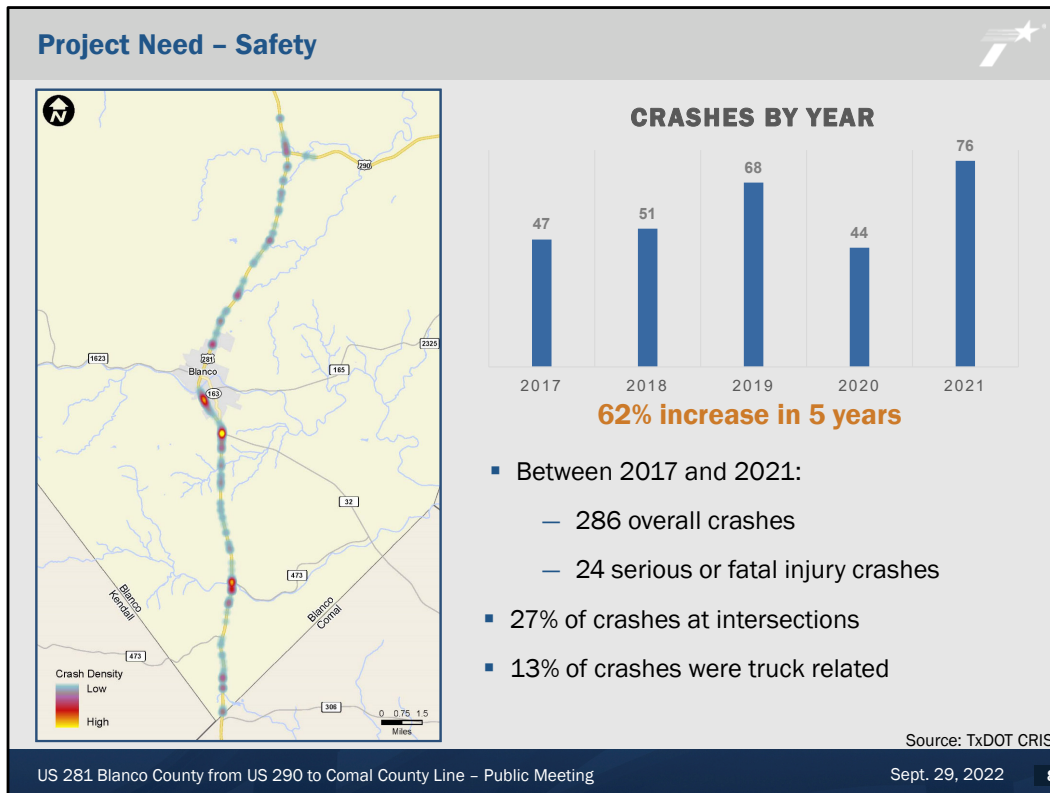
The project development process for the US 281 Blanco County Project is underway.

TxDOT began by researching the existing and future conditions to better understand the projects needs. This preliminary analysis helps TxDOT address existing issues while also preparing for the future.

Some of the preliminary analysis work that has been completed on the US 281 Blanco County Project includes:

- Safety analysis of the existing roadway
- Research on past and future population growth
- Development of future traffic projections
- Examine and understand how the roadway integrates with TxDOT’s statewide plan
- Coordination with adjacent projects in the region

Through this analysis TxDOT is able to identify the projects needs and determine the proposed improvements.




One of the primary goals of this project is to increase safety.

The current roadway was designed decades ago. By updating to current design standards, safety will be enhanced along the entire corridor.


Within the project limits, the number of crashes increased 62 percent from 2017 through 2021. Overall, there were 286 crashes resulting in 24 serious or fatal injuries.

Over the 5-year period, 27 percent of the crashes were at intersections, with the most occurring at RM 473. Truck related crashes accounted for 13 percent of the total crashes.

In addition to improving safety on the corridor, we must also develop a project that accommodates future growth in the region.


Project Need – Blanco County Growth 

Blanco County Surroundings (Comal, Hays, Travis and Kendall Counties)

 **239%** growth from 1980 to 2020
85% growth anticipated between 2020 and 2050

- Hays, Comal and Kendall counties ranked 2nd, 4th and 5th nationally in percentage growth from 2010 to 2019
- Travis County ranked 10th nationally in total population growth from 2010 to 2019

Blanco County

 **146%** growth from 1980 to 2020
10% growth anticipated between 2020 and 2050

- Blanco County growth combined with that of surrounding counties is substantial and will increase local and through trips along US 281

Source: Texas Demographic Center, US Census Bureau

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 **9**

According to the US Census Bureau and the Texas Demographic Center; from 2010 to 2019 the neighboring counties of Hays, Comal and Kendall ranked **2nd**, **4th** and **5th** nationally in percentage growth, and Travis county ranked **10th** in total population growth. When compared with all 3,142 US counties, this regional growth is substantial.

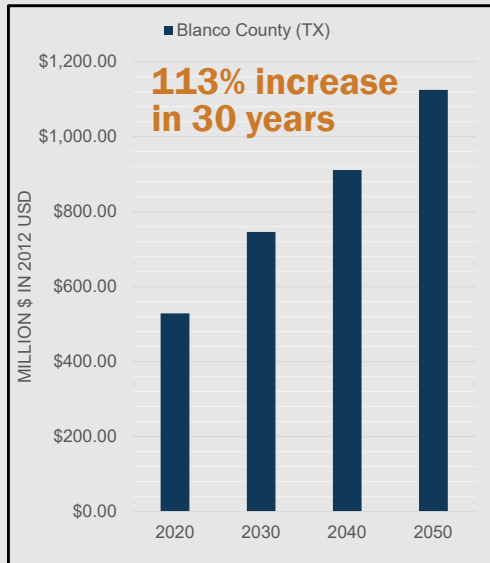
Blanco County’s population is projected to increase by 10 percent over the next 30 years. However, in that same period the regional population is anticipated to increase by 85 percent.

This regional growth will translate into economic growth in Blanco County.

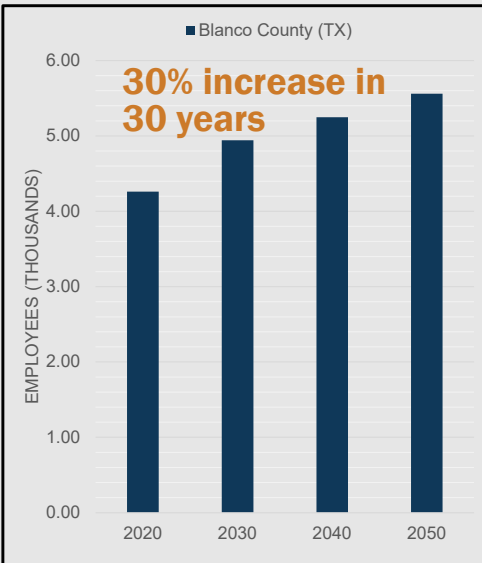
Project Need – Blanco County Growth



Gross Domestic Product Data

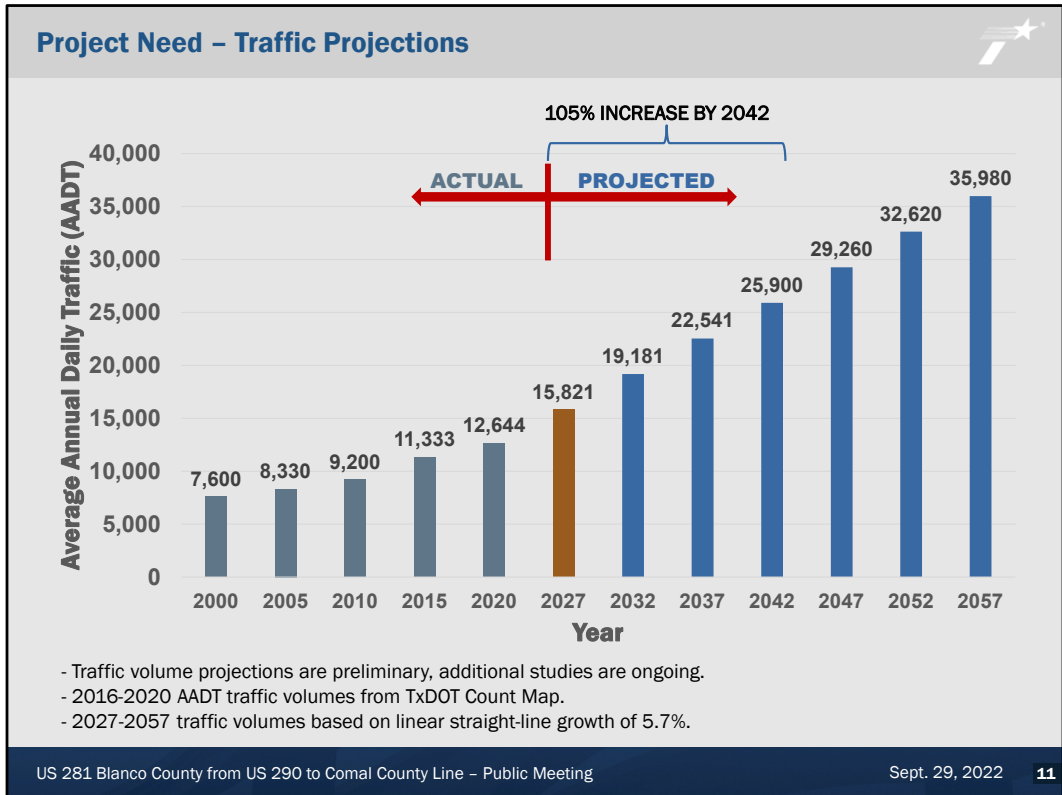


Total Employment




Source: Moody's Analytics

As the population increases, overall economic activity is anticipated to increase in the region. Based on Moody's Analytic data, there will be more jobs and they will have a larger contribution to the overall Gross Domestic Product of the state. All these things mean more people will be working, living, travelling and conducting business in the region. As this economic growth occurs an adequate transportation system is needed to accommodate this traffic.







In the Austin District, US 281 is a major north/south corridor. The tremendous growth in adjacent counties has caused traffic volumes to increase. These factors have caused an increase in the projected traffic within Blanco County. In 2020, more than 12,000 vehicles per day traveled this section of US 281. It is forecasted that traffic volumes will increase to approximately 26,000 vehicles per day by the year 2042, a 105 percent increase over 20 years. The existing roadway with a mix of cars and trucks is expected to experience safety and congestion issues with these traffic volumes if no improvements are made.

Project Need – Statewide Connectivity 

US 281 has been identified by multiple agencies as a critical highway within Texas and the nation.

Highway networks that have identified US 281 as critical include:

	
National Highway System	Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET)
	
Texas Trunk System	Texas Highway Freight Network

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 12

US 281 has been identified by multiple agencies as a critical highway within Texas and the nation.

- The National Highway System, designated by Federal Highway Administration includes the Interstate Highway System.
- The Strategic Highway Network, designated by the Department of Defense, is a network of highways which are important to the United States’ strategic defense policy, which provide access and emergency capabilities for defense.
- The Texas Trunk System, designated by TxDOT, is a statewide network of rural highways that complements the Interstate Highway System and is a principal connector for all Texas cities with over 20,000 population.
- The Texas Highway Freight Network, designated by TxDOT, is the Texas portion of the National Highway Freight Network implemented by the Federal government.

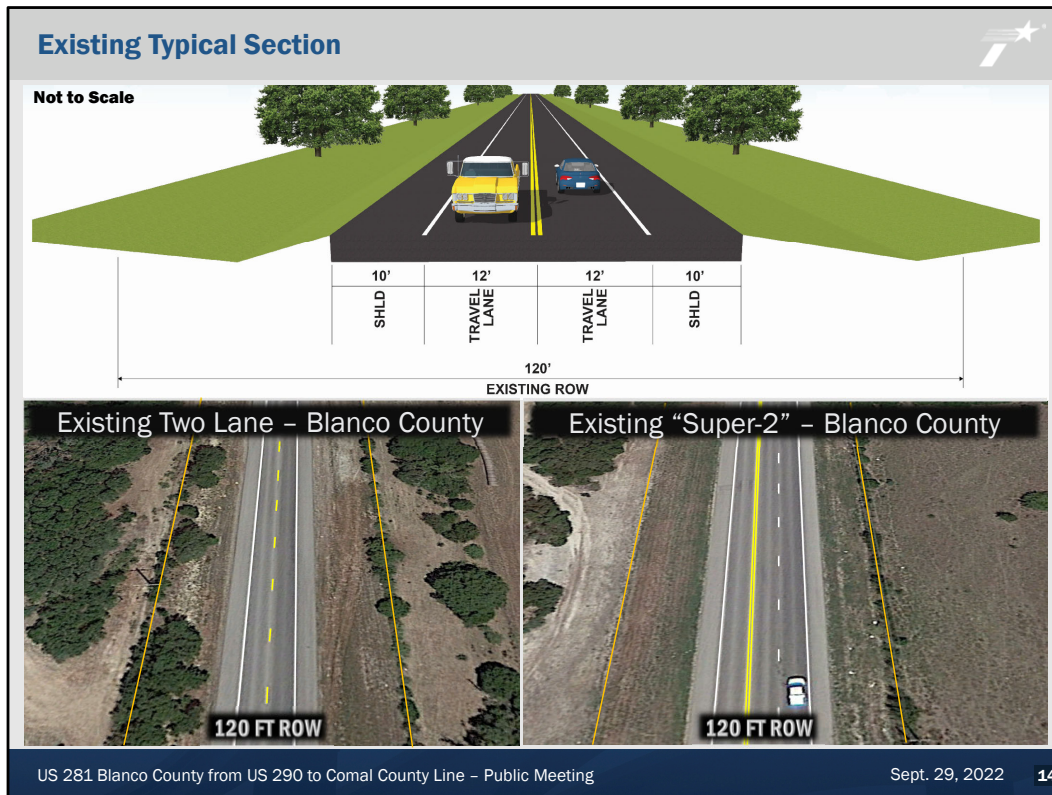


In addition to the national and statewide significance, US 281 is an important route for regional connectivity. Depicted here are the US 281 and US 290 corridors linking northern Bexar county with western Travis county, and the current status of improvement projects along the routes.

To the south, the gray section of US 281 in Bexar County has been upgraded to a freeway. The orange section in Comal County has multiple planning studies in various stages of development. The intent of these projects is to add additional capacity through Comal County to the Blanco County line.

Along US 290, the pink section, studies are being developed to upgrade the roadway from US 281 to the “Y” in Oak Hill. East of Oak Hill, the gray section, is an existing freeway.

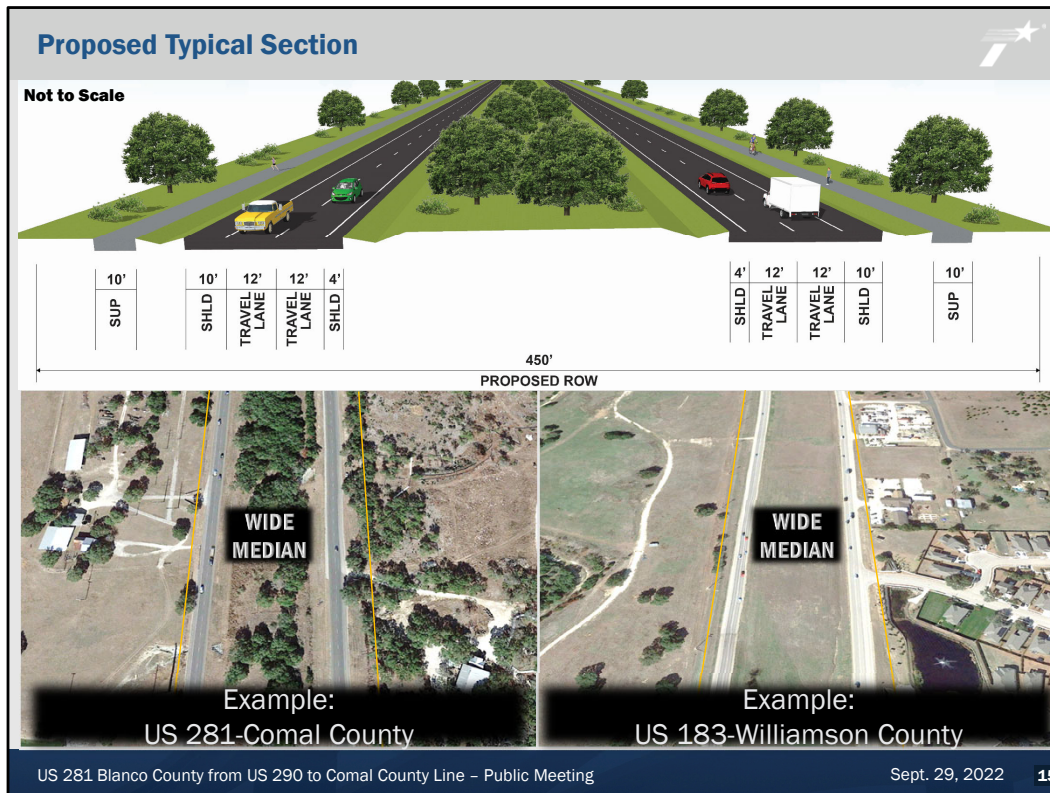
As the US 281 and US 290 corridors are improved the need to upgrade the Blanco County segment of US 281 is essential to the regional connectivity.



This is the existing US 281 roadway with one 12-foot travel lane in each direction and 10-foot shoulders on either side, as shown here. This is the last remaining section of two-lane roadway on US 281 within the Austin District.

The corridor also contains sections of "Super-2" highway, shown in the bottom right of the slide. A "Super 2" highway is when a passing lane is provided on a two-lane rural highway. Typically, the passing lane alternates directions allowing passing opportunities for both directions of travel.

The existing right of way has a typical width of 120 feet.









- This shows what the proposed project could look like. Improvements include:
- Widening the roadway to create a four-lane divided highway, with two lanes in each direction and shoulders.
 - Separating travel lanes by adding a grassy median to preserve flexibility in the corridor to accommodate future transportation improvements.
 - Adding median crossovers with acceleration and deceleration lanes at regular intervals.
 - Adding right-turn lanes at various intersections.
 - Designing roadway transitions North and South of the city of Blanco to tie into existing four-lane sections.
 - Upgrading the US 281 and US 290 interchange.

The proposed right of way has a typical width of 450 feet.

Evaluation Factors

Alternative evaluation includes consideration of the following:

		
Project Purpose and Need	Current and Future Corridor Conditions	Right-of-Way Impacts and Acquisition
		
Project Costs	Preservation of Hill Country Character	Public and Stakeholder Involvement

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 16










As the project team develops alternative concepts that would potentially address the current and future needs in the corridor, they will be evaluated based on several factors to determine the potential effects to transportation system performance, impacts to the human and natural environment, and project-related costs.

These factors include:

- Project purpose and need – to ensure the alternative addresses all identified needs of the project
- Current and future corridor conditions – including traffic and safety-related metrics
- Right-of-way impacts and acquisition requirements, including any potential displacements
- Project cost estimates
- Developing a roadway that preserves the Hill Country character
- Public and stakeholder involvement, including public input and agency coordination
- And potential environmental impacts

Environmental Resources

- Require right-of-way acquisition
- Potential for displacements
- Studies are underway to evaluate and minimize potential impacts of the proposed project on social and environmental resources, including:

 Air Quality & Traffic Noise	 Hazardous Materials	 Cultural Resources (Historic & Archeology)
 Land Use & Parkland	 Indirect & Cumulative Impacts	 Biological Resources
 Threatened & Endangered Species	 Water Resources	 Social & Community Impacts

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 17

As part of the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, process, TxDOT is studying the potential environmental impacts of the alternative concepts.





It is currently anticipated that the project would require the acquisition of additional right of way to accommodate the proposed improvements and may result in some displacements.

The project team is currently analyzing impacts to a variety of environmental resource areas, including:

- Air quality and traffic noise
- Hazardous materials
- Cultural resources, including historic and archeological sites
- Land use and parkland
- Indirect and cumulative impacts
- Biological resources, including threatened and endangered species
- Water resources; and
- Social and community impacts, including Environmental Justice

Cultural Resources

Cultural resource study is conducted in compliance with state and federal laws such as the National Historic Preservation Act and the Antiquities Code of Texas. These laws can protect:

-  **Historic buildings and structures**
-  **Archeological sites and cemeteries**
-  **Sacred/religious landmarks and sites**
-  **Historic objects and landscapes**

Important cultural resources identified include the Twin Sisters Dance Hall and cemetery, Blanco State Park, and several historic-age structures and archeological sites.

TxDOT looks for historic properties that:


- Are at least 45 years in age
- Have a documented connection with a historic event or notable person
- Have notable architectural or engineering design
- Contribute important information to understanding Texas' long history

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 18

Given the location of the project in the Texas Hill Country, we know that cultural resources are of particular importance for this project. During the project development process, TxDOT is responsible for identifying important cultural resources and looking for ways to avoid and minimize any project-related impacts pursuant to the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Antiquities Code of Texas, among other laws. These important cultural resources include historic buildings and structures; archeological sites and cemeteries; sacred/religious landmarks and sites; and historic objects and landscapes including heritage and generational properties.

Several important resources already identified in the project area include the Twin Sisters Dance Hall and cemetery; Blanco State Park; and several historic-age structures and previously identified archeological sites.

The project team needs your help to identify any additional resources, so please include any relevant information that you have related to potential cultural resources located in the study area on a comment form to ensure your input is incorporated into the project record for future investigation.

US 281 Blanco County Project – Study Partners 

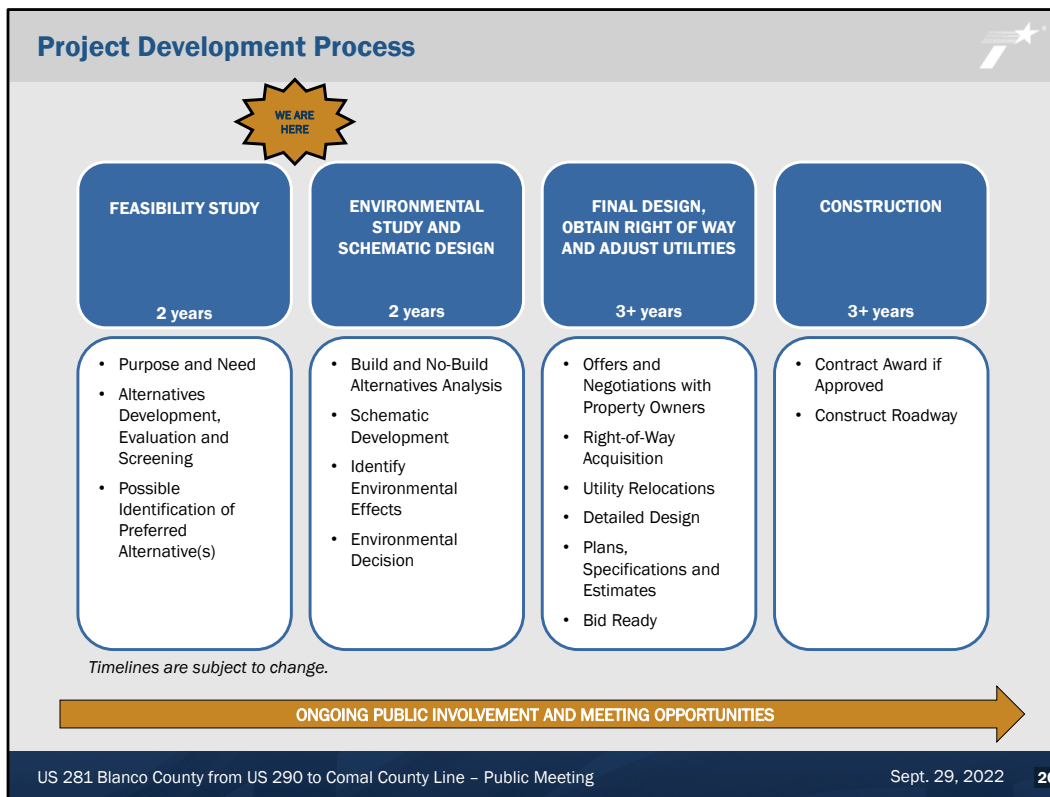
<p>Local Government City of Blanco Blanco County</p> <p>Chamber of Commerce Blanco Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>Environmental Agencies Texas Historical Commission Texas Parks and Wildlife</p> <p>Highway 281 Task Force</p> <p>Emergency Services Texas Department of Public Safety Sheriff Fire EMS</p>	<p>Independent School Districts Blanco Independent School District</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Elected Officials</p> <p>U.S. Senate Senator John Cornyn Senator Ted Cruz</p> <p>U.S. House Congressman Chip Roy</p> <p>State Senate Senator Dawn Buckingham</p> <p>State House Representative Erin Zwiener</p> </div>
--	---

If you know of any others, please let us know.

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 **19**

A project like this requires coordination with many groups, for example; local government, environmental agencies, school districts and elected officials.

Identified here are some we know about, if you are aware of other groups that would like to be involved, please let us know.

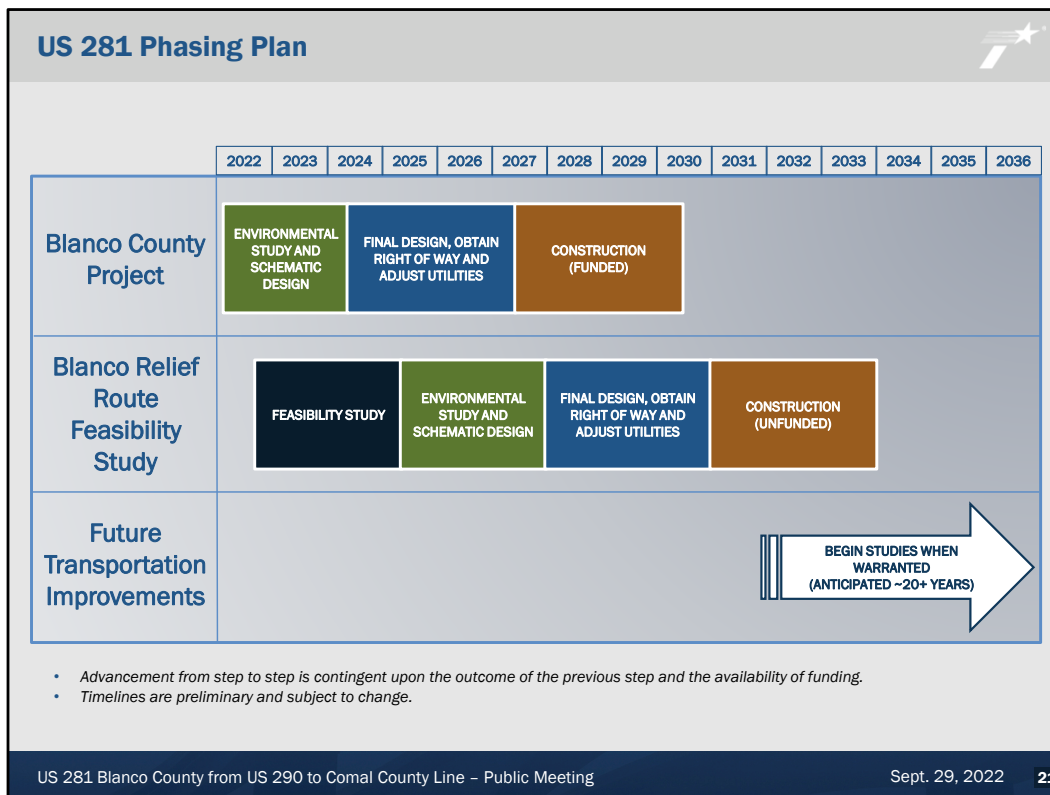


The project development process consists of four phases, each involving stakeholder and public engagement. The timelines of each phase noted here are estimates.

The Blanco County Project is currently at the end of the feasibility study phase.

Following the feasibility study the project will move into the environmental study and schematic design phase. This is when the preliminary engineering is developed and concludes with an environmental decision. It is anticipated the environmental study and schematic design phase for this project will take two years. There will be additional public outreach events and meetings throughout this phase.

Upon environmental decision, if the build alternative moves forward, the next project phase would involve right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation and final design. This phase is anticipated to take at least three years to complete. This is where offers and negotiations would occur with property owners to acquire needed right of way. Utility relocations would also occur. Once this phase is completed, the project can move into construction, which is anticipated in fiscal year 2027.




Now that we’ve provided an overview of the Blanco County Project, let’s focus on the overall US 281 phasing plan. The timeline presented here shows the preliminary schedules for the Blanco County Project, the Blanco Relief Route Feasibility Study, and possible future transportation improvements.

The Blanco County Project is the beginning of the Environmental Study and Schematic Design phase. Construction funding has been identified for TxDOT fiscal year 2027.

The Blanco Relief Route Feasibility Study is being initiated and expected to begin at end of this year. The study will include working with the community to establish a preliminary alignment that would move into the next phase of development. A City resolution would be needed to move onto environmental studies and schematic design. No construction funding has been identified for this project and local contributions for ROW and utilities would follow the Texas Administrative Code.

If the proposed Blanco County Project build alternative advances through development to construction, the established wide median would be included in a Future Transportation Improvement Study, anticipated in 20-plus years, well after completion of the Blanco Relief Route Feasibility Study.

Please note that all dates are tentative and subject to change.

How to Provide Feedback 

Submit comments on the US 281 Blanco County Project by:

- Emailing: US281Blanco@gmail.com
- Filling out a comment card and mailing to:
Nancy Ledbetter & Associates, Inc.
Attn: US 281 Blanco
P.O. Box 14622
Austin, TX 78761
- Online: www.txdot.gov, keyword search “US 281 Blanco County”
- Verbal Comment by voicemail: (830) 554-9114

**Comments must be submitted or postmarked by
Oct. 14, 2022**

US 281 Blanco County from US 290 to Comal County Line – Public Meeting Sept. 29, 2022 22

TxDOT is committed in our efforts to gain public feedback about this project.

TxDOT is offering several methods for providing comments. The first way you can share your input is to submit written comments by emailing the project email address, mailing your comments to the address on your screen, or by submitting comments online at www.txdot.gov. You can also provide your verbal testimony. The verbal testimony option is available starting at 5 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 29, 2022, and will be available until 11:59 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 14, 2022. Please call (830) 554-9114 and leave a voicemail with your comment during that time; your comments will be recorded, and a response will be included in the virtual public meeting summary report. The voicemail system allows you to record a comment up to three minutes long.

Most importantly, please be sure to submit your written and verbal comments on the US 281 Blanco County project no later than Oct. 14, 2022. The responses to all comments submitted during the comment period will be included in the virtual public meeting summary report, which will be posted to www.txdot.gov once completed.

Thank you for participating in the US 281 Blanco County public meeting.