Welcome to the virtual public hearing for the State Highway (SH) 63/ Louisiana Highway (LA) 8 at the Sabine River bridge replacement project. The project is being proposed by the Texas Department of Transportation (or TxDOT) and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (or LADOTD), in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration.

TxDOT and LADOTD are proposing to replace the SH 63/LA 8 bridge over the Sabine River in Newton County, Texas, and Vernon Parish, Louisiana; also known as Burr’s Ferry Bridge. My name is Lauren Macias-Cervantes and I will be speaking on behalf of the project team. I would like to thank you for your interest in the project.

This virtual hearing presentation is available for online viewing starting July 25, 2023 by noon. During the virtual public hearing you may pause the presentation and navigate forward or backward using your video player to allow more time to review the information.
November 7, 2000 was the last deathless day on roadways in Texas. That means for nearly 23 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 highways. We need drivers and passengers to act more responsibly and help us reach our goal of zero deaths by 2050. Members of the public 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 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. Thank you and please enjoy the rest of this presentation.
Purpose of This Public Hearing

- Provide project history, information, and current status
- Describe the project so the public can determine how they may be affected
- Provide the opportunity to provide public input
- Maintain effective communication with the public regarding the project
- Comply with the requirements of Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act and Chapter 26 of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code
- Present the Draft Environmental Assessment for public review

The purpose of this public hearing is to provide a project information, describe the project so the public can determine if and how they may be affected, provide an opportunity to receive public input, maintain effective communication with the public regarding the project, comply with the requirements of Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act and Chapter 26 of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code, and present the Draft Environmental Assessment for public review.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agenda Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Summary of Public Involvement to Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Summary of Outreach for the Public Hearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How to Submit Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Purpose and Need and Project Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Preliminary Alternative Analysis and Preferred Alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Environmental Studies and Right of Way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Anticipated Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Learn More and Submit Comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During this presentation, we will provide the following: a summary of public involvement to date, a summary of outreach for this hearing, how to submit verbal testimony and written or emailed comments, the purpose and need for the project and a project overview, a description of the preliminary alternative analysis and preferred alternative, and a description of the environmental studies conducted for the project. In addition, we will provide right of way needs, the anticipated project schedule, and then a recap of how to get additional information and how to submit comments.
The development of this project has included past public involvement. An alternative analysis workshop was held on March 8, 2018 to get early input from stakeholders and historic resource consulting parties on the bridge options and alternatives.

In accordance with LADOTD’s public involvement process, Solicitation of Views (SOV) letters were sent on November 16, 2018, prior to the public meeting. Letters and notices were also sent to Texas elected officials and stakeholders before the public meeting. The public meeting was held on on Dec. 11, 2018 at Leesville High School. Eleven written comments were received. In general, the comment themes included project support and safety concerns.

From November 2nd 2018 through January 4th 2019, TxDOT and LADOTD solicited public input on the bridge options and alternative routes through MetroQuest, an online engagement and survey tool. 159 unique participants provided 92 comments in the survey, which helped guide the project development process. Alternatives D and C were the top alignment choices. Based on public comment, Alternative C was slightly revised and named Alternative C-1. We will discuss the alternative analysis and preferred alternative in greater detail in this presentation.
## Public Hearing Outreach and Notifications

- June 23, 2023 - Notice published on TxDOT and LADOTD websites
- June 23 and July 14, 2023 - Notice published in Leesville Leader (Louisiana)
- June 28 and July 5 and 12, 2023 - Notice published in Newton County News
- June 23, 2023 - Notice mailed to State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) (Texas Chapter 26 requirement)
- June 26, 2023 - Notice mailed and emailed to elected officials
- Notice/reminders posted on TxDOT and LADOTD social media
- July 10, 2023 - Notice mailed to adjacent property owners
- TxDOT and LADOTD reached out to media

The notice of availability of the draft environmental assessment and virtual public hearing with in-person meeting opportunities was published in newspapers in Louisiana and Texas, mailed to elected officials, stakeholders, and adjacent property owners, and posted online on both TxDOT and LADOTD’s websites.
How to Submit Your Verbal Testimony

- Verbal testimony available, starting at noon on Tuesday, July 25, 2023, until 11:59 p.m. on Friday, August 11, 2023
- Leave your voicemail at:
  - (409) 203-3575
  - Please limit your comments to three minutes

TxDOT and LADOTD are committed to continuing our efforts in receiving public feedback. Let’s take a few minutes and explain the comment process, which is the most important part of this presentation. The project team would like your input through verbal and written comments. The first way you can share your input is to provide verbal testimony similar to an in-person public hearing. Other comment methods will be explained further in the presentation. The verbal testimony option is available starting at noon on Tuesday, July 25, 2023, and will be available until 11:59 p.m. on Friday, August 11, 2023. Please call 409-203-3575 and leave a voicemail with your comment during that timeframe to provide verbal testimony. Your comments will be recorded, and a response will be included in the public hearing summary report. Please keep your comments to three minutes, which is the same timeframe provided during the in-person public hearing event.
How to Submit Your Written Comments

1) Mail Comment to:
   - TxDOT Beaumont District
     C/O Jason Hightower
     Re: SH 63/LA 8 at Sabine River
     8350 Eastex Freeway
     Beaumont, TX 77708

2) Submit Online Comment:
   - Go to www.txdot.gov
   - Search “Historic SH 63/LA 8 Bridge”
   - Click on “Email the Beaumont District”
   - Add comments

3) Email Comment:
   - Send to bmtprojects@txdot.gov

Comments must be submitted by Friday, Aug. 11, 2023

In addition to providing the verbal testimony voicemail option, TxDOT and LADOTD are also encouraging written comments. Comment forms are available at the in-person hearing options, or you may submit them through the methods shown on screen. Comments must be received or postmarked by Friday, August 11, 2023, to be included in the public hearing summary report. You can submit written comments in the following ways:

To mail or submit your comments online:

- Mail comments to: TxDOT Beaumont District, Re: SH 63/LA 8 at Sabine River, 8350 Eastex Freeway, Beaumont, TX 77708
- Or -
  - Visit www.txdot.gov
  - In the “Search TxDOT” box in the upper-right hand corner, enter: “Historic SH 63/LA 8 Bridge” [note – say “Historic SH 63 forward slash LA 8 Bridge” in narration]
  - Once on the TxDOT site you can download a comment form, add your comments, and mail the form to the address shown on the screen. If you want to submit your comments electronically, you can click the “Email the Beaumont District” button on the TxDOT site. If you would like to email your comments, you can send them to bmtprojects@txdot.gov.

Please be sure to submit your written and verbal comments no later than Friday, August 11, 2023. The responses to your comments submitted during the comment period will be included in the public hearing summary report. This report will be posted to the TxDOT website once approved.
Two in-person meeting opportunities are available for this public hearing, one in Leesville, Louisiana on July 25th and one in Burkeville, Texas on July 27th. The presentation you are watching will be the same presentation that will be shown in person. Materials shown at the in-person hearing materials are also posted on-line. In addition, you can ask questions to the project team and leave written comments via mail or email and/or provide verbal comments through voicemail.
Project Purpose and Need

- The project is needed because of the existing bridge’s condition, dimensions, and location, including:
  - Migration of Sabine River has caused bank scour
  - Deterioration of bridge truss and approach spans
  - Impact damage on truss and approach spans
  - Existing railing system is not crash-rated
  - Degradation of existing bridge foundation
  - Horizontal and vertical clearance restrictions

- The purpose of the proposed project is to provide a structurally sound bridge that allows Texas and Louisiana motorists to cross the Sabine River.

The project is needed due to the bridge’s existing bridge’s condition, dimensions, and location, which include:

Migration of the Sabine River has caused bank scour
Deterioration of bridge truss and approach spans
Impact damage on truss and approach spans
The existing railing system is not crash-rated
Degradation of the bridge foundation, and
Horizontal and vertical clearance restrictions

The purpose of the proposed project (or the build alternative) is to provide a structurally sound bridge crossing that allows access for Texas and Louisiana motorists across the Sabine River. The project would focus on providing a bridge at a location with stable river banks, where river migration is not anticipated, and with adequate width and height to safely accommodate existing and foreseeable future transportation needs.
The proposed project is consistent with and listed in TxDOT’s 2023 Unified Transportation Program, which was adopted in Aug. 30, 2022. TxDOT is anticipating to use Category 6 (Bridge Replacement) and Category 4 (Rural Regional Connectivity) funding, with an anticipated split of 80 percent federal funds and 20 percent state funds. The proposed project is also listed in LADOTD’s DOTD Highway Priority Program for fiscal year 2023-2024.
## Existing Bridge

- Listed in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register)
- Part of the Texas highway freight network
- Built in 1937
- Bridge length – approximately 1,876 feet
- Consists of three Parker through truss main spans (right) and 34 T-beam approach spans
- Includes an 11-foot-wide travel lane in each direction with no shoulder

This slide provides a description of the existing bridge. The Burr’s Ferry Bridge is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (or National Register); and the SH 63 roadway is part of the Texas Highway Freight Network.

The bridge was built in 1937 and is approximately 1,876 feet long. It consists of three Parker through truss main spans, which are shown in the photo on the right, and 34 concrete T-beam approach spans. Currently there is one 11-foot-wide travel lane in each direction with no shoulder.
In the Feasibility Study and Historic Bridge Team Report, project engineers first analyzed eight preliminary bridge options for the SH 63/LA 8 crossing at the Sabine River. These options are listed on the slide and include:

- **Option 1**: No Build
- **Option 2**: Rehabilitation for continued two-way vehicular service
- **Option 3**: Rehabilitation for continued use as a one-way scenic bypass and new structure on new alignment
- **Option 4**: Rehabilitation for use as a one-way pair
- **Option 5**: Rehabilitation for use as a pedestrian structure with new structure on new alignment
- **Option 6**: Structure left in place as a monument with new structure on new alignment
- **Option 7**: New structure on current alignment
- **Option 8**: New structure on new alignment

Of the eight bridge options analyzed, project engineers recommended **Bridge Option 8**: New structure on new alignment as the preferred bridge option. The other bridge options either did not meet the purpose and need for the project or they were not reasonable due to economic costs or environmental impacts.
Five different conceptual route alternatives were also considered in the feasibility study, which are shown on this map. These conceptual route alternatives were evaluated based on environmental, engineering, cost, and public input parameters in an evaluation matrix. The evaluation matrix was shown at the public meeting held on Dec. 11, 2018. After the public meeting, the evaluation was further refined, and Route Alternative C, shown as the dashed purple line, was carried into the next stage. Based on public comments, the route was refined into Route Alternative C-1, shown as the solid purple line, which emerged as the recommended preferred alternative.
This is a description of the preferred alternative for the proposed project, which would be constructed approximately 1,825 feet downstream of the existing bridge. This area is anticipated to have long-term bank stability while using the existing roadway approaches to reduce impacts. The Preferred Alternative would remove the existing bridge. The proposed roadway and bridge would consist of two, 12-foot-wide travel lanes, one in each direction, with 10-foot-wide outside shoulders. The preferred alternative is 2.9 miles in length, and proposed project width is 116 to 240 feet. The project would require approximately 77 acres of new right of way.
If you would like to view and/or download the project design, which is also referred to as the “schematics,” you can go to www.txdot.gov and look at the top right corner of the screen. In the search field, add the keywords “Historic SH 63 forward slash LA 8 Bridge” to access the project page, where all of the project materials are located, including the schematics. Once you open the schematics, you can zoom in and out to show your location of interest. Also, shown on the slide is a screen capture of the schematic and legend. Refer to the legend on the schematic. It shows the colors that fill the proposed design. These colors identify the limits and major aspects of the project. For example, the new proposed bridge is shown in a solid blue color.
Environmental Documentation has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Air Quality & Traffic Noise
Social & Community Impacts
Hazardous Materials
Biological Resources
Water Resources
Historic & Archaeological Resources

The project team has evaluated the potential environmental impacts that could occur as a result of constructing the proposed project. The project has been categorized as an Environmental Assessment, or EA, under the National Environmental Policy Act or “NEPA.”

In support of the EA, TxDOT and LADOTD have prepared technical reports for the following resources: biological resources, community impacts, cultural resources including the historic bridge and archeology, water resources, hazardous materials, air quality, and traffic noise. The project was designed to avoid and/or minimize environmental impacts to the greatest extent practicable.

The materials are available at the TxDOT Beaumont District Office by appointment Monday through Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Please call ahead to schedule an appointment to see these materials. Contact information is shown at the end of this presentation.
The project area contains suitable habitat for the alligator snapping turtle, which is proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be listed as threatened. A field site assessment and survey of the project area will be conducted for this species. Based on the results of the assessment, and the timing of the project completion with respect to listing of the Alligator snapping turtle, it is expected that a section 7 conference consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may be pursued.

The project also contains potentially suitable habitat for two mussel species that are proposed for listing - the Louisiana pigtoe, which is proposed to be listed as threatened and the Texas heelsplitter, which is proposed to be listed as endangered. A field survey of the project area will be performed, and a permitted relocation will be conducted. Based on the results of the assessment, and the timing of the project completion with respect to listing of each species, it is expected that a section 7 conference consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may be pursued.
## Threatened and Endangered Species

- **Monarch Butterfly**
  - Suitable habitat exists within project area
  - Federal candidate species
  - No USFWS section 7 consultation currently required
  - Project will be reevaluated after decision for species is made by USFWS

- **12 Texas State Threatened Species**

- **1 Louisiana Prohibited Species**

- **31 Texas Species of Greatest Conservation Need**

- **Best Management Practices**
  - Available and implemented, where possible, to minimize potential impacts to species

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The project area contains suitable habitat for one federal candidate species, the monarch butterfly. The project may affect the monarch butterfly; however, the monarch is currently a candidate species and no consultation with USFWS is required at this time. The project will be reevaluated after a decision for the species is made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Additionally, suitable habitat was identified for 12 Texas state-listed threatened species, one species listed in Louisiana as prohibited, and 31 Texas Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Best Management Practices will be implemented, where possible, to minimize potential impacts to these species.
## Waters of the US and Floodplains

- **18.41 acres** of potentially jurisdictional waters of the U.S. identified in project area:
  - 18 wetlands
  - One potential wetland
  - Four streams
  - Three ponds
  - One open water area

- One wetland, one stream, and all three ponds avoided with the preferred alternative (no impacts)

- Application for Standard Permit for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in progress

- Project design will be conducted in accordance with TxDOT’s Hydraulic Design Manual, which will ensure that project will not result in “significant encroachment” as defined by FHWA's rules implementing Executive Order 11988 at 23 CFR 650.105(q), which relate to floodplain impacts

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TxDOT is currently coordinating with the USACE regarding potential impacts to waters of the U.S., which are considered Section 404 impacts under the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. In addition, the project would involve an action in a floodplain, however, the project will not result in significant encroachment on the floodplain.
Section 106, Section 4(f), and Chapter 26

- **Section 106** of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CRF 800):
  - Under Section 106, federal agencies must consider effects of their actions on historic properties, which are defined as resources that are included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register.

- **Section 4(f)** of the US DOT Act protects:
  - Publicly owned parks
  - Recreation areas
  - Wildlife and water fowl refuges, and
  - Historic sites (regardless of ownership)

- **Chapter 26** of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code protects:
  - Public parks
  - Recreation areas
  - Scientific areas
  - Wildlife refuges, and
  - Historic sites

This slide lists the types of properties that are protected under Section 106, Section 4(f), and Chapter 26. As shown in blue, the project is subject to Section 106, Section 4(f), and Chapter 26 because it potentially affects a National Register-listed historic site (the SH 63/LA8 at Sabine River Bridge).
Section 106, Section 4(f), and Chapter 26

- The project would replace the SH 63/LA 8 at Sabine River Bridge, which is listed in the National Register and protected under Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act and Chapter 26 of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code for its importance to the history of the area and its engineering significance.

- The proposed project would demolish and replace the existing bridge and relocate the state line marker near its current location.

Since the historic bridge is listed in the National Register, state law in Texas and federal law requires that TxDOT and LADOTD evaluate several alternatives to determine the most appropriate option for the historic bridge, the traveling public, and taxpayers. These alternatives were also evaluated for the overall EA, described earlier in this presentation. The alternative chosen was to construct a new structure on new alignment. The next step was to market the historic bridge to entities who may be interested in receiving it or maintaining it in place. Since marketing efforts did not result in any responses from interested parties, the alternative for the historic bridge is demolition.
The preferred alternative would require approximately 77 acres of new right of way, but would not result in any potential displacements, subject to final design considerations. Right of way acquisition and relocation would be conducted in accordance with the Federal Uniform Relocation and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. Additional information on this Act and on relocation assistance can be found on the TxDOT and LADOTD websites as shown on the slide. If you have questions, the slide also provides TxDOT Beaumont District Office and LADOTD Right of Way Administrator contact information.
This slide provides the anticipated project schedule. Note that all timelines are estimated and subject to change. Anticipated environmental clearance is estimated to occur **November 2023**. Right of way would be acquired after environmental clearance. Targeted right of way acquisition is estimated to be completed in February 2025. The project is planned to let for construction in May 2025, and construction is scheduled to begin **July 2025**.
The project team has evaluated the potential environmental impacts that could occur as a result of constructing the proposed project. Project materials are available at the TxDOT Beaumont District Office by appointment Monday through Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Please call ahead to schedule an appointment to see these materials. Contact information is shown at the bottom-right of the slide. If you have any questions about the project, please call 409-898-5732 or email bmtprojects@txdot.gov any time during the project development process.

The Draft Environmental Assessment is also available to view at:
Vernon Parish Library
1401 Nolan Trace
Leesville, LA 71446

and
Alexandria LADOTD - District 08
3300 S MacArthur Dr
Alexandria, LA 71301

For questions about the project or design process, please contact Jered Simpson
TxDOT Beaumont District
409-898-5732 or bmtprojects@txdot.gov.
In addition to providing the verbal testimony voicemail option, TxDOT and LADOTD are also encouraging written comments. Comment forms are available at the in-person hearing options, or you may submit them through the methods shown on screen. Additionally, comment forms and other project information can be accessed from the QR code on the screen.

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- Or
- Visit www.txdot.gov
- In the “Search TxDOT” box in the upper-right hand corner, enter: “Historic SH 63/LA 8 Bridge”
- Once on the TxDOT site you can download a comment form, add your comments, and mail the form to the address shown on the screen. If you want to submit your comments electronically, you can click the “Email the Beaumont District” button on the TxDOT site. If you would like to email your comments, you can send them to bmtprojects@txdot.gov.

Please be sure to submit your written and verbal comments no later than **Friday, August 11, 2023,** The responses to your comments submitted during the comment period will be included in the public hearing summary report. This report will be posted to the TxDOT website once approved.
Thank You for Your Participation!

Again, we would like to thank you for your participation in this public hearing for the SH 63/LA 8 Bridge at the Sabine River project.