



FM 2271 Extension Regional Feasibility Study

Public Involvement Plan

DRAFT

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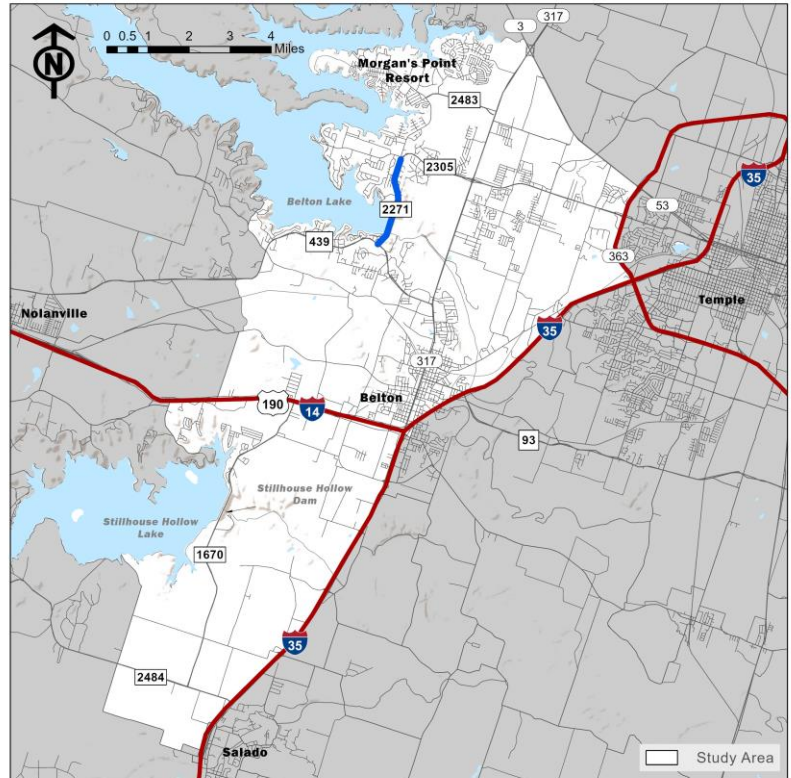
County: Bell

This public involvement plan is a living document. The plan may be updated to add or remove objectives, stakeholders, strategies or methods as needed to adapt to new and changing circumstances as study development progresses.

Study Description and Background

Bell County is one of the fastest-growing counties in Texas. Since 1999, the City of Belton has seen the need to extend Farm-to-Market (FM) Road 2271 to provide greater connectivity and congestion relief for local residents. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Waco District pursued a draft environmental assessment (EA) in 2013 to extend FM 2271 locally. Seeking to accommodate both ongoing requests from the City of Belton and concerns from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, TxDOT is now conducting a feasibility study to evaluate extending FM Road 2271 in Bell County.

The existing FM 2271 is currently a two-lane roadway between the intersections of FM 2305 and FM 439, and crossing Belton Lake dam. TxDOT will be evaluating the area west of I-35 from US 36 at the north, southward to Thomas Arnold Road (south of FM 2484). The current limits of FM 2271 and the entire study are shown on the map on this page.



There are multiple neighborhoods, businesses and other structures located along or in close proximity to the corridor. As of 2019, around 12,000 to 13,000 vehicles use FM 2271 daily. Planning for anticipated growth now is critical to ensure that people and goods continue to move throughout the region reliably and to ensure the quality-of-life residents enjoy today will be maintained in the future. The potential improvements are aimed at enhancing safety, providing greater access, and allowing for better connectivity in Bell County.

TxDOT will actively engage the surrounding communities throughout the study process. By encouraging participation and community-wide dialogue, transportation improvements can be identified that minimize community impacts and reflect community values. As part of the study, goals and objectives will be established, and potential improvements will be identified and evaluated. The study will conclude with the identification of one or more preferred alternatives and locally identified improvements. The FM 2271 Extension Regional Feasibility Study team will share information and resources with stakeholders and gather community input that will be used to guide planning for the corridor and the region shown in the study area.

Study Goal

The goal of the study is to assess potential alternatives for addressing the needs of various stakeholders.

Overall, TxDOT aims to address mobility and safety concerns with a constructable corridor management plan that minimizes impacts to the human and natural environment, is technically sound, and accepted by the public.

Public Involvement Objectives

Informative, timely and concise communication is essential for building trust and relationships among the community's numerous and varied stakeholders. Below are the goals for effectively communicating with applicable stakeholders.

- Establish early and continuous public outreach, providing timely information about the feasibility study process.
- Provide adequate public notice of participation opportunities during the development of the study, and time for public review and comment at key decision points in the process.
- Ensure public participation opportunities are compliant with current COVID-19 guidelines.
- Make information accessible and available in appropriate electronically accessible formats and means.
- Include measures for seeking input from and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems as defined in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), such as low-income, minority, and non-English speaking households who may face challenges accessing employment and other services.
- Stay integrated with TxDOT and their consultant teams for the most up-to-date technical/study information.
- Work closely with stakeholders, so the team is aware of their issues, and provide information in a timely manner.
- Develop a cohesive and continuous model for information sharing.

Communication efforts will be evaluated on an ongoing basis using the following objectives, with adjustments made as needed:

- Conduct ongoing reviews of the stakeholder database to identify new and/or emerging stakeholders, as well as their potential interests and concerns.
- On an ongoing basis, assess communication tools and techniques to evaluate effectiveness, best practices, and lessons learned and ensure innovative approaches are considered.
- Provide timely updates when new information is available to ensure the community is kept informed.
- Employ consistent messaging across all communication platforms.

- Ensure consistent branding across all communication tools and materials using TxDOT Brand Guidelines.
- Provide timely and appropriate responses to all stakeholder inquiries and requests.
- Keep TxDOT informed of stakeholder communication.

Current Issues to Address

Prior to reaching out to the public, it is important that the study team define and understand the issues and problems the feasibility study is designed to address, and that the study team can clearly and effectively describe these problems to the public.

Through initial stakeholder meetings, the study team identified the following problems in the region that may be addressed, whether directly or indirectly, through the study:

- Local need for greater connectivity in the region to I-35, I-14 and SH 317
- Congestion on existing corridors, including I-35, I-14 and SH 317
- Crashes at I-35 and I-14 leading to congestion in downtown Belton and on FM 439 and SH 317
- Unsafe freight connections between I-14 and FM 439
- Conflicting/unsafe use of SH 317 between residents and construction vehicles coming from the quarry off of FM 317
- Delayed transportation of products due to congestion
- Increased weight on the dam from freight/product movement through the area
- Congestion and backup on Lake Belton Dam resulting in safety concerns and delays
- Occasional closures of roadway over Lake Belton and Stillhouse Hollow Lake Dams for dam repairs and maintenance
- Growing congestion on neighborhood streets due to residential developments

The study team identified the following potential consequences of not addressing these problems:

- Safety of traveling public compromised
- Infrastructure wear and tear continues
- Increased congestion
- Continued lack of connectivity
- Limitations on economic development
- Continued cost of delays:
 - Frustrated residents
 - Decreased quality of life
 - Lack of mobility options

Stakeholders

TxDOT's Mission: Through collaboration and leadership, we deliver a safe, reliable, and integrated transportation system that enables the movement of people and goods.

By virtue of its mission, TxDOT must understand the unique needs and concerns of interested parties to effectively improve communication and build public trust. As more members of the public become aware of the study or are affected by the study, the stakeholder database will continue to expand. Efforts will be made to reach all stakeholders to provide study information via one or more of the communication tools described in the Informational Tools and Tactics section.

The stakeholder list developed for the FM 2271 Extension Regional Feasibility Study contains a broad cross section of audiences with a variety of interests. Initial stakeholders were identified based on their demonstrated interest in unique corridor issues and/or their location along the corridor. Following are the key stakeholders, study champions and internal resources that are included and will continue to be identified as a part of the stakeholder list:

Stakeholder Group	Potential Issues/Concerns
Local Elected Officials	Clear understanding of the need, timing, costs and financing, and feedback from their respective constituencies related to proposed improvements, construction impacts and environmental issues.
Corridor Property Owners	Temporary and permanent impacts to businesses or residences, including acquisition of necessary easements or rights of way
Economic Development Corporations	Disruptions to industries, impacts to the local economy and development plans/timeline
Corridor Businesses/Industries	Impacts to business operations, including increased travel times for delivery and shipping of goods, ease of access to businesses for patrons and employees, disruptions related to construction (e.g., noise, visual, lighting impacts), and environmental considerations.
Local, Regional, State, and Federal Agencies (e.g., cities, transportation planning agencies, resource management agencies, etc.)	Impacts to emergency services, school districts and regulatory agencies, and effective communication about future improvements and construction projects for their respective constituencies. Need to be informed and engaged in project elements that may become their responsibility in the future.
Coalitions/Interest Groups/Associations	Opportunities (perceived or real), and/or concerns related to specific issues (e.g., minority business owners) that could be affected by or realized by the study. Includes neighborhood and civic associations.
Rural Populations	Meeting distances and, during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, potential lack of high-speed internet or similar technology used for

	virtual engagement that may leave local residents feeling underrepresented
Minority Populations	Engagement concerns (perceived or real) due to cultural and language barriers and/or differences.
General Public	Impacts including project design, increased travel times, construction, noise, air pollution, project benefits, cost and financing, and opportunities for sharing feedback and asking questions. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual engagement may be perceived as a barrier.
Traveling Public	Where and when construction impacts will occur and the ability to choose and utilize an alternate route.
Media (in the role as communication resource to the public)	Sharing timely and important study-related information and opportunities to tell human interest stories related to the FM 2271 Extension Regional Feasibility Study and its benefits/impacts to residents and businesses.
Internal TxDOT Employees	Impacts and changes to agency practices, procedures and processes including changes related to development and implementation of construction contracts, oversight, and approval and authorization processes. Can act as study ambassadors in the community.
Experts/Industry Analysts and Publications	Unique design and construction approaches, innovative project management approaches and measured success of project implementation.

Key Messages

Key messages will be shared in study materials and communications to help explain the importance of the FM 2271 Extension Regional Feasibility Study and the problems that are being addressed. The following high-level key messages will be supported with additional facts and supporting messages.

- Bell County is one of the fastest-growing counties in Texas.
 - Planning for anticipated growth is critical now to ensure that people and goods can continue to move throughout the region reliably.
- FM 2271 is a north-south road that serves as a major transportation corridor for Bell County, providing access for residents, commuters, tourists, and businesses.
 - FM 2271 is experiencing increasing traffic congestion, resulting in safety and connectivity concerns and negatively impacting quality of life.

- The current feasibility study represents an effort to address mobility and safety concerns while minimizing impacts to the human and natural environment.
- We are accountable to all stakeholders and are committed to collaborative and transparent public involvement throughout the process.

Tactics, Tools, Roles, Responsibilities

The study team will engage the community about the study via multiple tactics. Outreach methods may be issue-specific (e.g., access to local businesses) or location-specific (e.g., FM 2271 at FM 439).

Public Involvement and Comment Methods

Elected Official & Community Leader Briefings– The team will coordinate meetings with elected officials and/or schedule appearances at various council/commission/board meetings to provide study information and answer questions as needed.

Ongoing Communication with Agencies in the Area–The team will provide updates as needed to partnering transportation and governmental agencies in the region including: Killen-Temple Metropolitan Planning Organization (KTMPO), Central Texas Regional Council of Governments (CTCOG), Bell County, and surrounding cities.

Working Group– A working group will be formed with representatives from Bell County, City of Belton, City of Temple, the Killeen-Temple Metropolitan Planning Organization (KTMPO) and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to encourage more substantive input regarding the look and functionality of the future roadway. The working group will also engage other stakeholders in identifying community values and needs related to planning and implementation of the study.

Public Meetings with Enhanced Citizen Engagement Techniques– Throughout the study, the study team will conduct multiple public meetings, virtual or in-person, if COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. These meetings will be developed and implemented in such a way that meet public outreach goals. This includes invitation methods such as display ads, use of electronic and social media, including emails, TxDOT.gov website, Facebook, targeted media relations, and outreach to elected officials and community leaders who can share information via their own communication networks. Public meetings will be held using an engaging open house format designed to be informal and informative with no formal oral presentation. Whether offered virtually or in-person, attendees will be able to obtain information at their convenience. Meetings will include multiple informative, interactive, multi-lingual exhibits. Online surveys (e.g., MetroQuest, interactive mapping tools, SurveyMonkey) and comment forms will be used to help gather public feedback on the study. The study team will engage in outcome-oriented reporting; through stakeholder emails and the TxDOT.gov website, the team will demonstrate that TxDOT considered ideas and concerns raised at the public meetings.

Meetings with Stakeholders– The team will coordinate small or large group or one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders, including corridor neighborhoods, businesses, and community organizations as needed. Outreach will be inclusive of study proponents and opponents.

Online Survey– Throughout the study, the team can gauge public and stakeholder opinions and concerns through surveys, either online or in-person at meetings. Using web-based survey technology, the team can produce multiple surveys over the life of the study.

Media–The team will promote the widespread dissemination of information by engaging reporters and coordinating with TxDOT to assist in producing and distributing media releases. Information provided to the

media will correspond with opportunities throughout the study. The TxDOT Waco District Public Information Officer (PIO), Jake Smith, is designated to speak on behalf of the study, and will be responsive to all media requests. He will review all materials to be provided exclusively to the media.

Information Distribution via Third Party Groups and Organizations–The team may utilize third party groups and organizations to help distribute information via websites and email networks. These could include newsletters and email blasts distributed by impacted municipalities, neighborhood groups, and religious institutions. Specific opportunities can be identified when stakeholder meetings, briefings and other outreach activities take place.

Website– TxDOT will establish a page on TxDOT.gov for the FM 2271 Extension Regional Feasibility Study. The webpage will provide up-to-date information, as well as study contacts to allow for two-way communication between TxDOT and the community. Outreach materials (e.g., At a Glance materials/fact sheets and advertisements) will encourage stakeholders to visit the website for more information.

Informational Tools and Materials

The team will utilize a variety of informational tools and materials to assist with outreach efforts. Where appropriate, the following will be displayed and distributed at stakeholder meetings and events, posted to the website, and distributed to community leaders, elected officials and the media.

In recognition of the Spanish-speaking population and the presence of environmental justice populations in the community, many of the tools noted below will be provided in Spanish as well as English. The team will offer interpreters at in-person public meetings and translated materials for static virtual engagement events (e.g., virtual open house) to engage with Spanish-speaking individuals. The team will also provide materials and translators for other languages upon request.

Maps– Develop easy to understand/public-friendly maps, schematics, and renderings for public distribution and online posting.

Fact Sheets and Handouts with Enhanced Citizen Engagement Messaging–Produce handouts containing key messages and general information, including maps and other visuals, information on personal and societal cost/benefits, as well as funding information.

Mailouts– Create and distribute colorful and easy-to-understand mailings to targeted audiences. These mailings could alert recipients about upcoming public events, and to tell them how to learn more about the study and contact the team.

The FM 2271 Regional Feasibility Study Public Involvement Plan is a living document that will be updated throughout the life of the study. As outreach is continuous, after every event we will evaluate:

- Number of participants at public meetings (virtual or in-person) and survey responses collected
- Number of informational materials (flyers, fact sheets, etc.) distributed

Contact List/Listening Log

The team will establish a public involvement database including a contact list and listening log to streamline the tracking of agency and stakeholder coordination as well as internal team coordination. The database will be used for the following:

- Tracking and documenting public and agency comments

- Tracking and documenting public participation, outreach, media, contact lists and mailing lists
- Managing administrative records
- Providing participation data for tracking metrics and reporting

Comment Management

Comments may be submitted by any of the following avenues:

- In writing (by mail or submitted at a public meeting)
- Email to study team member or TxDOT employee
- Telephone call with study team member or TxDOT employee
- TxDOT general inquiry email via TxDOT website
- Face-to-face conversations
- Social media via TxDOT accounts

All comments will be entered into the listening log, including the date received and contact information provided, such as:

- Name of commenter
- Agency/organization
- Address
- Comment method (letter, email, etc.)
- Information requested
- Preferred contact method
- Other, as appropriate

A report of all activities will be available to the State upon request.

Information Preference

In every situation where interested parties have the opportunity to provide contact information, they will be able to choose what information they want to receive and how they would like to receive it. In the event no preference has been recorded, and an email address is provided, the individual will be added to email distribution lists. In the event that a mailing is returned as undeliverable, a member of the FM 2271 Extension Regional Feasibility Study team will update the database. Any new contact information will be logged in the database for future reference. If no forwarding information is provided, the contact will be given a Do Not Mail status.

Timeline

A feasibility study is a multiphase process that develops and examines different alternatives for a proposed project or projects. A feasibility study begins by evaluating existing conditions in the area and

identifying goals and objectives. Alternative concepts are proposed and analyzed. Recommendations are made based on several factors, including minimization of impacts. Throughout the feasibility study, there will be many opportunities for the public to provide input. In addition to the other public involvement methods described in the section above, the current study will include three public meetings, culminating in the preparation of a draft, then final, feasibility report, currently anticipated Fall 2022 (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. FM 2271 Regional Feasibility Study Public Outreach Timeline

Recommendations resulting from this feasibility study will need to go through the Killeen-Temple Metropolitan Planning Organization (KTMPO) prioritization process as well as TxDOT’s project development process prior to construction. Within the project development process (see Figure 2), advancement from step to step is contingent upon the outcome of the previous step and funding availability. The study recommendations may be broken into several environmental and construction projects that extend over a longer period of time.



Figure 2. Project Development Process Timeline

Notes

Media Request Protocol

The media will seek information from multiple sources. These potentially include TxDOT, study team members, neighborhoods, businesses, or other stakeholders within the study area. Media requests for information internal to the study team must be directed to the TxDOT Waco District PIO immediately. Jake Smith, TxDOT Waco District PIO, is the designated spokesperson for media inquiries unless that protocol is modified by TxDOT.

Approval Process for Communications Products

Any communication product (ex. fact sheet, newsletter) created by district staff and/or the study team must go through the following approval process:

- Internal QA/QC review – staff responsible listed here

- Concurrent review by the Waco District and TPP (both Corridor Planning and Public Involvement Sections)
- Powerpoint presentations must be reviewed by TxDOT Communications Division – Beth Hallmark

TxDOT Branding

All materials created must be within current TxDOT branding guidelines:

<http://crossroads/org/cmd/templates.html>

<http://crossroads/org/cmd/Assets/PublicationsStyleguide.pdf>

Study Team

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