



SCRIPT:

Hello, and welcome to the virtual public meeting with an in-person option for the State Highway 68 project.

The approximately 22-mile highway is proposed from I-2/US 83 to I-69C/US 281 in Hidalgo County, Texas. My name is Ray Pedraza and I am the Public Information Officer and I will be presenting on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation, or TxDOT.

This presentation has been pre-recorded.

Thank you for participating in this virtual public meeting with in-person option. Public participation is important in the transportation planning process, and TxDOT appreciates your input on the proposed project.



SCRIPT:

November 7, 2000, was the last deathless day on roadways in Texas. That means for over 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 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.

Public Meeting Agenda



- Public Meeting Purpose
- Project Limits
- Project Need and Purpose
- Proposed Project Description
- Environmental Studies
- Right of Way Acquisition Process
- Next Steps in Project Development
- How to Provide Comments

SCRIPT:

This virtual public meeting with in-person option will include the following topics of discussion: the purpose of the public meeting; the project limits; the need for and purpose of the proposed improvements; a description of the proposed project; a description of the environmental studies being prepared; a description of the right-of-way acquisition process; the next steps in project development; and how to provide comments.

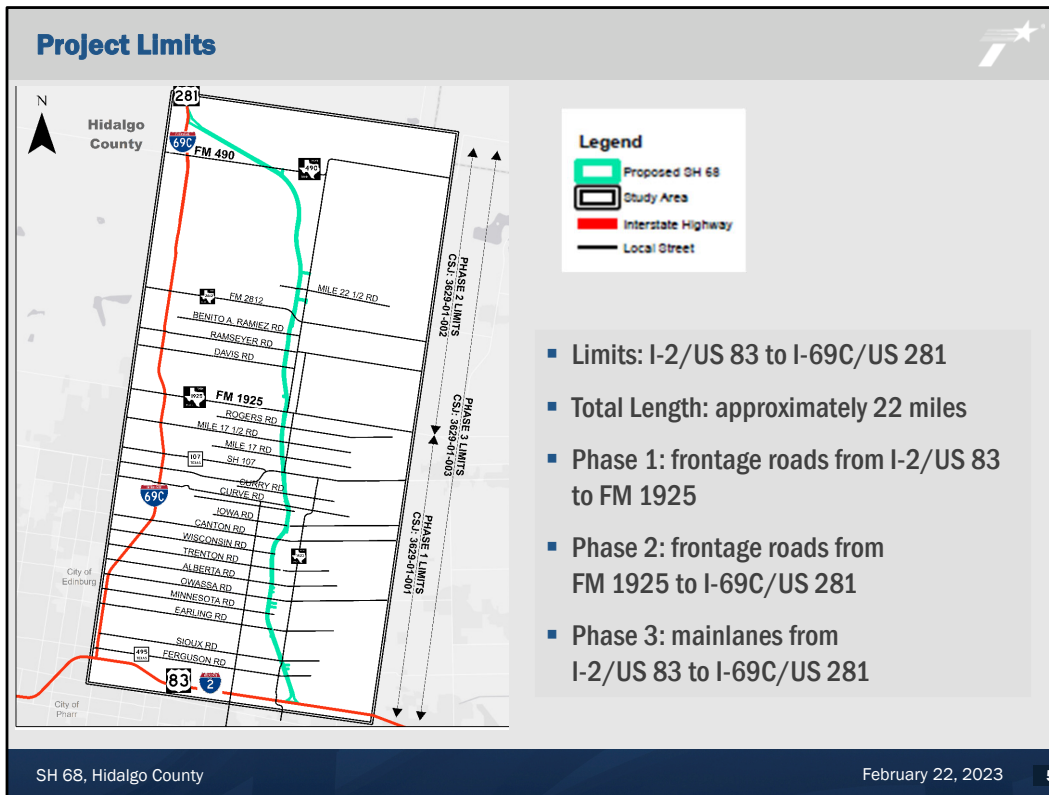


- Encourage and maintain effective communication with the public
- Provide information about design modifications to the Recommended Preferred Alternative that occurred after the 2018 Draft Environmental Impact Statement
- Receive public input and comments

SCRIPT:

The purpose of this virtual public meeting with in-person option is to encourage and maintain effective communication with the public and provide project-specific information as it relates to the State Highway 68 project in Hidalgo County. This presentation will provide information about design modifications to the Recommended Preferred Alternative that occurred after the 2018 Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Your input and comments are an important part of this process, and we encourage you to provide comments on this project. As I mentioned earlier, your continued participation throughout the planning and development of the project is very important. You are encouraged to talk to your neighbors and refer them to TxDOT so they can also make comments and be included in this process.




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This project is in Hidalgo County within the Cities of Edinburg, Pharr, San Juan, Alamo, and Donna. The area also includes unincorporated portions of Hidalgo County and the communities of Faysville, Hargill, Doolittle, Cesar Chavez, San Carlos, La Blanca, Nurillo, Muniz, Lopezville, and North Alamo. The proposed project would be a new four-lane divided rural highway with mainlanes and frontage roads. The new highway would extend from I-2/US83 to I-69C/US 281.

The project is approximately 22 miles in length, and the estimated construction cost is approximately \$1.1 billion. The proposed project would be constructed in phases. The first phase would be the construction of frontage roads from I-2/US 83 to Farm to Market 1925 (Monte Cristo Road). The second phase would be the construction of frontage roads from FM 1925 to I-69C/US 281. The third phase would be the construction of the mainlanes from I-2/US 83 to I-69C/US 281. The entire project is anticipated to be combination of state and federal funds.

The map shown on your screen shows the general vicinity of the proposed project as the green line. The red lines are the interstates and local roadways are the black lines.

Project Need and Purpose 

Need (What problems are we trying to address?)
SH 68 is needed because:

- there are limited north-south roadways in the area
- population is projected to increase substantially in the future
- projected increase traffic volume on north-south roadways
- there is limited emergency evacuation capacity on the state highway system in the south Texas region

Project Purpose (What are we trying to do?)

- accommodate population growth and higher traffic volumes
- relieve the burden on the limited number of existing north-south roadways,
- provide an alternate north-south evacuation route during emergency events

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A purpose and need statement explains why a project is being developed and provides a basis for the development and evaluation of project alternatives.

TxDOT has determined that SH 68 is needed to add additional travel capacity because there are limited north-south roadways in the area and population is projected to increase substantially in the future. Therefore, it is anticipated that traffic volume on north-south roadways in the area would increase substantially. SH 68 is also needed to improve the emergency evacuation capacity of the state highway system in the south Texas region.

The purpose of the SH 68 project is to accommodate population growth and higher traffic volumes, while relieving the burden on the limited number of existing north-south roadways and provide an alternate north-south evacuation route during emergency events.

Additional supporting information regarding the project need and purpose for SH 68 can be found in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The DEIS is available at the TxDOT.gov, SH 68 project website using search word "SH 68".



2018 Recommended Preferred Alternative

- Approximately 1,057 acres of new right of way
- Estimated 110 displacements

2023 Modified Recommended Preferred Alternative

- Approximately 1,000 acres of new right of way
- Estimated 100 displacements

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In 2018, TxDOT's environmental impact analysis of reasonable alternatives, resulted in a recommended preferred alternative. It was estimated that the alignment would require 1,057 acres of new right of way with the potential for 110 displacements. The public involvement, environmental studies, and engineering refinements have been on-going since the publication of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement. These efforts have resulted in modifications to the alignment that would result in reduced proposed right of way to about 1,000 acres with the potential for 100 displacements. The modifications to the alignment also incorporated improved operations and a drainage plan.



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The Recommended Preferred Alternative includes four 12-foot main lanes, 2 in each direction, and four 12-foot frontage road travel lanes, 2 in each direction.

The hurricane evacuation route would be accommodated on a north bound 12-foot shoulder adjacent to the outside main lane. The main lanes would also have 4-foot inside shoulders and the south bound outside main lane would have a 10-foot shoulder.

The mainlanes would be separated by grassy swale. Additionally, grassy swale would also separate the mainlanes from the frontage roads. The frontage roads would have an inside 4-foot shoulder and an outside 8-foot shoulder.

To accommodate stormwater flowing on the frontage roads, a curb and gutter system with storm sewer is proposed along the outside of the frontage road. The stormwater falling on the main lanes would flow to grassy swales.

Approximately 20 feet of border width outside the frontage roads could be used for a future shared use path, utilities, and other infrastructure.



National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Assignment to TxDOT


The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried-out by TxDOT pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated December 9, 2019, and executed by FHWA and TxDOT.

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The proposed project is anticipated to be programmed with both state and federal funds. Because of this, TxDOT is required to assess the potential environmental effects of the proposed project in accordance with federal standards.

The process that is followed is called the National Environmental Policy Act process, otherwise known as NEPA. The NEPA process provides analyses of the potential impacts to the natural and manmade environment and helps the decision maker to make an informed decision on whether to proceed with the project.

On December 9, 2019, TxDOT received a signed Memorandum of Understanding from the Federal Highway Administration that permits TxDOT to assume responsibility from the Federal Highway Administration for reviewing and approving certain assigned NEPA projects. This review and approval process applies to this project.

Environmental Documentation 

- **Environmental technical reports prepared for the proposed project assessed potential impacts to the following resource categories:**
 - Biological resources, including threatened and endangered species and their habitats
 - Water resources, including waters of the U.S.
 - Cultural resources, including historic and archeological resources
 - Hazardous materials
 - Traffic noise
 - Community resources, including Environmental Justice populations
 - Air quality
 - Resources protected under Section 4(f) of the DOT Act and Chapter 26 of the Parks and Wildlife Code
 - Indirect and Cumulative Impacts

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Since the proposed project would utilize state and federal funds, it is required to adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act. NEPA requires analysis of potential impacts to the human and natural environment as a result of the proposed project.

As part of the environmental process, technical analyses were completed to document the potential environmental impacts of the project. The resource categories studied include:

- Biological resources, including threatened and endangered species and their habitats;
- Water resources, including waters of the U.S. and wetlands;
- Cultural resources, including historic and archeological resources;
- Hazardous materials;
- Traffic noise;
- Community resources, including Environmental Justice populations;
- Air quality;
- Resources protected under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act and Chapter 26 of the Parks and Wildlife Code; and
- Indirect and Cumulative impacts

The technical reports are available for review upon request at the TxDOT Pharr District Office or by accessing the project webpage at TxDOT.gov and entering search word "SH 68". All environmental documentation was developed in accordance with NEPA, TxDOT, and FHWA standards.

Environmental Documentation 

- **Consultation with USFWS would be conducted for impacts to listed species.**
- **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 Permit for impacts to waters of the U.S., if necessary**
- **Historic Hidalgo County Irrigation District #2**
 - **Potential Section 106 Impacts (Federal Law)**
No contributing features are anticipated to be adversely affected under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act
 - **Potential Section 4(f) Impacts (Federal Law)**
Anticipated to be a *de minimis* determination under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966

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The environmental surveys and studies are ongoing including consultations with agencies; however, the following is a summary of the estimated outcomes.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be conducted for impacts to listed species.

The U.S Army Corp of Engineers is responsible for the Clean Water Act Section 404 program that regulates the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States. A permit may be required for the project.

The proposed project is anticipated to include acquisition of land from the Hidalgo County Irrigation District #2. This district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as allowed under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Section 106 is the law that required federal agencies consider how their actions may affect a historic-aged property and provides rules regarding the list of properties registered as historic places. No features of the Hidalgo County Irrigation District #2 that contribute to its National Register listing are anticipated to be adversely affected under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The Federal Highway Administration is required to consider impacts to historic properties under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act. The impacts to the district are anticipated to be a *de minimis*, which means SH 68 would have minimal impact to the features that contribute to its historic status.



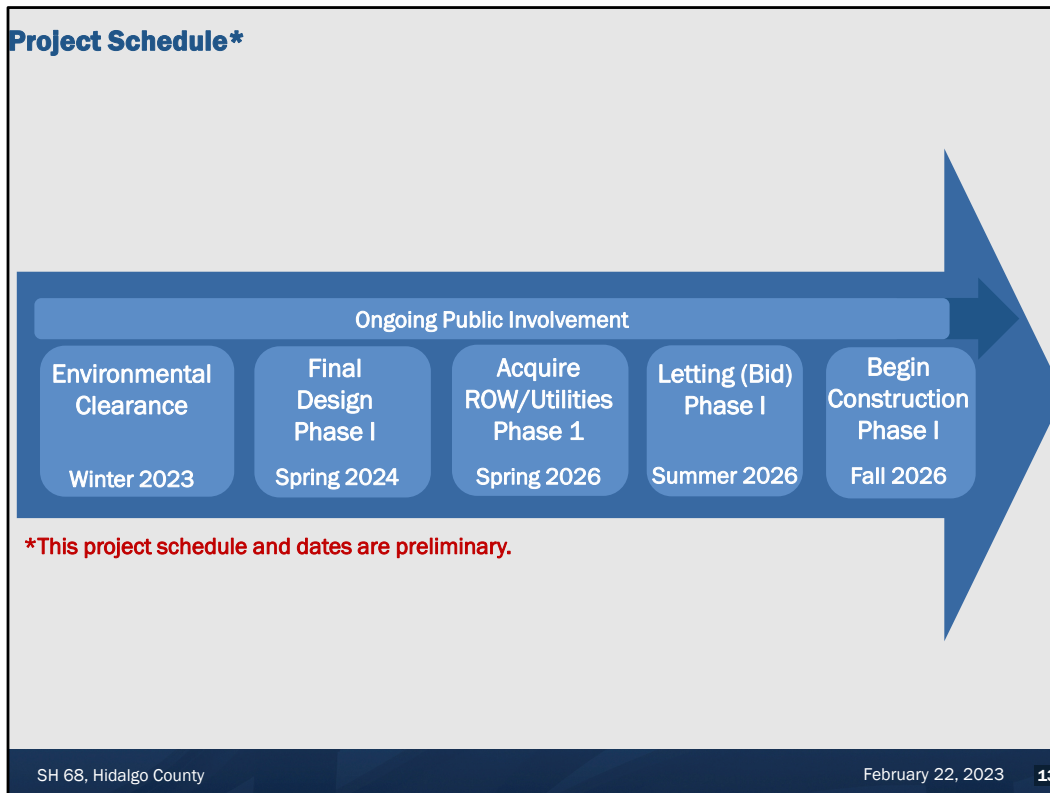
- Follow federal state laws and policies
- The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policy Act of 1970 (Uniform Act)
- Right of Way Brochures are available on the TxDOT Website: <http://txdot.gov/inside-txdot/forms-publications/publications/landowner-rights.html>
- Information about the benefits, services and Right of Way Acquisition schedule can be obtained by calling the TxDOT District Office at (956) 702-6350.

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The Right-of-Way Acquisition Process will follow federal and state laws and policies. The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisitions Policy Act of 1970, known as the Uniform Act, is the federal law that is followed for appraisals, negotiations, and relocation of families and/or businesses. Hard copies of the Right of Way Brochures and Property Owner's Bill of Rights will be available at the Right of Way table at the In-Person public meeting and are also available at www.txdot.gov.

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is the agency responsible for acquiring the additional right of way from the individual property owners for the project. TxDOT will ensure that the Local Public Agency acquires all real property in accordance with the provisions of Title III of the Uniform Act and its associated federal regulations (49 CFR Part 24). All negotiations for right of way conducted are subject to this law and these regulations. Relocation booklets, which provide a general overview of the Relocation Assistance Program and outlines the services offered and any payments for which displaced individuals, families, business, and non-profit organizations may be eligible to receive are available for download on the TxDOT website address listed.

Information about the benefits, services and Right of Way Acquisition schedule can be obtained by calling the TxDOT District Office at (956) 702-6350.



SCRIPT:

Currently, TxDOT is working on the environmental documentation and a schematic of the 22 miles of highway with mainlanes and frontage roads.

The final design of the frontage roads from I-2/US 83 to FM 1925 or Monte Cristo Road, which is the first phase of the project is anticipated to be ready in the spring of 2024.

The acquisition of right of way may begin after environmental clearance. The first parcels to be acquired would be located between I-2/US 83 and FM 1925.

Right of way purchase must be completed before the letting of the project in the summer of 2026.

The first phase will let, or be open to contractors for bidding, in Summer 2026, and construction is expected to begin in Fall 2026.

Phases 2 and 3 of the project would follow the same type of schedule from final design to construction as funding is available.

Project Inquiries



Project information may be viewed at:

- **TxDOT Pharr District Office**
600 W. Interstate 2
Pharr, Texas 78577
M-F 8:00 am to 5 pm
(956) 702-6170 by appointment
- **SH 68 Project Office**
4711 S. Alamo Rd, Suite 106
Edinburg, Texas 78542
Tuesday and Wednesday
11 a.m. – 8 p.m.
(or at other times (956) 460-9299
by appointment)
- **On-line**
Visit www.txdot.gov, search “SH 68”



SCRIPT:


After today, the public may view all the documents shown tonight at the TxDOT Pharr District office, the SH 68 project office or on-line as shown on this slide.


How to Provide Comments

Submit comments by:

- **Emailing:** eduardo.saenz@txdot.gov
- **Calling:** (956) 457-5654 to leave verbal testimony
- **Downloading and filling out a comment card and mailing it to:**

TxDOT Pharr District Office
 Attn: Eduardo Saenz, P.E.
 600 W. I-2
 Pharr, TX 78577
- **Online:** Visit www.txdot.gov, search “SH 68”





While comments are always welcome, they must be received on or before
Friday, March 10, 2023, to be included in the official meeting documentation.
 You may call project staff at (956) 702-6170 during regular office hours or email project staff at any time in the project development process.

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Written comments from the public regarding the proposed project are requested and may be submitted via email to eduardo.saenz@txdot.gov, or via mail by downloading and filling out a comment card available on the SH 68 public meeting website and sending to the TxDOT Pharr District Office to the attention of Eduardo Saenz at 600 W. I-2, Pharr, Texas 78577.

Verbal comments can also be submitted by calling (956) **457-5654** to leave a voicemail.

All comments must be received on or before Friday, March 10, 2023. Responses to comments received will be available online at www.txdot.gov, keyword search: “SH 68” once they have been prepared.

if you have any general questions or concerns regarding the virtual meeting or in-person option, please contact Eduardo Saenz, P.E., at (956) 702-6170 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. or email eduardo.saenz@txdot.gov.



**Thank you for your participation in the
State Highway 68
Virtual Public Meeting!**

**We would also like to thank
J. Economedes High School
for allowing us to use their facility for the in-
person meeting on February 23, 2023.**

***Please remember to submit your comments by
Friday, March 10, 2023.***

SCRIPT:

On behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation, I sincerely thank you for your participation in this public meeting for the SH 68 project.

We would also like to thank J. Economedes High School for allowing us to use their facility for the in-person meeting on February 23, 2023.

Please remember to submit your comments by Friday, March 10, 2023.