



## Ports-to-Plains Corridor Feasibility Study (House Bill 1079) Frequently Asked Questions

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### 1) What is the Ports-to-Plains Corridor?

Beginning with the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, corridors have been designated by Congress in Federal transportation legislation as high priority corridors on the National Highway System for inclusion in the NHS as specific routes or general corridors. The Ports-to-Plains Corridor is a proposed divided highway corridor stretching 963 miles from Laredo through West Texas to Denver, Colorado. The corridor was designated by Congress as a High Priority Corridor on the National Highway System in 1998. In Texas, the Ports-to-Plains Corridor is comprised of sections of Interstate 20, Interstate 27, Interstate 35, US 83, US 87, US 277, US 287, State Highway 158, and State Highway 349.

### 2) Why is this study being conducted?

The 86th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1079 relating to a study of the Ports-to-Plains Corridor, including an evaluation of the feasibility of certain improvements to Interstate Highway 27 (I-27), by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). The governor signed the bill into law on June 10, 2019. The law requires TxDOT to submit a report on the results of the study to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the House of Representatives, and the presiding officer of each standing committee of the legislature with jurisdiction over transportation matters not later than January 1, 2021.

### 3) What is the difference between the “Initial Assessment on the Potential Extension of Interstate 27 within the Ports-to-Plains Corridor” that TxDOT completed in 2015 and this Corridor Feasibility Study?

In early 2015, TxDOT conducted a high-level planning and public outreach effort for the Ports-to-Plains Corridor. As part of the study, TxDOT hosted listening sessions in Amarillo, Lubbock, Midland-Odessa, Big Spring, Eagle Pass and San Angelo to gather stakeholder input. TxDOT considered this input regarding the evaluation and development of the Ports-to-Plains Corridor as part of the interstate highway network.

The Ports-to-Plains Corridor Feasibility Study that is being conducted is required by House Bill 1079. This study will include an evaluation of improvements that extend I-27 and improvements that would create a continuous flow four-lane divided highway that meets interstate highway standards.

### 4) Would only existing highway corridors be studied to extend I-27?

The study will evaluate those highways that comprise the Ports-to-Plains Corridor. The feasibility study will examine two alternatives – identifying areas that are suitable for four-lane divided highway improvement or areas that are suitable for interstate highway development. During the evaluation, it may be determined that upgrading an existing highway to interstate standards would create significant engineering challenges due to constraints such as steep terrain or adverse environmental impacts. In those areas, deviation from the existing highway may be identified. Where the existing highway extends through a community to the extent that upgrading it to interstate standards would



create significant adverse environmental impacts, the need to construct a highway on a new alignment (a “relief route”) around that community would be studied.

## **5) Is the Ports-to-Plains Corridor in Texas going to be constructed to interstate standards?**

Using a data-driven planning process, this study will evaluate the need for and feasibility of extending I-27 in Texas. Although Congress has designated this corridor as a “High Priority” corridor on the National Highway System, it has not designated this corridor as a “High Priority Corridor designated as Future Interstate.” There would be many steps and coordination between the state and federal government, should this Ports-to-Plains Corridor Feasibility Study determine that extending I-27 is recommended. It is noted that currently, there is no funding currently programmed by TxDOT and the Texas Transportation Commission to construct this corridor to interstate standards.

## **6) How is membership in the Advisory and Segment Committees determined?**

House Bill 1079 requires TxDOT to establish an Advisory Committee to assist in conducting the study. The bill is explicit that the membership in the Advisory Committee shall include the county judge, or an elected county official or the administrator of the county’s road department, as designated by the county judge, of each county along the Ports-to-Plains Corridor; and the mayor, or city manager or assistant city manager, as designated by the mayor of Amarillo, Big Spring, Carrizo Springs, Dalhart, Del Rio, Dumas, Eagle Pass, Eldorado, Lamesa, Laredo, Lubbock, Midland, Odessa, San Angelo, Sonora, Sterling City, Stratford, and Tahoka.

The bill also requires TxDOT, in conjunction with the Advisory Committee, to establish segment committees for each geographic segment along the Ports-to-Plains Corridor as determined by TxDOT. Per the bill, the segment committees are composed of municipalities, counties, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, ports, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, oil and gas industry, trucking industry, TxDOT representatives, and other interested parties.

## **7) Will the public have an opportunity to participate in the study?**

Public input is an integral part of the planning process. TxDOT welcomes and expects the public to provide feedback and to inform the department of its concerns, interest, community features, and other topics that would be beneficial. The law requires public meetings to be held quarterly on a rotational basis in Amarillo, Laredo, Lubbock and San Angelo. Additional public meetings to engage the public will also be scheduled in other communities along the corridor. These meetings will be advertised through various means once the date, time and location are confirmed.

## **8) What are the key milestones in the study?**

Per House Bill 1079, not later than June 30, 2020, each Segment Committee must submit to the Advisory Committee a report that includes their priority recommendations for improvement and expansion of the Ports-to-Plains Corridor. Not later than October 31, 2020, the Advisory Committee must review and compile the reports submitted by each Segment Committee and submit to TxDOT, including a summary and any recommendations based on those reports. TxDOT must submit a report on the results of the Ports-to-Plains Corridor Feasibility Study to the governor, lieutenant governor, the speaker of the House of Representatives, and the presiding officer of each standing committee of the legislature with jurisdiction over transportation matters not later than January 1, 2021.

## **9) Who can I contact for more information?**

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