

Ports-to-Plains Segment 1 Committee Meeting #3 Summary

April 1, 2020, 8:00 a.m.

WebEx*

**Note: WebEx was required due to COVID-19 shelter in place orders*

Attendees

Segment Committee Member	Organization	Attendance
Mayor Bob Brinkmann	City of Dumas	Not Present
Kevin Carter	President and CEO, Amarillo Economic Development Corporation	Present via WebEx
Judge Terri Beth Carter	Sherman County	Present via WebEx
Kasey Coker	Executive Director, The High Ground of Texas	Present via WebEx
Judge Ronnie Gordon	Hartley County	Not Present
Mayor Phillip Hass	City of Dalhart Designee: City Manager	Designee: James Stroud Present via WebEx
Judge Ernie Houdashell	Randall County	Present via WebEx
Kyle Ingham	Executive Director, Panhandle Regional Planning Commission	Present via WebEx
Joe Kiely	Vice-President of Operations, Ports-to-Plains Alliance	Present via WebEx
Tonya Keesee	Executive Director, Plainview Chamber of Commerce	Present via WebEx
Judge Harold Keeter	Swisher County Designee: Director, Tulia Chamber of Commerce	Present via WebEx
Gary Molberg	President and CEO, Amarillo Chamber of Commerce	Present via WebEx
Judge David B. Mull	Hale County Designee: County Commissioner	Present via WebEx
Travis Muno	Administrator, Amarillo Metropolitan Planning Org.	Present via WebEx
Mayor Ginger Nelson Designee and Segment #1 Committee Chair: Jared Miller	City of Amarillo Designee: City Manager	Designee: Jared Miller present via WebEx
Milton Pax Segment #1 Vice-Chair	Vice Chairman, Ports-to-Plains Alliance	Present via WebEx
Ashley Posthumus	President, Dalhart Chamber of Commerce	Not Present
Mayor Ricky Reed	City of Stratford	Not Present

Judge Johnnie “Rowdy” Rhoades	Moore County Designee: Dee Vaughan County Commissioner Precinct 3	Designee: Dee Vaughan Present via WebEx
Judge Wesley Ritchey	Dallam County	Not Present
Judge Nancy Tanner	Potter County Designee: Director, Road and Bridge Dept.	Not Present
Carl Watson	Executive Director, Dumas Chamber of Commerce	Present via WebEx
Ross Wilson	President and CEO, Texas Cattle Feeders Association	Designee: Savana Barksdale Present via WebEx
Advisory Committee Members		
Mayor Dan Pope, Ports-to- Plains Advisory Committee Chairman	City of Lubbock	Present via WebEx

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Caroline Mays	Julie Jerome
Roger Beall	Steve Linhart
Kit Black	Sherry Pifer
Loretta Brown	Roberto Rodriguez, III
Emily Clisby	Jared Shaffer
Brian Crawford	Peter Smith
Gabriel De Ochoa	Akila Thamizharasan
Krista Jeacopello	

Consultant Team

Wendy Travis	Garver	Joe Bryan	WSP
Susan Chavez	Garver	Sophie Cohen	WSP
Michele Lopez	Garver	Rachel Lunceford	HG Consult
Tracy Michel	Garver	Robert Ryan	Blanton & Associates
Sean Wray	Garver		

Other Attendees

Cheri Huddleston	Hance Scarborough
Duffy Hinkle	Ports-to-Plains Alliance
Krishna Perkins	Panhandle Regional Planning Commission

Welcome

The Chair of Segment Committee #1 and Amarillo City Manager Jared Miller, called the meeting to order. He explained the presentation would be modified slightly and the economic data would be presented at the next committee meeting and today the Committee would focus on developing preliminary recommendations. There will be a recap of the previous meetings. We will be hearing information, reviewing chapters, and providing preliminary recommendations.

Peter Smith, TxDOT Transportation Planning and Program Director thanked everyone for participating in the meeting and said he wished they were meeting in person and under better circumstances, but he hoped this will keep everyone as safe as possible.

Caroline Mays, TxDOT Freight, Trade and Connectivity Section Director, said she really appreciates everyone being able to join the meeting online once again. She said at TxDOT they are trying their hardest to keep this moving, and there are deadlines we must meet, so some upcoming meetings will likely need to be held via WebEx. She thanked everyone for their patience.

Advisory Committee Chair and City of Lubbock Mayor Dan Pope thanked everyone for their time and for being at the meeting. There have been a couple of changes since the Committee last met. Caroline will review them in more detail, but after spending time with Caroline, Peter, and TxDOT leadership after the last Advisory Committee Meeting, they decided it was best to focus our study on what an interstate route would look like compared to the current route, and not have the modified 4-lane divided highway option like we were looking at previously. Mayor Pope said when this was first shared with him, he had a few questions including whether it fit into House Bill 1079, and it certainly does. He believes the Committee will find that a positive change. We don't want to lose sight of the recommendations that will need to occur, and we're on a short timeframe of only 90 days. He said we will also talk cost data today. These new costs are good numbers that are bottoms up, and the team will talk about how they came up with those numbers. We need to base our case on fact, and more realistic cost estimates may allow us to do that. Mayor Pope said he was thankful for TxDOT, the Consultant Team, Commissioner New who continues to be a great resource, and the Segment Committee leadership – Jared and Milton.

Recap of Previous Segment Committee Meeting

Ms. Mays explained the changes in the alternatives studied. She discussed the different analysis scenarios and mentioned that the original scenarios are now revised to include a baseline (no build) and interstate highway scenario.

Ms. Mays and Mr. Miller provided a recap of the February 6th Segment Committee meeting, conducted via WebEx due to inclement weather. At that meeting, the Committee reviewed forecasted conditions, planned and programmed projects, identification of gaps, preliminary corridor feasibility analysis, and Chapters 1 and 2. Ms. Mays and Mr. Miller gave a brief recap of each of those agenda items, highlighting the overview of findings for each topic. Ms. Mays explained the report chapter outline had changed. She said nothing was lost, but the chapters were streamlined to avoid redundancy and repetition.

Joe Kiely from the Ports-to-Plains Alliance asked if Committee members would get the chance to see the revised versions of Chapter 1 and 2.

Ms. Mays responded yes, they would see them when they review the draft report at the next meeting, but first we need to get comments on Chapter 3 and 4 first due to the timeframe.

Wendy Travis with the consultant team said a comment/response matrix would also be provided with the draft report at the next meeting, so Committee members can see how the comments were addressed.

Ms. Mays continued with the scope and schedule of the meeting.

Determination of Areas Preferable and Suitable for Interstate Design

Akila Thamizharasan, TxDOT Corridor Planning Branch Manager, started the presentation by reviewing a cross section of an interstate with frontage roads and one without frontage roads. She described the differences between those two options. Next, she explained federal guidance on interstate designation. There are three methods to obtain interstate designation.

Rachel Lunceford with the consultant team provided more detail about each method. Under Method 1, existing Segment #1 corridor outside of existing I-27 does not meet interstate standards and is not eligible for interstate designation by the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT). Next, she discussed the six criteria that corridors need to meet under Method 2 to be designated as a future interstate facility. For Method 2, the existing Segment #1 corridor, with the exception of I-27, will need to meet criteria 1 through 6 under Method 2 and be subject to TxDOT and FHWA approval, and TxDOT coordination would be required with New Mexico DOT, Oklahoma DOT, and Colorado DOT. Method 3 will involve a Congressional act to designate the corridor as an interstate facility.

Carl Watson, Dumas Chamber of Commerce asked if the state would continue to move forward with the interstate designation, since this is so preliminary, and whether we have already started talking to other states about this, or whether that is done in the future.

Ms. Mays said there has been no contact with other states at this time in terms of designation.

Mr. Kiely said the Ports-to-Plains Alliance is working in other states to have a similar discussion about the interstate, including New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Colorado. The committee could recommend both that TxDOT pursue Method 2 and support Method 3. Is there any reason the Committee could not make that recommendation?

Ms. Mays responded yes, but TxDOT is not allowed to lobby and engage in a Congressional act in that aspect. If the Committee makes those recommendations, they cannot say TxDOT will be involved.

Mayor Pope said we understand TxDOT can't do that, but the communities along west Texas and South Texas could do it.

Mr. Miller said one thing they've done in other cities is to have a robust relationship in Washington D.C., not necessarily lobbying, but talking to elected officials, and agencies including TxDOT representatives. We could, if we had coalition of members of Congress and U.S. senators representing this area to support Method 3. We could support that effort through our own coordinated acts and use TxDOT support on Method 2.

Ms. Mays said they are free to recommend that, but she wanted them to be aware of what TxDOT can and can't do.

Roger Beall, TxDOT Transportation Planning and Programming Deputy Director said TxDOT can't lobby or try to influence Congress. With I-69, that was written into legislation as future interstate, as well as with I-14.

Mr. Miller said he's hearing that for this group, if they elect to do Method 3, the report will not contain anything about that.

Ms. Mays responded no, they can certainly put that in the report and recommend it. It's just the Congressional act cannot be attached to TxDOT.

Mr. Beall agreed, they can recommend it, but since it would involve lobbying to Congress it can't be an action item for TxDOT.

Mr. Miller asked if they would coordinate through the Ports-to-Plains Alliance for Congressional efforts or have a coordinating entity to stay on the same page with our efforts in D.C.

Ms. Mays responded yes; they could do that.

Preliminary Cost Estimates

Ms. Lunceford continued the presentation by discussing cost estimates. She explained the costs are in 2020 dollars, a new software system (Concept Station) was used, it assumes a 75-mile per hour design speed, it uses TxDOT bids from each district for labor and prices, and it does not include costs for existing I-27. The estimates assume relief routes and include two estimates, one for frontage roads throughout the entire segment, and one for frontage roads in cities and towns. These estimates also include high-level estimates for utilities and right-of-way.

Mr. Kiely asked if the estimates look at what portion of the corridor/roadways can be continued to be used for improvements versus those that have to have complete re-construction, or whether these estimates look at what the cost is for complete reconstruction the entire roadway.

Ms. Lunceford responded it does not look at different portions to be used for improvements due to timing issues, but mostly includes a complete reconstruction. She said due to the study time constraints, that level of detail was not able to be captured. The timing for these roads was also looked at. Some roads may be ok, but they may be only good for five years, and be at the end of service life by the time this study starts.

Ms. Mays also said this is a planning level estimate. Once the districts start doing project level estimates, that detail will be included, but at this planning level; we can't go mile by mile.

Mr. Kiely said he understands that, but thinks it is important to not assume reconstruction of the entire corridor. Especially in Segment #1, since there are areas that will not require full reconstruction and will be less costly than this planning estimate.

Ms. Mays agreed, but she reminded everyone when you see these numbers, they are 2020 numbers. It takes a long time to build a corridor to interstate standards. She cautioned the cost could go up or down, and we need to focus on the bigger picture.

Mr. Kiely also asked where it was assumed relief routes would be in Segment #1.

Ms. May responded around cities and towns, but there was no line around specific areas, west or east, no lines yet.

Mr. Beall also commented we're having to make high level assumptions. TxDOT is trying to be cautious when talking about new location or relief routes. We must make sure we're not specific, since the study is still at a high-level of analysis.

Ms. Mays commented the goal is to provide realistic planning-level cost estimates.

Mr. Kiely responded he understood being cautious, but the Committee would be making recommendations about what improvements need to be made, and relief routes are part of that recommendations, and he was curious what the assumptions were in that.

Ms. Mays said the Committee could make those specific recommendations, but specific locations for relief routes weren't part of the bill. These high-level cost estimates for relief routes being presented today involved just whether you go through or around downtown. The Committee could make the specific recommendations if they chose to.

Mr. Smith said he didn't think we were asking everyone to make a determination whether they wanted to go through or around towns, we were doing a broad level feasibility assessment, it will get down to every individual project within project limits to be doing studies later on in terms of alternatives analysis.

Mayor Pope asked how we know what costs were attributed in this study to relief routes and whether that's needed to be broken out.

Ms. Lunceford said she's hearing Mayor Pope is asking a separate line item for relief routes. You're not asking for each city, just a separate line item for relief routes.

Mayor Pope said it would be a good place to start. We'll have to get a lot more granular as we move along, but not today.

Ms. Mays said broadly, when the Committee makes recommendations, relief routes will warrant further study. She said not to get granular with the cost estimates since each one will be different as the study goes on. Her concern is if it's broken down, it will be difficult to discern later. She said it's best to stay high level now. It's probably not helpful to separate as a line item at this point.

Mr. Kiely said these cost estimates will be included in a report from Segment #1. This is the cost estimate they've accepted, and that's why we're asking questions. When this report gets published, we will be asked to explain how those cost estimates came to be. Any detail you can give us to break it down will help the report and make the report fuller and help us know these are the correct cost estimates.

Ms. Mays said TxDOT is recommending we identify the cities and towns we can include, but we cannot put a specific number on individual relief routes at this level. Those specific relief routes will need to be studied later by communities to refine the cost estimates on them.

Mr. Smith said we'll state what assumptions have been made, but we can only go at a broad level right now.

Ms. Lunceford continued the presentation by reviewing the differences between the 2015 Initial Assessment Report and the current study.

The cost estimate for the entire corridor as interstate with frontage roads is \$27.886 billion and \$18.857 billion for interstate with frontage roads in urban areas only. The Segment #1 cost estimate is \$5.276 billion for interstate with frontage roads in urban and rural areas and \$3.680 billion for interstate with frontage roads only in urban areas.

Lastly, Ms. Lunceford provided a cost comparison of Segment #1 per mile cost to the I-69 Implementation Strategy and the I-35 Statewide Corridor Plan.

Mayor Pope said there was some discussion about frontage roads with Jared and Milton. There may be parts of this road that don't require frontage roads, but there are rural areas that may need frontage roads.

Ms. Mays said it would be good to get the reaction from the Committee about their thoughts on frontage roads. She asked if any of the district engineers had any comments from their perspective.

Brian Crawford, Amarillo District Engineer, said at some point, that decision has to be made, and we'd probably end up in the future with some rural areas with frontage roads and it would make sense, so I think it's a valid question. It will have to be considered. He said his question is whether this Committee should consider this.

Milton Pax, Ports-to-Plains Alliance, said these are decisions that are going to have to be made down the road. Demographics are going to change before this takes place, so decision are going to have to be made between TxDOT and the communities involved. To try to come up with that now seems premature.

Ms. Mays said she agrees. With relief route and high-level planning estimates and her thought process it is best to be conservative in the cost estimate rather than have it be underestimated and later at the planning level, things change, and the actual costs are much higher. If the cost estimate

is more, then you get questions of why it was so low. We'd need to determine where the frontage roads would be.

Mr. Kiely said perhaps a comment in the report that indicates they are high level cost estimates with frontage roads, and the actual number will be determined later with further study as to where frontage roads will be.

Mr. Miller commented it would be in everyone's best interest to stick with the recommendation of frontage roads in both rural and urban areas. He said the reason we're doing this is for safety improvements. As traffic goes up, the safety challenges go up without frontage roads, and the access is going to be more challenging. He explained it's difficult at this point, and it's a decision we need to make when we have funding constraints. Then our rural partners can provide their input. They are the biggest stakeholders where frontage roads are needed. The best step is to stick with frontage roads throughout the segment.

Mr. Pax said a lot of those decisions are going to be based on where you do and don't have utilities. It's too premature right now. We need to go with frontage roads everywhere.

Mr. Miller said he was hearing consensus we should put interstate with frontage roads in urban and rural areas forward and asked if anyone on the Committee thought differently.

Kyle Ingham, Panhandle Regional Planning Commission, said he thought they were moving in the right direction. He thought the one thing that's going to be hard in the timeframe is inflation. The uncertainty of labor, employment, the cost estimates we use today are probably going to be inaccurate in a year.

Mr. Miller said it's premature to be making cuts in safety and to leave as it's ideal safety position. The price is higher, but it's premature to save that money now without knowing what the need is.

Mr. Ingham agreed. He said he was more interested in the specific projects than dollar amounts.

Mr. Miller said this was the safest model, so it's best to keep it that way.

Preliminary Committee Recommendations

Ms. Mays started the discussion of Committee recommendations. She provided a brief overview of important data to consider from the forecasted data including population demographics, freight, traffic, and safety. She also reviewed the Committee's recommendations from the previous meetings.

Robert Ryan with the consultant team used an interactive map to capture the Committee's preliminary recommendations. The Committee decided to create a sub-committee in order to make specific recommendations along the corridor. Mr. Miller asked for volunteers and said he would get a group together soon.

As members were making recommendations, there were also three Mentimeter questions asked.

The questions and results are as follows:

Mentimeter Question #1: What added capacity improvements and locally preferred routes would you recommend from Amarillo to Dumas?

Responses included the recommendation of the entire Segment #1 is reasonable for interstate and the highway leading to the Canadian River bridge on northbound US 87 needs to be straightened.

Mentimeter Question #2: What added capacity improvements and locally preferred routes would you recommend north of Dumas?

No responses.

Mentimeter Question #3: What safety/operational improvement would you recommend?

Responses included a request that traffic signals are installed in Cactus.

Funding Sources

Ms. Mays continued the presentation by reviewing funding sources. Funding sources include federal state, local, and private funds. Private funding may include Permian Strategic Partnership, County Energy Transportation Reinvestment Zone, and public/private partnerships.

Mayor Pope asked where this project would fit from a funding category standpoint in the Unified Transportation Program (UTP). He asked if that would be something that would be called out.

Ms. Mays responded there are many different funding categories in the UTP, these improvements would fit in, but there's not one single certain category for these projects since they fall into different funding categories. There are some that could be targeted, but you don't want to box yourself into one category at this stage in the feasibility study.

Mr. Smith said the UTP is a stage in the planning and programming process. In some cases, there are projects that might be identified in the 10-year timeframe, but those will be in competition with projects around the state. The next steps following this feasibility study would be to take a detailed look at the corridor and look at top priority projects for further development and get them into the UTP stage then.

Ms. Mays asked if the district have any comments on current UTP projects in Segment #1.

Mr. Crawford said there were a couple examples from the Amarillo District. The Dumas to Hartley upgrade was funded in the 2020 UTP update in Category 4 or 12. He explained those are the big categories the transportation commission has the most latitude to fund project. The other example, State Loop 335 in Amarillo, we dedicated quite a bit of Category 2 funding but received Category 4 and 12 funding. They also use Category 1 and safety funding through Category 8.

Mr. Smith said primary categories to focus on would be Categories 2, 4, 10, and 12.

Mr. Pax asked if the bridges being refurbished between Dumas and Amarillo would be built to interstate standards.

Mr. Crawford said they are working on one bridge, and it's being built to interstate standards.

Mr. Kiely said Peter has presented the development process at the Commission Workshop, and that information needs to be added to the report.

Review and Discussion of Report Chapters 3 and 4

Ms. Mays reviewed changes made to the Segment Committee Report outline before asking committee members for comments and questions on draft Chapters 3 (Forecasted Conditions) and 4 (Corridor Feasibility Analysis).

Ms. Mays extended the deadline for committee members to provide comments to TxDOT on the two draft chapters to April 10, 2020. All comments received during the meeting and by the April 10th deadline will be added to a comment matrix to ensure each was addressed.

Comments on Chapters 3&4 from Segment #1 Meeting

Comment	Commenter
Chapter 3 Comments	
Make sure county names are shown on exhibits	Joe Kiely
Make sure numbers are addressed in text on why employment is much lower than population estimates	Joe Kiely
Change terminology or explain the government line in table 3.7	Joe Kiely
Chapter 4 Comments	
None	-

Next Meeting

The next meeting is proposed to be held Thursday, May 14 by WebEx.

Mr. Miller asked the Committee Members to provide comments on the report chapters to Caroline by April 10th and to send him recommendations for sub-committee members as soon as possible and to send comments on the chapters to Caroline by April 10th.

Mayor Pope said thank you to everyone for participating and for keeping this moving. He said it was not the race they signed up for, but one they must run.

Mr. Miller said he was aware of how busy Mayor Pope is and thanked him for his time, and said it showed how much of a priority this is to him.

The meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Action Items:

- Mr. Miller and Mr. Pax will put together a sub-committee list to develop specific recommendations and send to Caroline.
- TxDOT will revise the cost estimates for the frontage roads in rural areas.

- The TxDOT and consultant team will work with the districts and subcommittee to detail recommendations.
- Committee members will send all written comments to TxDOT by April 10, 2020.
- The next Segment Committee Meeting will be held on Thursday, May 14, 2020.