

## Capital Area Regional Transportation Planning Organization

TxDOT Riverside Office  
150 E. Riverside Dr. Bldg 200, 1A-2 Conference Room  
Friday, November 8, 2002

### Summary Minutes

#### Participants

John Almond	Program Director, City of Austin/Capital Metro
Michael Aulick	Executive Director, Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO)
<b>George Blume</b>	Mayor Pro Tem, City of Lakeway
<b>Eric Carlson</b>	Mayor, City of Elgin
Norm Chafetz	Interested Citizen
Ed Collins	Advanced Transportation Planning Director, TxDOT-Austin District
Maureen McCoy Daniel	Assistant Director, CAMPO
<b>Ron Davis</b>	Commissioner, Precinct 1, Travis County
Howard Falkenberg	Austin Area Research Organization
William Garbade	District Engineer, TxDOT-Austin District
<b>John Graddy</b>	Councilmember, City of Wimberley
<b>Bill Hamilton</b>	Councilmember, City of Rollingwood
<b>Ronny Hibler</b>	Commissioner, Burnet County
Joe Holland	Planner, TxDOT, Austin District
Neal Kocurek	Austin Area Research Organization
Bill LeJeune	Rail Manager, Capital Metro Transportation Authority
Surinder Marwah	Program Manager, Capital Metro
Mario Medina	Rail Planner, TxDOT
Judy Miller	Assistant City Manager, City of Marble Falls
Ross Milloy	President, Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council
Curtis Morgan	Associate Trans. Researcher, Texas Transportation Institute
<b>James Oakley</b>	Commissioner, Burnet County
<b>Maurice Pitts, Jr.</b>	Commissioner, Lee County
<b>Ray Sanders</b>	Mayor, City of Lockhart
<b>Herb Schulze</b>	Commissioner, Caldwell County
David Simons	Capital Projects Manager, City of Taylor
<b>Victor Tellez</b>	Commissioner, Blanco County
Gil Wilson	Rail Planner, TxDOT
Wilda Won	Rail Planner, TxDOT
Jeff Kaufman	Research and Planning Analyst, CAPCO
Richard Kelly	Regional Services Director, CAPCO
Erin Toedtman	Comprehensive Planner, CAPCO

#### I. Call to Order – Chairman Ray Sanders, Mayor of Lockhart

Mayor Sanders welcomed and thanked everyone for coming. He indicated that there is a lot to cover during the meeting, and immediately began discussing the first item on the agenda: to evaluate and determine which projects CARTPO will take to the Transportation Commission in April. He mentioned that this will be CARTPO's first opportunity to take projects before the Commission, so the group should select projects that have some reasonable way of getting approval or getting moved up on the planning list. Right-of-way acquisition requirements, local funding availability, project feasibility, and the possibility of getting approval from TxDOT, will all be important factors to consider when evaluating the proposed projects.

#### II. Project Evaluation and Selection

Mayor Sanders briefly explained the project evaluation process. He asked that each of the representatives from the counties involved evaluate only those projects proposed for areas outside of their respective

counties (i.e., representatives will not evaluate projects proposed for their own counties). He asked that evaluators look specifically for those projects that will get the Commission's attention. The top projects will probably become pretty evident on the scoring sheet because of obvious right-of-way or funding availability, local support, and/or feasibility. However, this is not to say that all five of the projects should not get some attention from this organization (e.g., seeking an endorsement from CAMPO or making a recommendation to TxDOT). The only reason that CARTPO cannot present all five projects in April is because the Transportation Commission limits requests to three projects.

Mayor Sanders then asked Erin Toedtman, Planner for CAPCO, to review the score sheets that county representatives will use to evaluate the projects. Ms. Toedtman explained the contents of the scoring packet. She mentioned that the first sheet contains a list of all projects that representatives will be evaluating, but added that one project might be taken off the list. Mayor Sanders interjected, offering to take the SH 21 project (Project #4) through Caldwell County off the list. He said that he had talked with Judge Wright, and that it was agreed that this project could probably be handled by simply working with local TxDOT staff to add shoulders to the road, as opposed to taking the project to the Commission. Once again, however, CARTPO should deem all of the proposed projects to be important systematically, regardless of whether or not they are selected for the April Commission presentation.

Ms. Toedtman then referred again to the scoring packet, and used the first Bastrop County project as an example to describe the available project information and scoring process. The headings at the top of the project matrix (located in the scoring packet) describe various project components, including the following: roadway project number; proposed improvement; general and specific location; and expected cost. They also show the criteria by which each project will be evaluated, including cost effectiveness; current and projected traffic volumes (current for 2000 and projected to 2020); number of accidents (from 1997 through 2000); local support and/or participation (which consists of local cost participation and support from the public, local officials, and/or TxDOT); economic development (which covers any new economic development opportunities that the project might encourage); ease of implementation (e.g., right-of-way has already been acquired, utilities have already been relocated, or an environmental study has already been done); and finally, regional impact. Each of these criteria is worth a total of ten points (a perfect project would be given a score of "10" for each criterion), though some criteria will be weighted more heavily than others. The Planning & Project Development Subcommittee determined the weights to be allocated to each criterion, which are as follows: Cost Effectiveness - 1.5; Traffic Volumes - 1.25; Accidents - 1.25; Local Support and Participation - 1.5; Economic Development - 1.0; Ease Implementation - 1.0; Regional Impact - 1.5.

Ms. Toedtman next mentioned that TxDOT provided all cost effectiveness, current and projected traffic volumes, and accident data, while the cities and counties provided the data for the remaining criteria. She then invited questions from participants. Commissioner James Oakley, from Burnet County, asked how a project would be rated if information is not available for one of the criterion. Ms. Toedtman said that the project would probably receive a score of "0" for that criterion.

Mayor Sanders then asked Ed Collins, with TxDOT, to go over some of the important points that the Commission will be looking for when it considers projects. Mr. Collins replied that it seems to depend on the community, but support is probably one of the biggest factors the Commission considers. Commissioners do not want to go forward with a project that has a lot of opposition. As far as cost participation is concerned, the Commission recognizes that Dallas and Houston and others will bring much more financial support with their projects than other smaller communities can. They realize that these communities have some constraints, but any extra help does show the Commission that there is support. Ease of Implementation is another big factor. Michael Aulick, Executive Director of CAMPO, added that the Commission is faced with a lot of delegations each year. There is a shortage of money, so the Commission is looking for projects that have a lot of strong support and no opposition. When they run into opposition, they will use the money elsewhere.

Mayor Sanders then invited each county group to make a short presentation on its proposed projects. Commissioner Oakley provided additional information about local support and participation for the proposed Marble Falls Loop in Burnet County: this project is a top priority for the Burnet County

Commissioners Court, and also has the backing of city officials and the area's State Senator and State Representative. These legislators will write letters of support for the project, and have offered to attend the Commission meeting if their schedules allow. Commissioner Oakley said that one thing that sets the Marble Falls project apart from any of the other projects is that it will be a whole new road, rather than an expansion or improvement to an existing road. The new loop will benefit travelers that use US 281 as an alternative to IH-35 from the south to the north. Currently, traffic is bottlenecking in some of the smaller towns along 281, including in Marble Falls. He also mentioned that he is concerned about the Marble Falls Loop not having cost effectiveness information, which will hurt the project's score. Ms. Toedtmann clarified that the cost effectiveness index could not be run for the project because there are no official cost estimates for it yet. Commissioner Oakley replied that local TxDOT staff has prepared some alignments and studies: their estimates are \$30 million, \$10 million of which is for the bridge. In addition, some landowners along the proposed route have discussed possibly donating the necessary right-of-way, and much of the land that will be used for the project is currently undeveloped. He added that the community wants and needs the project.

Next, Commissioner Maurice Pitts, from Lee County, presented information about the proposed US 290 project east of Giddings. He said that this is the last stretch of undivided highway between Houston and Austin, and that the proposed project is to make this piece a four-lane divided road. Currently, there are a lot of head-on collisions here, resulting in injury accidents and deaths. In the last two years, there have been six deaths on this stretch of road. The rights-of-way have been available for years, and the environmental impact study has been done. There are currently a lot of trucks that have trouble getting to the oil field industries along this part of 290. The traffic is unbelievable. Improvements would take some traffic off of SH 71, which would help us all. The project has support from local residents and surrounding communities, and would benefit people who drive between Austin to Houston. Senator Ogden, as well as Senator Armbrister and Representative Cook, have said that they would be happy to attend the Commission meeting. Danny Smith, Area Engineer for the TxDOT Bastrop Office, has said that the project should be ready by May 2003, which would include completion of construction plans. It is a \$12 million project, so it is probably one of the cheaper and more feasible projects being considered by CARTPO.

Next, Mayor Eric Carlson from the City of Elgin spoke about the widening project proposed for US 290 east of Elgin. He referred to a Presidential Corridor Travel Guide that was handed out at the beginning of the meeting, and said that the proposed project is located along this route, which was established by the Texas Legislature in 1996. It links Austin to the Bryan College Station area via US 290 E and Highway 21, and is very important for economic development. Therefore, he highly encourages making improvements to Highway 290 East. This stretch is currently a four-lane undivided highway, and there are a lot of people heading east that need to make left-hand turns here. There is a large volume of traffic in this area, and drivers plow into those cars trying to make left-hand turns, which leads to head-on collisions. The accidents are terribly tragic here. Joe Holland, from TxDOT, added that this road is part of the Texas Trunk System and is an evacuation route.

Next, Mr. James Fisher, Administrator for the Village of Bee Cave, briefly discussed the proposed project for SH 71 through Travis County: The project would start at the "Y" in Oak Hill (where U.S. 290 West goes south to Dripping Springs and SH 71 continues west through the Village of Bee Cave), and would continue on to the western Travis County line. Improvements to this road are important not only because of traffic congestion, but also because this stretch serves as a major route for traffic coming out of West Texas to businesses in Austin and the port cities, which affects economic development opportunities. Local officials in Travis County are asking for a divided highway to take the improvements from the "Y" in Oak Hill all the way to the Travis County line. This project is part of the CAMPO long-range plan, but needs to be accelerated to address the rapidly increasing traffic in this area. This stretch also has its share of accidents and fatalities. A developer has already agreed to commit \$5 million for improvements (including additional lanes and right-of-way) to Hwy 71 between 620 and Bee Caves Road within the Bee Cave city limits.

Mayor Carlson then briefly addressed Bastrop County's second proposed project: SH 71 through the City of Bastrop. He believes that anyone traveling from Austin past ABIA Airport into Bastrop knows about the

congestion problems on this stretch of highway. It is a major artery to the east and ties in with Interstate 10 further south at Columbus. It also has some very dangerous intersections.

Commissioner Ron Davis, from Travis County, added that he would take information obtained at this meeting back to the Travis County Commissioners Court.

Mayor Sanders then asked that everyone to attempt to evaluate the projects in 30 minutes. Representatives should get together by county to review the projects, and each county group should eventually come up with one score per project.

County representatives broke for 45 minutes to score the projects. Alderman Hamilton then asked Ms. Toedtman to explain the next steps in the process. Ms. Toedtman asked if everyone is absolutely set on having the final results at this meeting. She stated that CAPCO staff would like to go through each of the score sheets carefully and address any questions about the scores before announcing the results. She suggested that CAPCO could send out notice of the tallied scores in the next couple of weeks. Participants agreed that this would not be a problem.

### **III. Rail Presentations**

Mayor Sanders next introduced Mr. Ross Milloy, President of the Austin/San Antonio Corridor Council. Mr. Milloy said that for several years now, the Corridor Council has focused on creating a rail district that would operate some of the systems between Austin and San Antonio. Feasibility studies were conducted in 1998/1999 that considered a commuter rail option from San Antonio in the south to Georgetown in the north – this would be a more conventional system than light rail, and would cover approximately 110 miles, with 12 stations. Yesterday, the San Antonio City Council voted unanimously to approve the creation of this district, which means that there is now a rail district between Austin and San Antonio. The Board will have to be appointed by TxDOT, which should happen very quickly. Mr. Milloy said that he believes CARTPO's current process to identify some high priority regional highway projects might be something worth repeating in the near future for rail, which would possibly get some suburban communities interested in rail service in this corridor. The information obtained from this process could be used to push for rail operations funding from the federal government. The City of Austin, the City of San Antonio, Travis County and Bexar County have already joined the District, while Williamson and Hays Counties have given an indication that they intend to join. Other communities may join later. The original Board has thirteen people, who will help get the District up and running smoothly and develop a timetable and strategy for how it should move forward. There is a sense of urgency because of next year's TEA-21 reauthorization. There is a lot of work to be done to ensure that funding possibilities are put into the bill.

#### **A. Rural Rail District Presentation** – Curtis Morgan, Associate Transportation Researcher for the Texas Transportation Institute

Mr. Morgan presented information about Texas Rural Rail Transportation Districts. A digital copy of the PowerPoint presentation is available at the CAPCO offices.

### **IV. Lunch**

#### **B. Texas Rail Plan Presentation** – Mario Medina, P.E., Multimodal Section Director for the TxDOT Planning & Programming Division, Multimodal Office

Mr. Medina presented information about the Texas Rail System Plan. A digital copy of the PowerPoint presentation is available at the CAPCO offices.

**C. CMTA Rail Lines Presentation** – Bill LeJuene, Rail Manager for the Capital Area Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Mr. LeJuene presented information about Capital Metro’s existing rail lines and freight activity, as well as its plans for the future. A digital copy of the PowerPoint presentation is available at the CAPCO offices.

**V. Discussion on potential “High Priority Projects” to be earmarked in the reauthorization of TEA-21** – Ed Collins, TxDOT Austin District

Mayor Sanders invited Mr. Collins to discuss the possible earmarking of special projects under TEA-21 reauthorization. Mr. Collins said that the TxDOT administration has asked staff to work with local communities to develop and propose projects to be considered for earmarks under the upcoming reauthorization bill – these projects would be taken to Washington and championed by congressmen. There are five congressional representatives in the Austin District. TxDOT staff must turn in a list of projects by December 20, 2002. Projects should be supported by TxDOT, as well as by local communities. He said that perhaps CAPCO staff could send out copies of a TxDOT memo that outlines the criteria that will be used to select projects. CARTPO could meet again to develop a consensus about which projects it would like to submit. Mr. Garbade said that the work that CARTPO has already done to select projects for the Texas Transportation Commission meeting could also be used for the TEA-21 reauthorization earmarking process. All of these projects are high-priority, and none of them are unreasonable.

**VI. Other business**

The group decided to meet again on Friday, December 13, 2002 to discuss possible TEA-21 reauthorization projects, as well as to report back on the proposed Transportation Commission projects.

Mayor Sanders thanked TxDOT for letting CARTPO meet at its facilities. Ms. Toedtman then passed out handouts about the possible CAMPO boundary expansion, which were prepared by Michael Aulick.

**VII. Meeting Adjourned**