

# Capital Area Regional Transportation Planning Organization

CAPCO Board Room  
2520 South IH 35  
Austin, Texas  
Friday, October 24, 2003

## Summary Minutes

### Participants

<b>Karl Ansbach</b>	Councilmember, City of Lakeway
<b>Walt Bailey</b>	City Planner, City of Marble Falls
<b>Eric Carlson</b>	Mayor, City of Elgin
<b>Ed Collins</b>	Advanced Transportation Planning Director, TxDOT-Austin District
<b>Robert Daigh</b>	District Engineer, TxDOT Austin District
<b>Maureen M. Daniel</b>	Assistant Director, CAMPO
<b>Bill Hamilton</b>	Alderman, City of Rollingwood
<b>Ronny Hibler</b>	Commissioner, Burnet County
<b>Joe Holland</b>	Planner, TxDOT, Austin District
<b>Don Loucks</b>	Commissioner, Bastrop County
<b>Ross Milloy</b>	Austin San Antonio Corridor Council
<b>Rosie Moulinet</b>	HRM Consultants
<b>James Oakley</b>	Commissioner, Burnet County
<b>Maurice Pitts</b>	Commissioner, Lee County
<b>Duane Stueven</b>	Commissioner, Llano County
Betty Voights	Executive Director, CAPCO
Lucy Buck	Director of Regional Planning, CAPCO

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

Mayor Sanders welcomed everyone and led introductions. He then reported on CARTPO's success at the Texas Transportation Commission: CARTPO's top priority project was funded and should start construction in 2004. The TxDOT press release of September 25, 2003 praised CARTPO for its regional unity in supporting this project.

Mayor Sanders introduced Robert Daigh, the new TxDOT District Engineer for the Austin District, who was invited to give his perspective on the region's transportation future.

### II. Remarks—Bob Daigh, TxDOT

Bob Daigh thanked CARTPO for the invitation and said that he was committed to representing the Austin District's needs at the Texas Transportation Commission. He offered a few observations on the state of the region's transportation:

1. For the third year running, Austin is the most congested metropolitan area in the country, according to the Texas Transportation Institute's annual Urban Mobility report. There are reports that businesses are leaving because of the traffic. In the metropolitan area, there is a mobility crisis.
2. TxDOT gets funding from the gas tax. Newer vehicles get much higher mileage, and it is likely that in the near future, average miles per gallon of fuel will double, if not triple. This means that TxDOT's funding from taxes on gasoline will fall while miles driven continue to increase. TxDOT may well face a 50% cut in funding. Since 50% of the budget is devoted to preservation of the existing system, a 50% cut means that there will be no new road projects.
3. Right now, at least a third of the mobility needs projects are not funded. In the future, more and more of the mobility dollars will flow to the urban areas, so rural areas will have a very hard time getting projects funded.

4. Tolling is a way to solve this crisis. If we do this, we can fund projects that will otherwise not get built. This creates an economic engine for mobility funding. (If the gas tax increased, we would still need tolling. An increase in the gas tax would, at best, keep us even with where we are now.)

Next year, TxDOT hopes to mail out a sticker in everyone's water bill, so that everyone can put a sticker on their car that will be automatically read on toll facilities and the toll either billed to a credit-card account or debited from a TxDOT account. The goal is to have everyone in the state be able to use toll facilities without having to stop at the old-fashioned toll booths. This toll-card/electronic chip technology is being designed so that it will work in all toll facilities in the entire state.

Mr. Daigh emphasized that there is not enough funding to do things the old ways, but also that TxDOT is not looking at tolling current facilities. However, all future facilities will be considered for tolling, including in at least some cases, expansions of existing highways.

Mayor Sanders thanked Mr. Daigh and opened the floor to questions for Mr. Daigh.

Q: Will there be a minimum monthly charge for the electronic chip sticker on each car?

A: That has not been decided, but that the current thinking was to charge a minimum monthly charge only on accounts that used a mailed paper billing; accounts that used electronic (internet) billing would have a zero minimum monthly charge. The business rules have not been decided, but the goal is to have a single painless system that works in all facilities statewide.

Q: What are your thoughts on the proposed Tran Texas Corridor concept?

A: It is a bold vision and TxDOT is working on identifying and preserving corridors so that there will be future intermodal facilities.

Q: How do other states finance road projects?

A: Each state has its own funding system, including its own criteria for the feasibility of a tolling project. TxDOT has decided that if the toll revenues will pay operating costs and any maintenance costs, the toll road project is feasible and should be built. The Texas Transportation Commission intends that users should pay for both capital costs and maintenance wherever possible.

Q: Since local jurisdictions are responsible for Right-of-Way costs; would toll revenue ever be used to reimburse local jurisdictions for this?

A: At this point, everything is negotiable for each proposed toll project. However, the Texas Transportation Commission reviews all competing projects and those projects with local support and a regional consensus are given priority.

Q: We have focused on new capacity, but that is only one side of the issue. What can we do about the demand side?

A: There is no single answer, but we need the roads in any event. We can encourage car-sharing. We need to encourage transit, but then we need managed lanes for buses.

Q: Tolling and big facilities are for major metropolitan areas. What about the smaller communities? We don't have the tax base for as much local match for our projects.

A: Well, the local match always matters to the Texas Transportation Commission. There is really no way around that.

Q: Although it may take legislative authority, there has been some discussion of local gas taxes. What do you think of this idea?

A: I am not a legislative expert. In general, I support communities in doing what they want. And if a community wants to tax itself to build a loop, that's great.

Q: How would you suggest that we, as CARTPO, can move our priority projects forward?

A: You may already be doing this, but my advice would be to figure out what you really need first, without regard to costs. Then overlay the financial analysis on your list.

Mr. Daigh closed by saying that this is an interesting opportunity in that the TTC wants one District to be the “poster child” for tolling roads, so there is likely to be more recognition of a district with this kind of project. The Austin area has some very significant needs that are not toll-feasible but are desperately needed. One possible strategy might be to have two lists: priority toll-projects and priority non-toll projects.

Commissioner Loucks expressed concern about having an electronic chip on each car in the state. He pointed out the privacy issues of having an electronic chip that could be “read” anywhere, whether at tolling facility or somewhere else. Mr. Daigh emphasized that the program is voluntary, not tied to the registration sticker.

Commissioner Daugherty expressed his concern about the region being pushed in a direction that they don’t want to go. In particular, the idea of multimodal facilities means that we are going to force you out of your vehicle. Voluntary facilities like High-Occupancy Vehicle lanes serve many purposes, but other programs and projects don’t. In particular, Commissioner Daugherty expressed dissatisfaction with CAMPO committing 40% of its funding on alternative modes of transportation. In Austin, there is not a comprehensive road system. Loop 360 has 15 lights and only goes part of the way around. It’s not really a loop.

Mr. Daigh encouraged everyone to call the area engineers if they have any questions or concerns for TxDOT, and stated that he has encouraged them to get out into the community to work with locally elected officials.

### **III. Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council Update**

Ross Milloy, Executive Director of the Corridor Council gave brief update on the Commuter Rail District. The CRD has its first meeting 9 months ago. In its first 9 months, it has applied for 5.6 million dollars of federal funding and 1.4 million of State funding. It has identified a rail corridor for commuter rail operations. The CRD has negotiated an agreement with TxDOT so that it can receive funding, hired consultants, developed an annual budget, and launched a public involvement campaign. The District is also looking at freight rail concerns.

The Austin San Antonio segment of the Union Pacific route has 200 at-grade crossings. As a consequence, the average speed is 17 mph. The goal is to move the freight lines to a more eastern alignment so that the main rail corridor can be converted to commuter rail use. An efficient rail freight route could relieve the truck traffic problem on IH 35 between San Antonio and Round Rock.

Mr. Milloy pointed out that the area enjoys a healthy debate on how to allocate transportation dollars, but that eventually, everyone agrees that you have to do more than just roads. Along the IH 35 corridor, there is a linear pattern of development and a rail line that is serving through traffic almost exclusively. Union Pacific runs 34 trains a day through this area; only 2 of those trains actually stop in the region.

Mayor Sanders reviewed the Envision Central Texas project and discussed how growth would change the region and its transportation needs in the future. Mayor Sanders thanks Mr. Milloy and asked that he keep CARTPO up to date on the progress of the Commuter Rail District.

### **IV. Consider reestablishing the Legislative and policy Committee.**

It was agreed that CARTPO Committees would be needed in the coming year and that some time would be spent in the next meeting on the role of each committee. The next meeting is set for January 23, 2004.

### **VI. Meeting Adjourned**