

## FACT SHEET -- US 281

### Bexar County

#### US 281: From Loop 1604 to Comal County Line

##### What is there now?

US 281 is presently a four- to six-lane highway with intermittent signalized intersections and driveways. The section with six lanes was originally designed as a four-lane section but safety shoulders have been re-striped to add the extra lanes. There are many intersecting driveways and streets and several traffic signals along the existing roadway.

##### What is the problem?

Traffic has increased dramatically on this section of highway as the population has increased. There are numerous conflict points with rural long distance travelers, commuters and those visiting business along the highway. This situation has resulted in numerous crashes, many of which have been severe.

Traffic Counts on US 281 North of Loop 1604	In 1980	2004	2005	2035 Projection based on demographic data
Vehicles per day	8,600	91,000	92,590	217,900

Crashes on US 281: Loop 1604 to Comal County Line	Total Crashes	Reported Injuries	Reported Fatalities
Years 1996-2001	856	905	87

##### What is the Solution?

To address the congestion and safety problems on this section it will be necessary to separate the conflict points and allow for less stopping at traffic signals and intersections. Additional travel lanes are also needed to improve mobility and safety.

Construction Cost Estimates For US 281	From Sonterra to Stone Oak	From Stone Oak to Comal County	At the Interchange with Loop 1604
In 2005 Dollars	\$77 million	\$ 103 million	\$180 million
In 2007 Dollars	\$100 million	\$130 million	\$247 million

The total estimated cost including construction, right of way, utility relocation, engineering and environmental costs is about \$600 million in 2007 dollars.

This construction, as proposed, will result in completion of an expressway section with grade separated overpasses at major intersections and direct connectors at Loop 1604 to allow operations at a safer level and provide improved mobility on the corridor.

### **What Funding is Available?**

Currently there is approximately \$102 million in tax dollars (equity) allocated towards the project through the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), representing about 20 percent of the funding required. We anticipate that equity will be reduced; however, due to inflation and additional federal rescissions.

According to the MPO's plans, leveraging tax dollars with toll revenues will allow the project to be built sooner rather than piecemealed over many years. Toll revenues will also be used to reimburse some of the equity allocated by the MPO for other much needed projects in the region. In other words, some of the tax money on this project is borrowed from other projects, for which the MPO financial plan anticipates being paid back.

### **Where Will the Rest of Money Come From?**

This project is identified in the MPO 2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) as a toll lane project. The revenue from tolls on the added capacity lanes will be used to help fund the project, pay for maintenance and repay equity to the MPO.

### **Why Toll this Project?**

In the MPO study area congestion and related safety and air quality concerns have increased over the last decade. Demographic projections show that to maintain the current congestion levels in the region, \$8.4 billion (2004 construction cost estimates) more is needed in equivalent lane mile capacity improvements than can be funded through tax dollars alone. There are more needs than tax dollars available. This project was identified as a toll project in a petition to form a regional mobility authority (RMA), for Bexar County. The AlamoRMA strategic plan identifies this project as a toll lane project. Other projects included in the AlamoRMA strategic plan include adding toll lanes to IH 35 and to SH 16, and the construction of an interchange between US 281 and the Wurzbach Parkway.

The MPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan, which is a 25-year funding plan for the region, identifies this project as a toll project and toll revenue is included in the regional financial plan.

Tolls in the financial plan will help reduce congestion by 20% system wide in Bexar County. More projects will be built sooner and mobility will be gained more quickly.

The MPO looks at all modes of travel and all areas of the region as decisions are made on funding individual projects and developing a regional financial plan.

**Is this just a San Antonio Problem and can we get a bigger share of the state funds?**

Statewide the MPOs have identified a funding gap of more than \$86 billion (2004 construction cost estimates) to build their needed projects. No area of Texas gets as much state funding as it needs. Currently, TxDOT has \$1 billion worth of projects under construction in the San Antonio District. That is more funding per person than Dallas-Ft. Worth where needs are also great.

All the major metropolitan areas in Texas are looking at toll projects to help fill the funding gap.

Most tax funds available are allocated to the area through the MPO based on population and traffic counts.

**Why is so much more money needed and where are the tax dollars being used?**

The last state gas tax increase was in 1991 and it was only a nickel. At the pump you pay 38.4 cents in tax with every gallon of gas. Of that, 18.4 cents is federal tax that goes to Washington D.C. and 20 cents is state gas tax. Of the federal tax, Texas has been getting back about 85-87% of what is collected here. The remainder is used to build projects in other states and fund the federal Department of Transportation. On the state side, pressing needs in the state budget have required the transfer of gas tax dollars to things other than highways. Besides highway construction, the state gas tax is used to help fund schools, the Department of Public Safety (Highway Patrol), University and state park roads, and other needs in the state identified by the legislature.

Estimate of Gas Tax Collected in Texas but not Used on Texas Highways since the 1980's	Federal Tax	State Tax
Since the mid 1980s	\$5 billion	\$10.5 billion

Maintenance costs are also increasing as the system ages. There is a \$100 million funding gap between the cost to just maintain existing roadways and transportation revenue generated by the 20 cent per gallon state gas tax. Today, there are more than 79,000 centerline miles of highway in Texas to maintain. As the transportation system ages, maintenance costs outpace funding for increasing capacity. We do not get enough from the state tax to even just preserve our assets much less add significant capacity.

Federal rescissions of the gas tax dollars allocated to Texas, totaling about \$600 million, has occurred over the past couple of years and we anticipate additional rescissions in the near future.

The gas tax under its current structure is not indexed to inflation. In recent years, the Highway Construction Index has increased significantly due to the cost of labor and materials. Adjusting Motor Fuel deposits by Highway Cost Index, we can perform less than 70% of the work that we could in 1993.

**Why not just get more of our federal money back or raise the gas tax instead of tolls?**

Congress would have to increase our percentage of the federal gas tax to over 180% of what we pay in. That means they would have to take that money from other states.

The state legislature would need to raise the state gas tax by about 175% or more than 50 cents per gallon.

Neither of these seems likely to happen anytime soon.

**But I have heard that you are taking away the lanes I already paid for with gas tax and will make me pay a toll every time I use the roadway.**

That is inaccurate. On US 281, the existing lanes will be moved outward and remain non-tolled. The new added toll lanes will be constructed between the non-toll lanes.

In fact, in Bexar County every toll project planned has a non-tolled alternative.

In most cases, the existing lanes will not be moved, but on US 281 the existing median is not wide enough for the needed lanes. The existing lanes would have to be moved outward if the project were a toll project or not.

You will be able to travel on the same equivalent road section as you do today, or a better road section in most cases, and never pay a toll.

On the US 281 section from Loop 1604 to Stone Oak, more non-toll lanes are being added than exist today. A flyover bridge at Redland and U-turn lanes at Redland, Evans and Stone Oak will allow travelers to avoid signals, enhancing the overall operations, toll and non-toll.

**Will toll booths slow down traffic and cause more congestion?**

In Bexar County, all toll projects are being developed with electronic toll collection systems. You will be able to use the express toll lanes and never stop at a toll booth. The electronic system is being developed for interoperability with all the other toll systems in Texas and the transponders (toll tags) will be available at local markets.

**People say this toll plan is Double Taxation and it is illegal.**

Drivers are not being taxed twice for the same asset. Instead, they are financing new choices. Gas taxes built the existing lanes on US 281 and continue to fund the maintenance of the highway. Tolls will be used to pay back the money borrowed to build the new express lanes. And toll revenue that is greater than that needed to pay the debt service is used to build other mobility projects in the area.

By blending user tolls and gas tax dollars, motorists get miles of new roads, years in advance. And drivers who prefer not to pay a toll may continue to use the non-tolled alternative. To the extent anyone feels they are being taxed more, they should recognize that it is a voluntary tax that pays for new highway lanes and a faster commute.

**I heard that construction on US 281 was shut down because TxDOT did not comply with environmental requirements and tolling?**

That is not correct. A segment was let to contract in September 2005 to build the first phase of the project. There were multiple bidders on the contract.

Construction began by preparing the right of way for the new lanes a few months after bids were received.

The contract was approved to move forward after environmental studies on the section were completed in 1984, 2000 and 2004.

Another environmental study was performed on the section between Stone Oak and Comal County in 2005.

All studies were approved by many resource agencies and the federal government.

A lawsuit was filed in late 2005 contending the studies were not complete.

The federal government and TxDOT agreed that even though the environmental studies comply with both agencies' obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act, construction on the project would cease until a single environmental document is prepared for the stretch of US 281 that runs from just north of Loop 1604 to Borgfeld Road. A single environmental document for this corridor will provide a more complete picture of the proposed roadway construction activities in that area.

**Is it possible that with the new studies the project could be cancelled?**

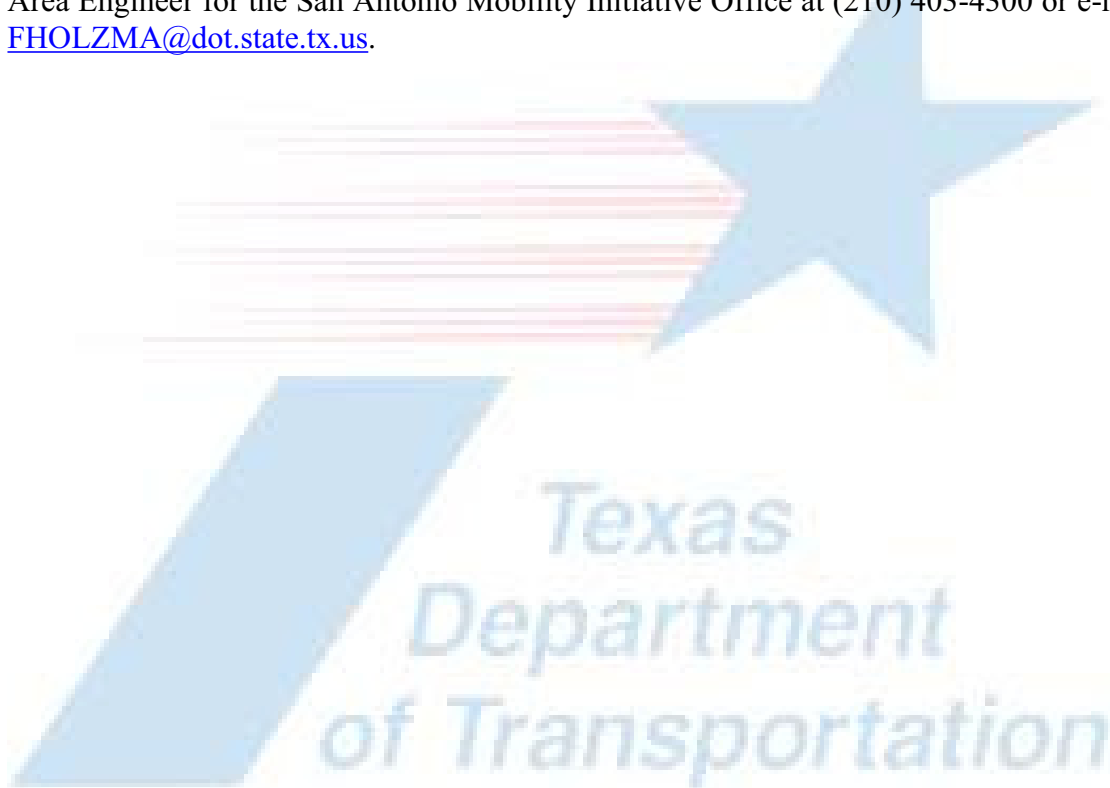
Yes. The no build option will be studied and if it is found to be in the best interest of the public, the project will be cancelled.

**How long will construction be delayed because of these new studies?**

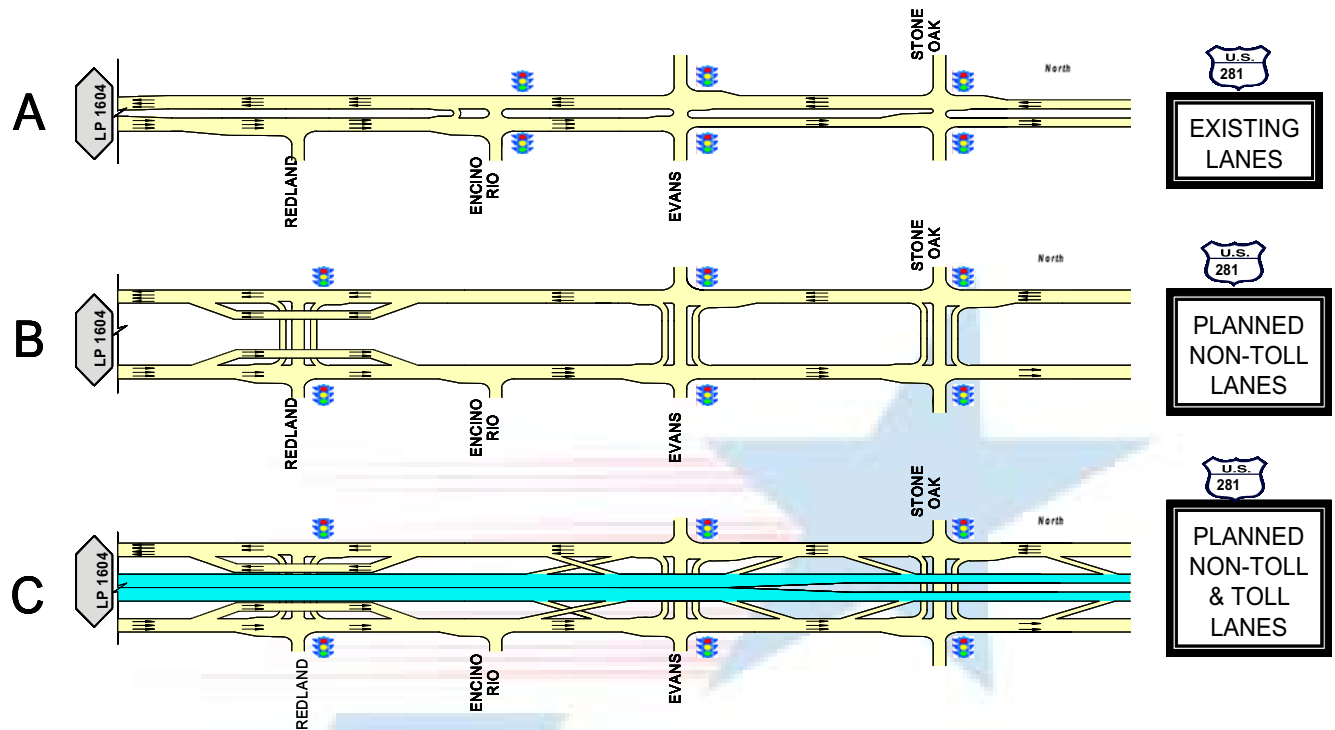
Construction has been delayed for almost 2 years and it could be postponed indefinitely or cancelled. The length of the delay depends upon what the environmental assessment reveals and which alternative is selected. If there is potential for significant impacts, additional study may be required. If no significant impacts are found, construction could recommence in less than one year. If the no build alternative is selected the project could be postponed indefinitely or cancelled.

**What if I have more Questions?**

Please contact Laura Lopez in the TxDOT San Antonio District Public Information Office at (210) 615-5839 or e-mail [LLopez1@dot.state.tx.us](mailto:LLopez1@dot.state.tx.us) or contact Frank Holzmann, Area Engineer for the San Antonio Mobility Initiative Office at (210) 403-4300 or e-mail [FHOLZMA@dot.state.tx.us](mailto:FHOLZMA@dot.state.tx.us).



*Exhibit 1*



- A. Existing Lane Configuration: US 281 is a divided non-access controlled roadway (cross streets and driveways tie directly to the travel lanes). There are 3 northbound travel lanes between Loop 1604 and Evans transitioning to 2 travel lanes north of Evans. There are 2 southbound travel lanes approaching Stone Oak Parkway transitioning to 3 travel lanes south of Stone Oak Parkway to Loop 1604. There are existing signalized intersections at Encino Rio, Evans Road and Stone Oak Parkway.
- B. Planned Non-Toll Lane Configuration: There are proposed to be 3 to 4 non-toll travel lanes each direction between Loop 1604 and Stone Oak Parkway. Signals are proposed to remain at the Stone Oak Parkway and Evans Road intersections. The existing signal at Encino Rio would be moved to Redland Road; however a proposed non-toll fly-over bridge at Redland would allow travelers to avoid the Redland Road signal all together. Turnarounds are proposed at Redland Road, Evans Road and Stone Oak Parkway allowing travelers to avoid the signalized intersections and to circulate more efficiently and safely.
- C. Planned Non-Toll and Toll Lane Configuration: Subsequent to upgrading and improving the existing lane configuration to the planned non-toll lane configuration, toll express lanes are proposed as shown in blue. The toll express lanes are proposed to be constructed down the median of US 281 so that residential and commercial developments can continue to directly access the non-toll lanes.