

A wide-angle photograph of a highway interchange with multiple lanes and overpasses, set against a clear sky.

Loop 1604 Environmental Impact Statement Community Advisory Group

Meeting Summary

September 29, 2009 - 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Valero Corporate Headquarters
Building F – Room FB 118
One Valero Way, San Antonio, Texas 78249

Attendance:

Members: Robert Arias, *Town of Hollywood Park*; Mel Borel, *San Antonio Toll Party*; Letti Bresnahan, *North East ISD*; Kenneth Dempsey, *Helotes Merchant & Business Association*; Art Downey, *District 9 Neighborhood Alliance*; Terri Hall, *Texans Uniting for Reform and Freedom*; Barbara Hall, *San Antonio Conservation Society*; Ronnie Hernandez, *San Antonio River Authority*; Michael Hogan, *SAAA - HomeSpring Realty Partners*; Alan Hulme, *Cornerstone Church*; Nolan Kuehn, *Hill Country Bicycle Touring Club*; J. Douglas Lipscomb, *The University of Texas at San Antonio*; A. David Marne, *City of Shavano Park*; Wade McGinnis, *Real Estate Council of San Antonio*; Dick McNary, *North San Antonio Chamber of Commerce*; Anna Lisa Peace, *Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance*; Chuck Saxer, *Northside Neighborhood of Organized Development*; Chesley Swann, IV, *San Antonio Builders Association*; Enrique Valdivia, *Aquifer Guardians in Urban Areas*; Marty Wender, *Westover Hills*; John Williams, *Northeast Partnership for Economic Development*; and Dominic Zickgraf, *Six Flags Fiesta Texas*.

Alternate Members: Brian Gottardy, *Northeast ISD Alternate*.

Alamo Regional Mobility Authority: Bob Thompson, *Board Member*; Terry Brechtel, Lisa Adelman, Pat Irwin, PE, Leroy Alloway, and Michelle Martinez.

Michael Baker, Jr., Inc.: Robb Fishman, Matt Barkley, Lorraine Richards, AICP, and Mary Keith Floyd.

RJ RIVERA Associates, Inc.: Linda Vela and Rudy Rivera, PE.

Meeting Objectives:

- Build a common understanding of the charter
- Establish guidelines for working together
- Get acquainted with your fellow Community Advisory Group members and their interests

Handouts:

- Study Process Diagram and Proposed Schedule for Loop 1604 Environmental Impact Statement
- Project Location Map
- A Citizen's Guide to the NEPA: Having Your Voice Heard
- Draft SAFETEA-LU Section 6002 Coordination Plan

1. Welcome and Introductions

Lorraine Richards, AICP, facilitator with Michael Baker, Jr., Inc., opened the meeting. She then introduced Terry Brechtel, Executive Director for the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority. Ms. Brechtel thanked the Community Advisory Group members for agreeing to participate and said this was the start of the environmental process to identify solutions for Loop 1604. She also said the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority brought together a good mix of representatives and that they appreciated the time commitment made by the members. She then introduced Bob Thompson, Alamo Regional Mobility Authority Board Member, and said he had taken on the responsibility of overseeing the community advisory groups for both US 281 and Loop 1604 environmental impact studies.

Mr. Thompson thanked the members for volunteering and providing their imagination to the project. He said the group would be able to help provide a better product than any one person could achieve. He further said that the Loop 1604 Environmental Impact Statement is the largest Environmental Impact Statement in Bexar County. He said the challenge will be to develop a solution that protects the environment while providing mobility.

Ms. Richards then invited participants, the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority, and the consultant staff to introduce themselves by stating their name, the organization they represent, their relationship to the Loop 1604 corridor, and what they hope to achieve by participating. Once everyone introduced themselves, Ms. Richards reviewed the meeting objectives which included:

- Building a common understanding of the charter
- Establishing guidelines for working together
- Getting acquainted with your fellow Community Advisory Group members and their interests

2. Getting to Know Each Other

Next, the group worked on an icebreaker activity intended to help them get to know each other better and start to find common ground. Ms. Richards asked the group to count off and break up

into groups of 3-4 people. These small groups were then given about four minutes to come up with the most unique thing they all had in common with each other. Once the groups presented their commonalities to the larger group, one of the groups was selected as the winner of a small prize.

3. Ground Rules for Working Together

The group was then asked to review the ground rules for working together as listed in the Community Advisory Group Charter document. Ms. Richards summarized the ground rules:

- Prepare in advance and attend all meetings
- Treat each other with courtesy and respect; agree or disagree with ideas, not people
- Be positive and constructive
- Identify issues rather than taking positions
- Listen to and consider opinions of others
- Concentrate on problem-solving
- Represent your group and community
- Focus on providing well-meaning, clear and concise comments
- Help facilitator discourage disruptive behavior
- Have an enjoyable and rewarding experience

Once she finished reviewing the list, she asked for feedback or additions from the group. The group then agreed to the ground rules as stated in the charter without any additions or revisions.

4. Community Advisory Group Charter and Mission

Ms. Richards then reviewed key elements of the charter with the group. She noted that everyone should review the charter and the information in the binders provided. She summarized the group's purpose as outlined in the charter:

- Facilitate exchange of information, concerns, and ideas
- Provide feedback on the study process
- Review study materials for clarity and effectiveness

She explained that the facilitator's role is to make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard, to keep the group on task, to act as a neutral party, and to ensure the group has the information they need from the Environmental Impact Statement team to accomplish their purpose.

A member then asked who the Environmental Impact Statement team included. Robb Fishman, Project Manager with Michael Baker, Jr., Inc., said the Environmental Impact Statement team

included a team of consultants led by Michael Baker, Jr., Inc. This group will provide the experts needed throughout the environmental process. Mr. Fishman also directed the group to visit www.MoreFor1604.com for more information about the Environmental Impact Statement team.

Ms. Richards then asked the Community Advisory Group to work in their small groups to review the charter in further detail. She asked the groups to:

- Discuss what other elements of the charter stood out to them
- Confirm that everyone in the group understood their role
- Identify any questions about the charter that needed clarification

The groups then reported the following questions, comments, or concerns. During this effort, non-related questions and comments were placed on a flip-chart (parking lot) to be addressed later in the meeting.

Question/Comment/Concern	Response
Do we need to adopt the charter this meeting?	Not at this meeting.
We did not know it was a three year commitment.	Comment accepted.
The charter appears to be very informal.	Comment accepted.
What is the end product we are expected to produce?	<i>[The following response was not provided as part of the meeting, but is included as part of the minutes to provide clarification. The product expected of each group member is to make sure that your knowledge, ideas, commonalities and differences are understood as part of the study process so they can be considered at each key milestone associated with the ultimate development of an Environmental Impact Statement.]</i>
Why will it take so long? Why three years?	<i>[The following response was not provided as part of the meeting, but is included as part of the minutes to provide clarification. According to the Federal Highway Administration's website, on average, Environmental Impact Statements take about five years to complete (http://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/strmlng/nepatime.asp, accessed November 3, 2009). This is due largely to the amount of detailed environmental and engineering work to be completed and several required agency reviews. The Alamo Regional Mobility Authority has requested an expedited</i>



Question/Comment/Concern	Response
	<i>schedule for this study given current federal rules and regulations governing Environmental Impact Statements.]</i>
Are we the cart or horse? In other words, will we be providing input into the process or will we be commenting on items presented to us?	A little of both. There will be a sharing of information from both perspectives.
We are not sure what it is we are doing, or that we have the authority to do anything. It seems that we are just a sounding board.	Public involvement is a critical component of this process. This group will help us understand how the community and the environment will be affected by various alternatives. This group will help us understand the issues through an open process.
What will be covered at the next meeting?	<i>[Only a portion of this response was discussed in the meeting. Additions have been included as part of the minutes to provide clarification. The group will review remaining questions pertaining to the charter (if necessary), cover the results of the first round of scoping meetings, review changes to the Need and Purpose and Project Coordination Plan, and discuss alternative screening criteria and conceptual alternatives.]</i>
What is the Project Coordination Plan?	This document is required by federal law and is currently in draft form. A copy is included in the Community Advisory Group's binders. It also represents the first step in defining the problems in the corridor.
How does membership work? Is the organization the member or the individual? Are alternates allowed? If a member can no longer participate, can the organization name a replacement?	Alternates are acceptable but they need to stay up to speed on the process. We want to avoid a rotating group. If a member is no longer able to participate, the organization can name a replacement.
I have seen two processes – 1) a group is formed to provide input but nothing is done with the input they provide or 2) the input the group provides actually guides the process. Which type of process is this?	The National Environmental Policy Act does not require any form of citizens' group. This is something the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority Board of Directors added to engage the community. This is above and beyond what you would normally see for this type of effort. The Alamo Regional Mobility Authority is trying to do something different and is reaching out to the community on the front end of the project because we do want



Question/Comment/Concern	Response
	input. The Need and Purpose defines the project. We need input on that as well as on possible solutions for this corridor. For example, is Bus Rapid Transit an alternative that should be considered? The process will largely be driven by national law, but there is a genuine opportunity with this group to help address local issues and concerns. Input from this group, and all other stakeholders, will be considered in the public involvement and hearing process as required by law.
As a Community Advisory Group member, do I need to agree to the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority mission?	The Alamo Regional Mobility Authority mission is included as an introduction in the charter to provide more information about the organization. The committee has a different purpose.
We noticed that the charter talks about consensus. What happens when we cannot reach consensus? How will the process move forward?	Differences of opinions will be recognized and acknowledged prior to moving forward.
Are you forbidding us from speaking to the media?	You are free to speak to the media on your own behalf, not on behalf of the Community Advisory Group or the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority. Only the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority can speak on behalf of the Community Advisory Group as a whole.
I do not understand where we are in the process. Am I to understand that there is no engineering design for this project?	<i>[This item was placed in the Parking Lot and is addressed as part of the next agenda item.]</i>
We have a straight forward rules of operation concern. I feel the focus should be on fact based problem solving, not just consensus. A group can reach consensus without reaching the correct solution. We need to be careful of this.	Comment accepted.

Given the prevalence of concerns regarding the study process and timeline, and because of time constraints, Ms. Richards moved to the next agenda item. She said that additional questions regarding the charter would be compiled and unanswered questions would be provided to each member and discussed, if necessary, at the next Community Advisory Group meeting.

5. Community Advisory Group Meeting Schedule and Review Topics

She then invited Mr. Fishman to give an overview of the general study process and timeline diagram. Mr. Fishman explained that we are currently at the beginning stage of the process. The Notices of Intent have been published; the draft Need and Purpose and draft Project Coordination Plan have been prepared. He continued, discussing these steps of the process:

- Prepare for and hold Public Scoping Meeting #1 to provide the public with an opportunity for input and feedback on draft Need and Purpose and Draft Project Coordination Plan and other issues that the Environmental Impact Statement should address
- Incorporate public comments into Need and Purpose and Project Coordination Plan
- Present changes to Need and Purpose and Project Coordination Plan at Public Scoping Meeting #2, along with alternative screening and conceptual alternatives
- Develop a range of reasonable alternatives
- Review reasonable alternatives
- Assess impacts and refine reasonable alternatives
- Identify a recommended alternative and prepare Draft Environmental Impact Statement
- Identify preferred alternative and prepare Final Environmental Impact Statement

The following represents the questions, comments, or concerns expressed by the Community Advisory Group during this portion of the agenda.

Question/Comment/Concerns	Response
Who are you referring to when you say “we”?	The consultant team, Alamo Regional Mobility Authority, Federal Highway Administration, and the public.
Will the preferred alternative include design? When do we comment on design?	There will be a progression of detail, meaning some elements of design will be presented at various stages. Early on we may talk about topics like facility type or design speed and as alternatives are developed further we would be presenting more defined concepts.
But isn't there already a design done by Texas Department of Transportation	There are previous studies from the Texas Department of Transportation. There is a schematic, but the Environmental Impact Statement process starts at the beginning and we are in the problem definition phase.
Is someone from VIA here to represent the transit component?	Coordination is being undertaken with VIA and many other agencies. VIA has been invited to serve as a participating agency as



Question/Comment/Concerns	Response
	noted in the draft Project Coordination Plan.
When will a design be available?	A preliminary design of the Preferred Alternative will be completed as part of the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Mr. Fishman then concluded by saying that once the Final Environmental Impact Statement is submitted to the Federal Highway Administration with all of the public comments collected throughout the course of the study, the Federal Highway Administration will select an alternative in their Record of Decision.

He said that the goal is to meet with the Community Advisory Group when there are meaningful opportunities for input and feedback. He explained that at the next meeting the group will discuss input received on the draft Need and Purpose. The group will also discuss outstanding issues related to the charter.

A member then requested to get contact information for members of the group and participating staff. Ms. Richards agreed to provide this information.

6. Next Steps

Ms. Richards then reviewed upcoming meetings including the Public Scoping Open House Meetings on October 21st and 22nd and the next Community Advisory Group meeting tentatively planned for January. She asked everyone to attend one of the Public Scoping Open House Meetings and to help spread the word. She also asked the group if the Community Advisory Group meeting location was acceptable or if they wanted to rotate throughout the corridor. The group agreed to keep the same meeting location. She encouraged the group to identify any issues related to dates or times on the comment card provided. Ms. Richards concluded by reviewing the meeting objectives. She said that the group achieved two of the three objectives and would complete work on building a common understanding of the charter at the next meeting.

Prior to adjourning, the last remaining items in the parking lot were addressed.

Question/Comment/Concern	Response
Why was eastern portion from IH 35 to IH 10 removed?	Ms. Brechtel answered this question and said the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority, working with the Federal Highway Administration, looked at what a reasonable scope and length for this project would be and tried to bring together similar needs along this section of the corridor. She said the section past IH 35 looks different and traffic counts



Question/Comment/Concern	Response
	drop off between IH 35 and IH 10. She also noted that stimulus funds are being utilized to provide some interim relief in this area.
Since the area is so long, could it potentially endanger the project by bringing in issues such as those related to the recharge zone to areas unaffected by those issues?	Ms. Brechtel responded that the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority is required to look at issues such as indirect and cumulative impacts. She said they did discuss breaking up the project into smaller pieces with Federal Highway Administration but they did not approve of this approach.

ADJOURN

This concluded the first meeting of the Loop 1604 Environmental Impact Statement Community Advisory Group.