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HOUSTON - GALVESTON AREA COUNCIL

7

2008-2011 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

8

AMENDMENT NUMBER 20

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PROJECT CSJ 1685-05-090

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SH 6 AT FM 529

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CONSTRUCT GRADE SEPARATION

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PUBLIC ORAL COMMENTS MEETING

13

TAKEN ON FEBRUARY 10, 2009

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TAKEN AT

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LABAY MIDDLE SCHOOL

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15435 WILLOW RIVER DRIVE

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HOUSTON, TEXAS 77095

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1 (6:09 p.m.)

2 MS. WASKOWIAK: Good evening. We're going  
3 to get started now so that we won't have you here all  
4 night long. My name is Pat Waskowiak and I'm with the  
5 Houston-Galveston Area Council and I thank you for  
6 coming out on this drizzly Tuesday evening.

7 We're here tonight to discuss the proposed  
8 grade separation on State Highway 6 and FM 529. And  
9 what I want to do tonight is give you a little bit of  
10 overview of the transportation decision-making process  
11 and the status of this particular project and I also  
12 want to give you a chance to ask questions.

13 We're going to try to keep that fairly  
14 limited as far as time. We just want to spend about 20

15 minutes or so on the Q and A. My portion will be fairly  
16 brief as well. What I'd like to do then is get to your  
17 comments because that's why we're here tonight, not for  
18 you to listen to me so much but for us to listen to you.  
19 And I'll explain more about why that is in just a bit.

20 But, again, we're glad that you're here.

21 I'd like to thank -- we have some elected official  
22 representatives here tonight and I'd like to thank them  
23 for sending their staff. We have Sarah Singleton with  
24 Representative Dan Patrick's office here. We have  
25 Sharon Slover with Representative Fletcher's office.

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1 And I'm sorry. I should have said Senator Patrick. We  
2 have Kelli Ray with Representative Gary Elkins. And we  
3 also have Pamela Rocchi with Commissioner Eversole's  
4 office. Thank you-all for being here. Were there any  
5 other elected officials or elected representatives that  
6 I missed?

7 No. Okay. So let's start with an  
8 overview of the decision-making process and why that  
9 will impact this project. Oops. Okay.

10 Thanks, Christy. I'll give you the secret  
11 hand signal.

12 CHRISTY: Okay.

13 MS. WASKOWIAK: Okay. The

14 Houston-Galveston Area Council is the metropolitan

15       planning organization for this region. Metropolitan  
16       planning organizations have been designated throughout  
17       the nation in areas with populations of 50,000 or  
18       greater.

19                               They were created back in the '60s  
20       and '70s by the federal government and part of the  
21       reason they were created was to give citizens more input  
22       into the transportation planning and decision-making  
23       process.

24                               The Houston-Galveston Area Council, the  
25       MPO. The mission of the MPO is to provide short and

1 long-term solutions to transportation issues and  
2 concerns for the entire region. And in this case, the  
3 region is eight counties, so it includes Harris and the  
4 seven surrounding counties.

5                   The policy board for the metropolitan  
6 planning organization is the Transportation Policy  
7 Council or TPC. The TPC is the body that meets monthly  
8 at H-GAC offices to discuss transportation funding, to  
9 trans -- to discuss transportation issues and concerns  
10 and really to look at the long-range growth and  
11 development in this region and try to figure out what  
12 are the best solutions for the region and how does that  
13 compare to the money that's expected to be available in  
14 the region.

15                           The Transportation Policy Council approves  
16           the distribution of state and federal funding through  
17           this eight-county area for both right-of-way and transit  
18           projects, so they have a lot on their plates. And,  
19           again, they meet monthly and they are representatives of  
20           all eight counties, representatives of the large cities,  
21           representatives from the heads of different agencies  
22           like Metro, like the Texas Department of Transportation,  
23           the Houston and Beaumont districts who meet to discuss  
24           and kind of work out the issues and solutions.

25                           The Transportation Improvement Program,

1       which we're specifically discussing tonight, is a  
2       short-range transportation programming document. It  
3       covers a four-year period. The current TIP, as we call  
4       it, covers the years 2008 through 2011. All federally  
5       funded transportation, both roadway and transit  
6       projects, must be included in the TIP.

7                       The TIP also includes locally funded  
8       projects and state-funded projects as well that will  
9       happen in this region if they are considered regionally  
10      significant, and that usually means if it's an added  
11      capacity project, a major interchange improvement like a  
12      grade separation, direct connectors. Those types of  
13      things would all be considered regionally significant  
14      and included in the TIP.

15                           It is constrained by financial  
16           considerations so you can't program more than what we  
17           think we have money for.  It's constrained by air  
18           quality considerations so the total grouping of projects  
19           should not lead to a worsening of your quality in the  
20           region.  And it's also constrained by public comment so  
21           the public gets to view the document.

22                           Whenever there's a new TIP that comes out,  
23           we go out and we solicit public comment on the program  
24           of projects in the TIP.  If there is a major amendment  
25           to the TIP such as removing a project or adding a

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1 project to the TIP, once it's been approved and that  
2 project costs exceeds \$5 million, then that is a major  
3 amendment and must be approved by the Transportation  
4 Policy Council.

5 The Transportation Improvement Program  
6 includes a funding category called Category 8 or the  
7 safety bond program. Those projects are selected at the  
8 state level by the Texas Transportation Commission and  
9 the Transportation Commission looks at really safety  
10 issues at a variety of different places around the state  
11 and they select projects based on how those  
12 intersections fare in terms of a safety index for future  
13 funding.

14 So the project that we are here -- that

15 we're here tonight to discuss was funded through  
16 Category 8. It was included in the TIP as a programmed  
17 project that was scheduled to go to contract via the TIP  
18 process. These bonds are repaid through state highway  
19 funds and they're not transferable.

20 Again, the commission selects the  
21 projects. And once they select funding for a certain  
22 project, if that funding is not used on that project, it  
23 doesn't get to be used on an alternative project. It  
24 doesn't mean that there wouldn't be perhaps some other  
25 funding that might be available, but these particular

1 funds, if they're not used for that project, they go  
2 away so they're not available to the region to spend on  
3 something else. So that's important to know about the  
4 safety bond funds.

5 H-GAC, along with TxDOT, has been engaged  
6 really in '07 and part of '08 in looking at three  
7 projects that were funded or programmed by TxDOT using  
8 these safety bond program funds, intersections on State  
9 Highway 6 at Bellaire, Westheimer and FM 529 and H-GAC  
10 independently looked at crash statistics at those three  
11 locations.

12 And you can see at FM State Highway 6 and  
13 529 there were about 64 crashes between the period 2005  
14 and '07, and this comes from TxDOT's crash record

15 information system. Most of them were rear-end  
16 collisions. They were due to driver inattention and  
17 failure to control speed. It's similar to what we saw  
18 at both Bellaire and Westheimer.

19 So TxDOT again saw three intersections as  
20 safety concerns and they were selected for funding. The  
21 next step in that process for TxDOT was an environmental  
22 assessment of the different intersections. And the one  
23 that they just completed last year was the environmental  
24 assessment for State Highway 6 at FM 529.

25 And they base that assessment on really

1 three key findings. The travel demand in the corridor  
2 today and in the future exceeds capacity in the  
3 corridor. The existing average daily traffic was a  
4 little over -- almost 62,000 vehicles per day. That's  
5 expected to increase to 99,000 or close to a hundred  
6 thousand vehicles per day by 2030. Those forecasts are  
7 consistent with H-GAC forecasts for the corridor which  
8 shows tremendous growth and travel demand in the section  
9 between US 290 and Interstate 10.

10 The other consideration they had was that  
11 just the safety concerns at that particular intersection  
12 where the intersection design really doesn't move  
13 traffic very effectively or safely through there.

14 And the third thing is State Highway 6 is

15 designated as a hurricane evacuation route, the entire  
16 corridor. And what that means is it has to meet certain  
17 safety standards and design standards in order to really  
18 function as a hurricane evacuation route. And the  
19 environmental assessment looked at that and really felt  
20 that many sections of Highway 6, the entire corridor  
21 again, it isn't sufficient to meet hurricane evacuation  
22 needs.

23 So with that understanding, TxDOT moved  
24 forward with the environmental assessment and they  
25 looked at a no build and four build alternatives. The

1 no build is just what it says. It's do nothing, leave  
2 the intersection like it is and see what happens. They  
3 did consider a build alternative that basically was what  
4 we call access management treatment so it was median  
5 improvements along the corridor and I think they even  
6 looked at, you know, some dedicated turning lanes and  
7 that option was dismissed very early on in the process  
8 because TxDOT felt that it wouldn't provide enough  
9 benefit in terms of traffic flow and safety for this  
10 intersection so they basically took that one off the  
11 table and then they moved to the other four build  
12 alternatives.

13 They're fairly similar. They all include  
14 some overpass or underpass. And they did look at an

15       underpass on FM 529 as well as an underpass on State  
16       Highway 6. Those two options were eliminated because  
17       they were not considered cost efficient, and that means  
18       that they didn't feel like the cost -- the benefit that  
19       you would receive, again in terms of traffic flow and  
20       safety, warranted the cost of the project.

21                        So what they ended up with was Build 2,  
22       and that is a four-lane overpass on State Highway 6 with  
23       five at-grade lanes on either side with -- and widening  
24       FM 529 to six lanes with two turn lanes and a dedicated  
25       right. That is the preferred alternative in TxDOT's

1 environmental assessment.

2                   So where are we now? So TxDOT has done  
3 its environmental assessment. We've had a lot of  
4 comments about this project and they really stem from  
5 the work last year and the previous year on Highway 6 at  
6 Bellaire and Westheimer where, again, grade separations  
7 were proposed. And it became clear to a number of  
8 people at that time with wait a minute. There's a third  
9 grade separation at 529 and State Highway 6. What about  
10 that?

11                   At that time -- I think this is November  
12 of 2007 -- Gary Trietsch, who was then director of the  
13 Texas -- or who was the district engineer for TxDOT in  
14 Houston, asked that TxDOT be allowed to finish its

15 environmental work, see what came out of that before the  
16 TPC took any action or made any consideration on this  
17 project.

18 So that's what happened. They finished  
19 the environmental assessment and we're back tonight to  
20 solicit comment on that proposal, the Build 2 proposal,  
21 the overpass on State Highway 6 and the widening of  
22 FM 529.

23 We'll take the public comments that we  
24 receive tonight, we'll summarize them and we will  
25 present them to the Transportation Policy Council for

1 consideration at its February meeting.

2                   And I want to make a note of that February  
3 date. Originally we had thought it might be March, but  
4 it is the February 27th meeting where this will be  
5 discussed. Those meetings are, excuse me, held at  
6 H-GAC. And for more information on times and location  
7 and all that, you can go to our website. It's posted  
8 there.

9                   So, again, what we do is we summarize the  
10 comments and we present them to the policy council and  
11 then it becomes the policy council's decision whether to  
12 keep the project in the TIP and let it move forward to  
13 construction or to remove the project, and that's the  
14 only decision that they make at that time.

15                           There's no consideration about doing  
16           something else at that intersection. That may come  
17           later, but the only thing that's on the table before  
18           them or will be at the February 27th meeting is do we  
19           keep it funded and let it move forward or do we take it  
20           out and deal with the intersection later?

21                           So, again, the public comments will help  
22           them make that decision. They will also be looking at  
23           TxDOT's work on the environmental assessment -- thank  
24           you, Christy -- and then it will be entirely up to them  
25           to decide what to do.

1                   So can we go back to the agenda? I want  
2                   to stop now and let you-all have a chance to ask  
3                   questions about anything I said or you've seen or  
4                   whatever you'd like to ask a question about. And if you  
5                   wouldn't mind, if you would stand up to ask your  
6                   questions so that we can hear you. And we do have a  
7                   roaming mike somewhere. Right in front of me. Okay.

8                   Thanks.

9                   UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Test, test,  
10                  testing.

11                  MS. WASKOWIAK: Anyone have a question?

12                  And let me just say again we will open  
13                  this up for comment and I'll ask if you have a comment  
14                  that you would like to include for the record to come up

15 to the podium and the court reporter will be recording

16 all of these comments.

17 So if you -- it's up to you if you have a

18 question or a comment you want to make up here.

19 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: If they

20 decide to go ahead and do this, when would they start

21 the work on 529 and Highway 6?

22 MS. WASKOWIAK: That's a good question.

23 I'm going to ask -- Beth, do you know when the estimated

24 letting date is?

25 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Let me

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1 check. It's supposed to be February 2009.

2 MS. WASKOWIAK: So obviously it's not  
3 going to let when it's scheduled to, but it is -- it has  
4 finished the environmental assessment. It could let --  
5 again, if it's kept in the TIP, it could let sometime  
6 later this year. When I say "let," I mean that's when  
7 TxDOT would let it for contracting so they would solicit  
8 bids and get a contractor and start moving. So later  
9 this year, early 2010.

10 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Thanks. You  
11 showed -- you showed a projected vehicle per day count  
12 for the year 2030. Would these design changes  
13 accommodate that count?

14 MS. WASKOWIAK: They would. And let me --

15 let me back up. Yes and no, to give you a clearer

16 answer.

17 State Highway 6, the entire corridor is

18 growing rap -- the travel demand in the corridor is

19 growing extremely rapidly. And y'all who live along

20 this corridor and use it every day know that, know how

21 much congestion is increasing.

22 So what TxDOT is saying is that this grade

23 separation proposal will provide the greatest benefit

24 for the longest amount of time. Now, how long that is

25 is unclear. I mean, will it get us through to 2030, if

1 travel demand doesn't increase any more than forecasted,  
2 it should. But, again, these travel forecasts are  
3 subject to change as conditions change.

4 And I would say, you know, 15 years ago we  
5 weren't forecasting this kind of growth in the State  
6 Highway 6 corridor, and that's along the whole corridor.  
7 It's just exploding.

8 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Two things.  
9 Can you put on the slide with the accident rate?

10 MS. WASKOWIAK: Sure.

11 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: And, secondly,  
12 are we talking about putting sound walls around the  
13 neighborhood?

14 MS. WASKOWIAK: There we go. It's kind of

15 hard to see, but down at the bottom, 64 crashes, and,  
16 again, that's in a three-year period. There were no  
17 fatalities included in that, I should point out, but  
18 those are all what are considered serious accidents,  
19 enough to be included in this report.

20 Sound walls, noise walls, that would  
21 depend on further environmental work. I don't think  
22 that they're calling for noise walls at this point, but  
23 there are certain noise standards. And if the noise  
24 standard was expected to exceed that, TxDOT would have  
25 to do some mitigation activity to keep it from impacting

1 neighborhoods in particular.

2 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I'm  
3 concerned about this number of the crashes, where they  
4 get those from. I know that on the accident report  
5 sheet they ask you for the nearest intersection.

6 MS. WASKOWIAK: Right.

7 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: And I've  
8 lived in my house, which is along Highway 6, now for  
9 almost 17 years. I have not seen any accidents on 529  
10 and Highway 6. They have all been in Ridge Park and  
11 Highway 6 or Sugar Ranch and I'm not sure that this  
12 really represents exactly where the accidents are  
13 happening.

14 MS. WASKOWIAK: These are accidents that

15 happened within 500 feet of the intersection. That's  
16 the definition for it. So if it's 500 feet -- and  
17 that's on FM 529 or 500 feet on State Highway 6, and  
18 that's all it includes. So anything outside of that  
19 isn't captured in this.

20 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: When you  
21 talk about the growth data when they got the numbers,  
22 how long ago did they get those numbers and have they  
23 changed since all the new growth out 290 further? Have  
24 they gone down or gone up, because there's more shopping  
25 out that way? It seems like the traffic has gone down

1 in our area since all that has opened up in the -- in  
2 the last year.

3 MS. WASKOWIAK: Well, these numbers  
4 predate the last year. TxDOT's numbers are based on  
5 2005 numbers. H-GAC's numbers actually, the baseline is  
6 2007, and that comes from 2006 traffic counts, but we  
7 did our forecast in 2007 based on those six counts.

8 So, you know, we're getting on almost  
9 three years now from the actual traffic counts that were  
10 used as the basis for the forecast, but that's where  
11 they came from.

12 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes. How  
13 did the evacuation -- this past hurricane with Ike, how  
14 did that fare with the traffic going through?

15 MS. WASKOWIAK: You know, I don't really  
16 know on Highway 6.

17 Christy, do you have an idea? Christy is  
18 our hurricane evacuation planner and is much more  
19 engaged in that.

20 CHRISTY: We worked directly monitoring  
21 Highway 6. I could not tell you, but the evacuation  
22 went pretty smoothly overall because a lot more people  
23 stayed home so we didn't see the kind of numbers we saw  
24 with the Rita evacuation.

25 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: As a

1 resident, we [inaudible] wonderful. Every light we had  
2 was on green. It was very effective. They just ran up  
3 6 and took off.

4 MS. WASKOWIAK: Any other questions? Oh,  
5 one more?

6 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Which one,  
7 Pat?

8 MS. WASKOWIAK: Wherever.

9 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Has there been  
10 an assessment made of the pollution that's going to  
11 happen that is currently -- the pollution rate right now  
12 and what impact this change is going to have on  
13 pollution?

14 MS. WASKOWIAK: Yes. In fact, that was

15 included. Part of the environmental assessment is just  
16 that, an environmental analysis, and TxDOT looks at  
17 emissions. And, in fact, it's showing that there is no  
18 net increase in emissions because what you're doing is  
19 improving traffic flow and keeping cars -- or moving  
20 cars rather than keeping them stuck in traffic has some  
21 positive emissions benefits.

22 Even if it's the same number of cars, if  
23 they're not idling but they're moving it tends to  
24 improve or reduce emissions. Now, overall increase in  
25 the number of vehicles increases emissions, but what

1 TxDOT is saying is they kind of balance each other out  
2 because they're just moving traffic better through the  
3 intersection.

4 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: On your  
5 anticipated traffic volume, is there any consideration  
6 of improvements to 290 and how that could possibly  
7 alleviate some of the traffic that I currently see  
8 coming down Highway 6 now that I-10 has been improved?

9 MS. WASKOWIAK: Yes. The traffic volumes  
10 are based on what you saw from TxDOT from 2030 and  
11 H-GAC's 2035 volume projections are based on really a  
12 build-out network so 290 is included in our travel  
13 demand models and all of the improvements that are  
14 planned for 290 are captured in that by 2035.

15                               So, yes, what you're seeing is today  
16       everything we know that's going to happen and is planned  
17       to happen for major corridors and major arterials is  
18       captured in that 2035 and the 2030 number.

19                               UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER:   What's the  
20       current status of the grade separation at Westheimer and  
21       Bellaire?

22                               MS. WASKOWIAK:   The grade separation at  
23       Westheimer and Bellaire again was the subject of a lot  
24       of discussion in 2007 and early 2008 and the  
25       Transportation Policy Council opted to remove the

1 project from the TIP so that it would not be funded and  
2 that's it.

3 Yes, ma'am, right there.

4 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: What did the  
5 community do to achieve that goal? I mean, what is it  
6 that prompted them to change their mind?

7 MS. WASKOWIAK: What prompted the policy  
8 council to change its mind? A couple of considerations.  
9 One was they -- a number of public comments and public  
10 concerns about the impact of the proposed grade  
11 separation to businesses and residents.

12 They also were concerned about, again,  
13 this long-term -- the long-term viability of the  
14 corridor and what is really needed along Highway 6 to

15 meet this huge increase in travel demand.

16                                   And at the end of the day -- again, I'm  
17 kind of putting words in their mouths, but this is what  
18 we got from what -- the discussion at the policy council  
19 was that they felt like the grade separation would  
20 improve traffic and improve safety at that location and  
21 at Bellaire, but ultimately it wouldn't solve the  
22 problems in the corridor so a lot of money would be  
23 spent, businesses, homeowners antagonized and, you know,  
24 in some cases maybe even businesses would go out of  
25 business and they just felt it wasn't worth -- it wasn't

1       worth it for what you were going to get in the long  
2       term. So what they looked for was, you know, some  
3       better solution for the entire corridor.

4                       Yes, sir.

5                       UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: What's the  
6       length of the construction phase?

7                       MS. WASKOWIAK: How long does the  
8       construction take for a grade separation? It would take  
9       in total probably about two years. The worst part of it  
10      would take about a year, but this would be a pretty big  
11      grade separation.

12                      And anything -- yes, ma'am.

13                      I think -- sorry, Mike. Go ahead. I'll  
14      come back to you.

15 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: If you could  
16 go back to that slide where it had each one of the build  
17 considerations.

18 MS. WASKOWIAK: Uh-huh.

19 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: The analysis  
20 is not cost effective. What does TxDOT consider a cost?  
21 And in this analysis, is there any kind of economic  
22 impact to area businesses that they considered in their  
23 analysis for what they would choose?

24 MS. WASKOWIAK: The answer to the last one  
25 is no. The cost effectiveness is really just based on

1 the capital cost of the project, including any  
2 right-of-way acquisition, engineering costs and so on,  
3 and -- as opposed to the anticipated travel benefits and  
4 safety benefits.

5 So, you know, the grade separation,  
6 there's X number of vehicles per day and it would  
7 decrease accidents by whatever percent. You weigh that  
8 against cost -- the capital cost of the project.

9 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: But no  
10 economic impact to area businesses is considered?

11 MS. WASKOWIAK: Not in the cost  
12 effectiveness, no. Okay.

13 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Hi. My name  
14 is Donna. I have two or three questions.

15 MS. WASKOWIAK: Okay.

16 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: One is how  
17 many businesses will be affected? How long would the  
18 widening be as far as the distance? If it is determined  
19 that a sound wall is needed, will TxDOT or the HOA's be  
20 responsible for building those?

21 MS. WASKOWIAK: Let's see. The first  
22 one -- well, let me answer the last one. Noise walls  
23 would be TxDOT's responsibility. State Highway 6 is a  
24 TxDOT facility. It owns, operates, maintains the  
25 facility so any noise walls would be TxDOT's

1 responsibility.

2                   On businesses that were impacted, the  
3 environmental assessment shows that no businesses or  
4 homes would need to be relocated. There would need to  
5 be some utility adjustment and there would be some  
6 right-of-way that would be needed, but that right-of-way  
7 would come from what is now part of the parking lots of  
8 the businesses that are located adjacent to the  
9 intersection.

10                   UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: So that won't  
11 affect [inaudible]?

12                   MS. WASKOWIAK: Well, I'm not saying it  
13 won't affect them. What I'm saying is that the  
14 environmental assessment says no businesses would have

15 to be relocated, so it rates about -- it does call for  
16 about five acres of right-of-way acquisition.

17 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: And excuse  
18 me. One other question you didn't answer is how long is  
19 the extension?

20 MS. WASKOWIAK: You know, I forgot. It's  
21 about 12 -- oh, Dan knows it.

22 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: When the  
23 [inaudible] of the coalition members met with Gary  
24 Trietsch before he retired [inaudible], he told our  
25 [inaudible] field coalition and those that were seated

1 at the table that the project would normally be a one  
2 and a half, two-year project, but because we have buried  
3 utilities -- we're Friendswood Development Company -- it  
4 would add another one third again total project cost and  
5 approximately it could be as long as another year to a  
6 year and a quarter to that project.

7 MS. WASKOWIAK: So the construction time  
8 could take longer. That's not unusual. I would say an  
9 average is about two years, but if they run into some  
10 problem that adds more. I think it's about 1200 feet is  
11 the length of it, but I could be wrong. I'm not sure if  
12 it's -- Beth, do we have a length on it? I've just  
13 forgotten what it is.

14 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Conceptually

15 if you do Build 2, the second option there so that  
16 there's an overpass, where would it start? And it would  
17 obviously go over 529 and then probably pass those  
18 lights and then come back down. Where would it end?

19 MS. WASKOWIAK: Well, that's what I'm  
20 trying to -- I'm not sure what the length is. And it's  
21 in the environmental --

22 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: I can give you  
23 a visual of it. It starts -- it starts at the French  
24 Quarter Restaurant and ends at the Taco Cabana. That's  
25 about the best visual I can give everybody.

1 MS. WASKOWIAK: I'm not sure how many feet  
2 that is.

3 Do we have other questions or do you want  
4 to get to comments?

5 A few other questions? We'll take a few  
6 others and then we'll go to comments.

7 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I just  
8 wonder what purpose that serves for, you know, the  
9 little overpass that's disrupting everything?

10 MS. WASKOWIAK: Well, the real advantage  
11 of it -- and, again, I'm not here to sell you on an  
12 overpass or no overpass. I just want to try to give you  
13 information about what's in the environmental assessment  
14 and the basis for that.

15                           The advantage is -- according to the  
16           environmental assessment, is that it takes away the  
17           traffic signal at State Highway 6, and that's what TxDOT  
18           found was that signalization there was really impeding  
19           traffic flow so the overpass takes that away so you're  
20           not stopping at Highway 6 and going through that fairly  
21           complicated busy interchange. You move right over it.

22                           Now, that doesn't mean you don't have  
23           problems elsewhere, but at that particular intersection  
24           if you're on Highway 6 you can get through that.

25                           UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: You

1 mentioned that you don't believe that businesses will  
2 have to relocate, but with both the mutation of parking  
3 and obviously the effect of the flow, how do you really  
4 feel business will be affected in that area?

5 MS. WASKOWIAK: I really don't know. The  
6 TxDOT environmental assessment found that -- found that  
7 no businesses would need to be relocated. It doesn't  
8 mean it wouldn't impact their business. It just means  
9 they wouldn't have to move, that their space where the  
10 actual business is located would remain where it is and  
11 intact.

12 Now, they may have less parking and how  
13 that would impact them is unclear, but the environmental  
14 assessment only looked at, you know, would they have to

15       move the bank from its existing location to some other  
16       place and they found that they wouldn't have to do that.

17                               UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: My question  
18       is regarding the utility easements for the overpass to  
19       happen. If anybody knows anything about Highway 6  
20       South, when they -- they have an intersection down  
21       there. When they put in that overpass, it just really  
22       affected those businesses that sat on that corner.

23                               Any of you that are familiar with that,  
24       those businesses had to close up. They went out of  
25       business. Citizens could not get to those businesses.



15 from them, then when one car pulls in and they've only  
16 got three parking spots and other cars are pulling in  
17 trying to find a parking spot it is a domino effect  
18 that's going to -- that's going to lead down into your  
19 road, into the traffic.

20 And so there are a lot of considerations  
21 that we as a community need to take into effect and,  
22 that is, it's going to affect our businesses that are  
23 around here. It's going to affect how our intersection  
24 looks and there's nothing attractive that's going to  
25 come out of this.

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1                   And I just challenge anybody to go down  
2 Highway 6 South towards Harwin and look at the  
3 overpasses that were built there and look at the  
4 businesses that are on either side and the subdivisions  
5 that are on either side. In the '80s, those were nice  
6 subdivisions. Those were -- you want to live there.  
7 Now you don't. So I just challenge y'all to take a look  
8 at that and see what we're up against.

9                   MS. WASKOWIAK: Ma'am, can I get you to  
10 state your name, please?

11                   MS. YEAKLE: My name is Mary Yeakle.

12                   MS. WASKOWIAK: Okay. The only reason is,  
13 again, we're going to record these comments. And I  
14 would consider that a public comment so why don't we do

15 that now is move into the public comment section?

16 And I want to call on -- sir, if you

17 wouldn't mind, one moment. We had a request from

18 Representative Elkins' office to read a statement. You

19 want to do that now, Kelli?

20 MS. RAY: My name is Kelli Ray. I'm from

21 Representative Gary Elkins' office. I'm going to read a

22 letter from Gary.

23 Dear H-GAC Members, thank you for allowing

24 me the opportunity to express my opposition to the TxDOT

25 proposed overpass project at State Highway 6 North and

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1 FM 529 on behalf of the constituents in District 135.

2 My numerous meetings with Copperfield area  
3 residents have demonstrated the legitimacy of their  
4 concerns about this overpass project. Their concerns  
5 should be seriously considered by the Houston-Galveston  
6 Area Council, H-GAC, and the Texas Department of  
7 Transportation, TxDOT.

8 TxDOT has told the Copperfield community  
9 that the only answer to the State Highway 6 North and  
10 FM 529 intersection traffic issues has to be an overpass  
11 project based on the criteria established by the Texas  
12 Transportation Institution in conjunction with the Texas  
13 Transportation Commission.

14 This policy is nothing less than a take it

15 or leave it proposition that closes the door on more  
16 sensible and economic alternatives and which ignores the  
17 traffic issues and transportation challenges and  
18 concerns the area.

19 The H-GAC completed State Highway 6  
20 mobility studies for State Highway 6 South up to I-10 in  
21 2008. It is important to note that an overpass project  
22 was not part of the mobility studies' recommendations.  
23 I urge the H-GAC to find the necessary funding to study  
24 the entire State Highway 6 North corridor from I-10 to  
25 249.

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1                   A large amount of taxpayer dollars would  
2           be devoted to building this overpass project, an amount  
3           expected to exceed \$30 billion. Furthermore, due to the  
4           negative impact on the area's businesses, there will be  
5           a loss to the state's property, sales and franchise tax  
6           base.

7                   These disadvantages more than outweigh any  
8           potential advantages of this overpass project. I remind  
9           the H-GAC that when the other two overpass projects  
10          proposed for State Highway 6 South at Westheimer and  
11          State Highway 6 South at Bellaire were placed on the  
12          H-GAC TPC's agenda on November 16th, 2007, as amendments  
13          for a vote the H-GAC TPC soundly defeated these overpass  
14          projects.

15                   As a result, they were immediately removed  
16                   from the 2008-2011 TIP. Therefore, I ask the H-GAC TPC  
17                   to do the same thing for the Copperfield area by adding  
18                   an amendment for an immediate vote to remove the  
19                   Copperfield overpass projects from the 2008-2011 TIP.

20                   I appreciate your consideration given to  
21                   the Copperfield area constituents, community leaders and  
22                   business owners who will be directly affected by this  
23                   overpass project. Sincerely, Gary Elkins, House of  
24                   Representatives, District 135.

25                   MS. WASKOWIAK: And I believe there was a

1 gentlemen --

2 UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Yeah. My name  
3 is Mike Kelly. I live in the neighborhood and have for  
4 a number of years. I am addressing this as an  
5 individual contrary to the other lady. I don't think  
6 she fully represents a we or our rather than an  
7 individual view.

8 I support it. I think it would be good.  
9 One advantage I can immediately see is we would  
10 eliminate the green area where the illegal sale of dogs  
11 occur. It wouldn't take that many parking spaces  
12 because most of that area is green.

13 So as an individual and not speaking for  
14 you as a group, I would support it.

15 MS. WASKOWIAK: Thank you.

16 And Mr. Tyre Oliphant? Oh, yes, sir.

17 MR. OLIPHANT: Tyre.

18 MS. WASKOWIAK: Oh, I'm sorry. Tyre.

19 Tyre Oliphant.

20 MR. OLIPHANT: Thank you. My name is Tyre

21 Oliphant. I've been in the neighbor -- I have lived in

22 the neighborhood since 2000.

23 Now, the neighborhood I moved out of was

24 Alief right at Highway 6 and Bellaire. I've been

25 through this before. When the overpass went in at

1 Highway 6 and Bellaire, it promised better traffic flow  
2 and more business in the area because of ease of entry.  
3 What it cost is being encountered by the new businesses  
4 that would bring -- that would be brought in.

5 What it actually cost was Randall's,  
6 Kroger, Los Tios, several small shopping areas and  
7 restaurants. What it brought in were tattoo parlors,  
8 massage parlors, illegal alien workers and panhandlers  
9 sleeping under the bridge. It also brought lower  
10 property values and higher crime.

11 Now, according to your figures, one of the  
12 things -- we're putting this bridge in is because of  
13 traffic flow and to ease accidents. By the figures you  
14 have, there's 95 million cars that run through this

15 intersection in the last three years at Highway 6 and  
16 529. That's basically -- with only 64 accidents in that  
17 three years, that's 1.4 million -- 1.48 million cars for  
18 each accident.

19 Now, the bridge at Bellaire and Highway 6  
20 has been there during all that time. There have been 97  
21 accidents in that same time and only -- and only 79  
22 million cars so that's one accident for every 820,000  
23 cars.

24 How does that make it safer if -- you  
25 know, it doesn't. It's almost double the accidents for

1 the same amount of vehicles. So we don't need this. We  
2 definitely don't need this.

3 MS. WASKOWIAK: Thank you, sir. And  
4 actually you brought up a good point that I need to  
5 clarify. The 64 crashes is based on a million vehicles  
6 entering the intersection so it's not a -- it's not a  
7 total 64 crashes. It's 64 crashes per million vehicles  
8 going through the intersection and I didn't make that  
9 clear earlier just so it's --

10 MR. OLIPHANT: It's still the same figure,  
11 though.

12 MS. WASKOWIAK: Yeah, and I'm not  
13 disagreeing. I just wanted to clarify what that number  
14 is. And, again, I want to clarify the roles of the

15 different agencies.

16 TxDOT owns, operates, maintains the  
17 facility. It is theirs. Any improvements to it would  
18 be done by TxDOT. The Houston-Galveston Area Council  
19 doesn't own, operate, maintain anything. The policy  
20 council is made up of primarily local elected officials  
21 from, again, these eight counties and the large cities  
22 in the region so they don't necessarily, each one of  
23 them, have a stake in this intersection project.

24 Someone in Chambers County or Liberty  
25 County is unlikely to be really concerned about it. The

1 beauty of that policy council is just that, that they  
2 don't all have a stake in everything that they consider.  
3 So what they do is consider the benefits, the  
4 dis-benefits, what makes sense to them as an individual,  
5 and they come together as a group and make that  
6 decision.

7                   And, again, the 26 members of the policy  
8 council are the ones who will make that decision on  
9 February 27 and the comments that you've made here  
10 tonight are important to them. They hear them. They  
11 heard them at Bellaire. They heard them at Westheimer  
12 and they'll hear them on FM 529 and State Highway 6,  
13 those for this proposed Build 2 alternative and those  
14 who don't support it, and they'll make the decision

15 based on what they -- what we give to them from what we  
16 got tonight.

17 And we have a court reporter here who's  
18 taking down every word verbatim. We'll have a  
19 transcript of this meeting. It will be posted on the  
20 H-GAC website. And, again, there's our web address.

21 Now, before we -- I'm not sure we're ready  
22 to -- were there others who wanted to make comments?

23 Oh, Brock Miller. Yes, sir.

24 MR. MILLER: Thank you. My name is Brock  
25 Miller and I'm a 20-year resident of Copperfield and I

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1 appreciate the opportunity to address my fellow  
2 Copperfield residents tonight.

3 I'm here today to express my support for  
4 the project which I guess means my opposition to  
5 Amendment 20. The reasons I support the project are  
6 simple. It will improve -- first, it will improve  
7 safety and reduce accidents both at the intersection  
8 with the grade separation which eliminates right angle  
9 conflict points and away from the intersection by  
10 introducing a raised median to separate traffic and  
11 better manage the lanes and replace what some people  
12 call suicide lanes that are -- that are in front of  
13 Wal-Mart.

14 Second, it will reduce congestion and

15 associated delays in pollution.

16 Third, it will dramatically improve access  
17 with turnarounds, additional turn lanes and access roads  
18 for residents in our area.

19 Fourth, it is a prudent and cost-effective  
20 expenditure of public funds. Previous studies by the  
21 Texas Transportation Institute have documented the cost  
22 effectiveness of urban grade separations of similar size  
23 and scope to this project with benefit cost ratios  
24 ranging from two to as high as 12.

25 It will dramatically reduce cut-through

1 traffic in Copperfield which should be a concern for all  
2 of us. For example, you know, at the present time  
3 heading south on Highway 6 if there's gridlock, which  
4 is -- there are many times there at 529, you know,  
5 the -- you're going to -- if you're going to want to go  
6 west on 529, you're going to end up cutting through  
7 Copperfield. So I think that's a safety issue and  
8 something that this project would be beneficial for.

9 And, finally, it's a funded project, as  
10 the H-GAC representative has said tonight. The  
11 environmental approval is either complete or nearly  
12 complete. And in my opinion, it would be a huge mistake  
13 to cancel a project that's a funded program and will  
14 significantly improve safety and mobility. So I

15 appreciate your -- the opportunity.

16 MS. WASKOWIAK: Gerald Ford -- I'm sorry.

17 Greg Ford. Mr. Ford.

18 MR. FORD: I'm Greg Ford. I have lived

19 out in the Southdown community since 1989. I also

20 appreciate the opportunity to enter my comments about

21 this project.

22 All of us as residents of Copperfield

23 recognize there's traffic problems on Highway 6. That's

24 not in dispute. It was over three years ago when TxDOT

25 first introduced this project to our community. I

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1       didn't support the project then and I don't support it  
2       now.

3                       The -- looking at the large footprint of  
4       this project, the noise -- and I agree with one of the  
5       previous speakers. I think there's increased safety  
6       concerns with cars that will be speeding over this  
7       overpass up to the next traffic light.

8                       There was a group that tried to engage  
9       TxDOT to talk about alternatives since that project was  
10      introduced. During that process, we became aware of the  
11      safety bonds that were mentioned. And the safety bonds  
12      require a grade separation project. So the alternative  
13      which we were asking for TxDOT to look at and analyze,  
14      an at-grade solution, they never -- they never took us

15 up on that. They never looked at that.

16 The safety data was mentioned. And I

17 would agree that most of the traffic issues are not at

18 the intersection of Highway 6 and 529. They were north

19 and south of the intersection in those turn lanes and I

20 agree that we need to do something about that.

21 There's been talk about hurricane

22 evacuation routes since the project was first

23 introduced. And with Rita we all saw what that turned

24 out to be with cars stacked up on Highway 6, a big

25 difference last year with Ike. But I really question

1 eliminating one traffic light. What is that really  
2 going to do for Highway 6? I really question the  
3 benefits of that.

4 The traffic data does need to be  
5 refreshed. I've lived out here for 20 years. There has  
6 been tremendous growth. I would say that growth is  
7 plateauing or has certainly slowed down. There's more  
8 shopping out 290 in other locations. We have --  
9 certainly at times on Saturday afternoons, it's backed  
10 up there, but there's things that can be done to improve  
11 that intersection short of an overpass.

12 I don't feel this overpass is the right  
13 solution for our community. It's not compatible with  
14 the Copperfield community. The alternative solution --

15 and there's a model in the back there that shows an  
16 at-grade solution. We can add dual turn lanes. We can  
17 add raised medians. This will certainly be more cost  
18 effective, it will be flexible and I can guarantee you  
19 it will take less than two years to complete.

20 As Representative Elkins said in his  
21 letter, there is a more sensible and economic solution  
22 and I say let's fix the problem the right way. Thank  
23 you.

24 MS. WASKOWIAK: Is there anyone else who'd  
25 like to come up and make a comment?

1                   Yes, sir.

2                   MR. GUTHRIE: My name is Ron Guthrie and I  
3           am a business owner on the corner of -- the northwest  
4           corner. And I definitely appreciate everybody's  
5           concern.

6                   I'm actually on both sides of the fence  
7           with this, but I want you to at least be -- I actually  
8           have a visionary of picturing this thing done because  
9           right now I watch the amount of traffic that's basically  
10          avoiding our corner because they can't get in, they  
11          can't get out.

12                   And when I spend -- in my visionary I  
13          picture the major traffic going over and now the traffic  
14          being able to get out. Right now people cannot get out

15 of the parking lot without really putting their life in  
16 their hands, especially going north and especially going  
17 west. And I can picture it with the overpass there they  
18 can actually exit, take the turnaround and be out of  
19 there without even engaging a light.

20 So I know right now when I watch the  
21 intersections and see almost three times to get through  
22 any one light fixture, and that's like almost all day  
23 anymore. It used to be when I was trying to go to  
24 church. I now go to another church to avoid it, but  
25 those people that are here are seeing that at three

1 different intersections. Boy, just seeing the mobility  
2 is something that I do consider, but I don't cherish the  
3 down time that may be created in the meantime, but I --  
4 but I can see long term how this could actually be great  
5 for mobility, which is safe.

6 MS. WASKOWIAK: Others?

7 Yes, ma'am. Did you want to come up or we  
8 can bring the microphone to you, whatever you guys -- I  
9 think we have a microphone still floating out there.

10 Mike. Mike, the microphone guy.

11 MIKE: Phil Donahue here. Where am I  
12 going?

13 MS. WASKOWIAK: Right there, this lady.

14 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I was

15 wondering. Has anybody done a study of the possibility  
16 of causing more flooding in the Copperfield area with  
17 added cement because we already have a flooding problem?

18 Anytime it rains really hard, the streets back up.

19 There's no drainage.

20 And with a project like this, when you add  
21 more cement, you have less absorption into the soil.

22 You have more possibility of making the streets flood.

23 I've got flood insurance. The floodwaters have come up

24 within three inches of my house recently. And I'm just

25 concerned that this is going to make my house go under

1 water the next time we have a heavy rain after this  
2 project gets completed because I don't think we're going  
3 to have the proper drainage.

4                   And I'm wondering also if they even looked  
5 at the possibility of just retiming the lights because  
6 if you retime the lights the traffic will flow better.  
7 Right now it seems like the lights don't last in any  
8 direction for enough time to get the appropriate amount  
9 of traffic through. And it seems like if you do a study  
10 of properly timing lights why do you need to put more  
11 cement in the area? Thank you.

12                   MS. WASKOWIAK: I do -- I do want to let  
13 you know that drainage was an issue. Any -- anywhere in  
14 Houston, Harris County, just about anywhere in this

15 eight-county region, anytime you build anything, you-all  
16 know drainage is an issue, and that was looked at in the  
17 environmental assessment and it did conclude that there  
18 would be needed additional drainage improvements along  
19 the corridor.

20 Part of that is included in the utilities  
21 relocation that is all talked about in there as well.  
22 So that information is in the environmental assessment  
23 if you want to take a look at it. Again, it's posted on  
24 line, the full environmental assessment, at H-GAC's  
25 website.

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1 Yes, sir.

2 MR. OLIPHANT: Quick question. That extra  
3 drainage, is that part of the budgeted numbers on this  
4 or is that something we have to pay for?

5 MS. WASKOWIAK: No, you wouldn't have to  
6 pay for it. That would be a TxDOT cost and that would  
7 not be included in what they were looking at. The  
8 \$10 million is strictly the capital cost for the -- for  
9 the overpass construction. Additional costs associated  
10 with that again would be picked up by TxDOT.

11 Yes, ma'am. State your name, please.

12 MS. LISANSKI [PHONETIC]: My name is  
13 Catherine Lisanski and I work at a small medical office  
14 right in that corner. And we actually moved into this

15 community because of the community that this whole area  
16 had. I know that our lease is up at the end of this  
17 year. And if this is approved, we will be relocating.

18 We cannot as a -- as a small business --  
19 not only us, but we do keep in touch with all of the  
20 small businesses in our area, and we cannot sustain this  
21 type of expenditure. And we will be relocating. We  
22 provide jobs for the community. We provide medical  
23 service to the community and we wouldn't be able to  
24 afford it.

25 MS. RIXEY: My name is Mary Rixey and I've

1 lived in Southdown for about 20 years. I'm waiting for  
2 TxDOT just to sync those lines. If you're ever coming  
3 down Champion, 1960, you can go a long way on a green  
4 light.

5 In Copperfield, you're there forever. So  
6 TxDOT doesn't need to spend all this money. They just  
7 need to sync the lights.

8 MS. HERMAN: Hi. My name is Stephanie  
9 Herman and I just wanted to make the comment that when  
10 my husband and I moved to Houston we did not want to  
11 live in a big city, but we came here for the jobs.

12 And Copperfield has a small town feel. We  
13 have a community. And if you put a big concrete wall  
14 right in the middle of our community, you're going to

15 change what our community feels like. We all go eat  
16 there. We go visit with our friends there. We go to  
17 our bookstores. We go to our grocery store.

18 If you put a big wall right there, we're  
19 just another wall of concrete like the rest of Houston.  
20 I think it's really going to impact our home values.

21 MS. WASKOWIAK: We'll come up to you, sir,  
22 next, I promise.

23 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I just want  
24 to defer to the lady right here for [inaudible] --

25 MS. WASKOWIAK: And would you like to come

1 up, Jan?

2 MS. CONNOR: Hi. My name is Charlotte  
3 Connor and I live not only in Copperfield Southdown, but  
4 I also work in the area. And I don't feel that it would  
5 be beneficial to build the overpass because we have too  
6 many red lights.

7 I mean, it would be senseless unless you  
8 take out some of the lights. If you repaired the road  
9 where it was easier and more accessible, fix the lights,  
10 I think that would help a tremendous amount.

11 MS. PERINO: My name is Jan Perino. I'm a  
12 Southdown Village resident. I've lived here since 1993.

13 My passion in life, as many of you know,  
14 is pets. I'm the founder of the Copperfield Lost &

15 Found Pet Program. This project has been one of the  
16 most controversial projects I have ever been involved  
17 with and so I must stand here and tell you the  
18 historical.

19 Number one, TxDOT came to our community in  
20 June of '05 and said it's a take it or leave it  
21 alternative. Either you must vote for it or your  
22 community will not receive any funds to fix the problem.

23 What TxDOT has not addressed, however, is  
24 that an overpass project definitely comes with its own  
25 set of safety issues. Those skid marks that you see

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1       when you approach 290 and the bumps against the wall  
2       that are made with rubber tires and the way people have  
3       to make a decision -- now, you know what? I don't know  
4       if I'm going to get off at Texas Roadhouse. They took  
5       nine months to complete that right-hand turn. You know,  
6       I just don't know what to do.

7                        What I'm trying to tell you is these  
8       overpass projects are not beautiful nor are they  
9       popular. But when you look at these projects and you  
10      see it from what we are here in Copperfield, which is  
11      the only -- one of the only villages, towns that are  
12      left that are not on the freeway that have big box  
13      stores, we can say we're proud we were able to keep  
14      Lowe's. We were able to keep Home Depot. This is our

15 history.

16 Now, TxDOT is never going to be in a  
17 position to tell us -- what are those skid marks up  
18 there? I've asked them. I said, "Do you know that a  
19 lot of people don't know how to merge?"

20 "Well, yeah, yeah, I -- you know, that's  
21 true."

22 I said, "Do you realize that most of the  
23 accidents are not in the intersection?" In fact, I've  
24 never seen one, but they are outside of the intersection  
25 and they are caused by the type of turnarounds, U-turns

1 that we definitely want to have fixed in our community.

2 The grandfather road is 13 feet point 1  
3 inch. We are lucky because we have more lane width. If  
4 we were to put in dual left turn lanes, we would  
5 actually have enough room. I invite you to look at the  
6 alternative solution coalition's model.

7 And, lastly, I want you to think of one  
8 thing. Whether you read the environmental assessment,  
9 whether you read the TxDOT grade separation -- if you  
10 can find it on the website, by the way. If you read it,  
11 you will see that TxDOT is not telling you the whole  
12 story.

13 These projects will not go away. They may  
14 be renamed unless we stand strong and say, "This project

15 is not going to solve mobility." The car goes up one  
16 part of the hill and guess what? I'm stuck up there  
17 waiting for the light to turn green at Queenston or over  
18 at Ridge Park. Then we have a problem.

19 It does not address safety issues because  
20 TxDOT has not told those of us who have sat down with  
21 them just what issues do come with this overpass.

22 Mobility? Well, you can go north-south on  
23 the top of the overpass, but what if you decided, uh-oh,  
24 I meant to go back to Randall's? Now what do you do?  
25 You'll be turning around and U-turning in traffic at the

1 bottom of the overpass is what you will be doing.

2 So please. This is one of those projects  
3 that we can be proud as a community that we are not only  
4 a residential community, we are a commercial community,  
5 and we have managed to keep excellent businesses and we  
6 want to make sure we keep those businesses.

7 I say to the TPC add that amendment for  
8 vote to defeat the project. Thank you.

9 MS. WASKOWIAK: Yes, sir.

10 MR. LEAL: My name is Xavier Leal. I have  
11 lived in this area since 1993 and I just wish you-all  
12 would remember how 529 was before it got suspended. We  
13 were really waiting a long time on this 529 coming over  
14 290, not anymore.

15                               Now Highway 6 is stopping traffic. Let's  
16       get that improved some way or another. Anybody can  
17       stand out here and minimize and exaggerate the things  
18       according to their feelings and according to what they  
19       believe, but TxDOT is here and they want to do some  
20       improvements. Let's get something improved.

21                               MS. WASKOWIAK: Any other -- oh, yes, sir.

22                               And did you want to come up here or you  
23       want -- we'll make Mike run over here. Another  
24       microphone would have been a good idea.

25                               UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Thank you.

1 I'd like to speak first to the emotional. I grew up in  
2 Houston and we hunted rabbits out here so I remember  
3 when it was a two-lane -- we called it Aggie Road. It  
4 was the way to get to A&M. That was all that was out  
5 there. And it's grown.

6 And the last -- I'm sure you [inaudible]  
7 in the Easton Commons and I guess we've lived here  
8 almost ten years now. And so the -- what we've seen  
9 happen is a tremendous amount of growth. The last  
10 survey I said-- I saw said in 25 years that this will  
11 probably be -- about the apex or center of Houston.  
12 That's okay as long as we have ours, okay, and it's not  
13 impacted upon?

14 The emotion is is that I can see those

15 walls going up on each side of the overpass. I can  
16 see -- our community is very fragile. We're very proud  
17 of it. We're very proud of the signs up and down the  
18 road and how they're low and how everything is pretty  
19 well maintained. But it is fragile.

20                   When you bring the big bulldozers and a  
21 tremendous amount of dust and dirt, that accident rate  
22 you spoke of will more than quadruple just during the  
23 construction period. So short-term pain, long-term gain  
24 may not be -- is not the right answer.

25                   I agree with timing the lights. I think

1       that's a short-term solution. Long term, there are  
2       other alternatives that have been spoken about here that  
3       are great and need to be looked at.

4                    The critical thing I think tonight is we  
5       would like to thank you. And we're not shooting the  
6       messenger. We would like to thank you very much for  
7       just allowing us to come together most sincerely. The  
8       thing is that if we walk out of here tonight without --  
9       and say, "Okay. I got to say my piece. I'm done."

10                   You know, we need to talk to people like  
11       Mr. Culverson and anybody else that we can get that can  
12       help influence this area directly and indirectly to  
13       facilitate this occurring.

14                   TxDOT is like a bulldozer. When

15 they finish -- when they get going, it's very hard to  
16 pull them back and say, "Wait a minute." You know,  
17 there's a right way, there's a wrong way, there's a  
18 TxDOT way, and they're very adamant about that.

19 I guess on the emotional -- on the -- on  
20 the intellectual side, when I'm at Randall's and I want  
21 to turn left and pull out, I mean, it is just -- it is  
22 hairy every time, but I would still rather do that than  
23 have walls up on each side, the parking lot of the  
24 Randall's and the parking lot of the Barnes and Noble  
25 half the size it is now because these walls -- you've

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1 not only got the road, but then you've got the retention  
2 ponds that are going to be over there to try to offset  
3 some of the flooding areas that we were talking about.

4 So it's not just a small project. I --  
5 from what I understand, it's a lot larger than what  
6 we've even been exposed to so far. I would like to see  
7 it not occur, very strong. I think that there are other  
8 things that can be done. I don't know that there's a  
9 silver bullet that is the right course of action. Thank  
10 you.

11 MS. WASKOWIAK: Okay. Sir, I'm sorry.

12 Can we get -- just get your name real quick?

13 MR. MORTON: It's Terry Morton. I live in  
14 the Easton Commons.

15 MS. WASKOWIAK: Thank you.

16 Anyone else? Going once. I guess --

17 MS. THOMPSON: Hi. My name is Lorri

18 Thompson and I live -- I'm a Southcreek resident and

19 I've lived here I think 14 or 15 years so Copperfield

20 wasn't an old community when we bought here. It wasn't

21 an established community.

22 And over the years, we've grown. We've

23 matured. We're known for our green spaces, our parks,

24 our large trees. It means something, especially when

25 we're competing against neighborhoods like Riata Ranch.

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1 We've got Black Horse. We have Canyon Lakes. We have  
2 all of these communities that Copperfield competes  
3 against when people are looking to purchase their home.

4 So eliminating green areas may be not the  
5 best solution for us. And I appreciate that -- I  
6 appreciate the efforts, as the gentleman said, for you  
7 coming here and providing information to us and what  
8 you're doing to try to improve traffic flow within the  
9 area.

10 However, I as a resident as well as a  
11 representative of one of the seven villages within  
12 Copperfield would be remiss if I didn't question the  
13 expenditure of close to \$30 million to bypass one  
14 stoplight.

15                           It's my understanding that once vehicles  
16       pass over the overpass they will be dumped right back  
17       onto Highway 6 into another stoplight. This doesn't  
18       increase traffic flow overall. It only delays traffic  
19       by one light.

20                           In addition, Copperfield has very strict  
21       residential as well as commercial deed restrictions. At  
22       this time commercial businesses cannot have  
23       advertisement signs that exceed four feet. If this  
24       overpass goes in, the businesses at 529 will no longer  
25       benefit from their current advertisement. This will

1 result in businesses pushing the homeowners associations  
2 for large billboards and I'm fairly sure that no one in  
3 the community wants Highway 6 to have large billboards  
4 throughout.

5 I previously was in the real estate  
6 appraisal industry and -- for years and I know that the  
7 residents in Southdown having an overpass in their back  
8 yards will impact their property values, no doubt.

9 With Copperfield being known for its trees  
10 and its green parks and all of the strict easements and  
11 setback restrictions that we have within our community,  
12 I find it strange that we really want to get rid of  
13 those green areas to make room for the overpass when  
14 there are other options to be considered.

15                   So I guess the main point is that traffic  
16    is an issue. We all know it, but we as a community --  
17    as a community can benefit from help and we're asking  
18    for help, but we're asking for the right solution, not  
19    just the one that happens to be on the table right now.

20                   MR. CLAPPER: My name is Paul Clapper and  
21    I would like to echo Lorri Thompson's sentiments and  
22    Mr. Oliphant's.

23                   I became familiar with the Highway 6-1960  
24    arc as a college student. I came home from college in  
25    1973 and I had my first wreck on Highway 6. And there

1        were less than ten lights from I-10 to 59 in that entire  
2        arc at that time and it was a two-lane road.

3                                But one of the things I've noticed as a  
4        long-time Houston area resident is the condition of  
5        urban sprawl that Lorri is talking about, I believe.  
6        And if you follow the major arteries outbound as our  
7        population has expanded, the Inwood area of 290 where  
8        the golf course is, every major freeway we've had urban  
9        sprawl eventually resulted in a decline in property  
10       values, a decline in the quality of businesses that  
11       frequent the area, as Mr. Oliphant noticed.

12                                And even as close to us as 1960 and 45,  
13        Ponderosa Forest, Westador, these neighborhoods here,  
14        they're struggling tremendously to try to maintain their

15 home values and safety for their children as undesirable  
16 businesses and people are first settling along the major  
17 arteries and then working their way into the  
18 subdivisions.

19                                   And I don't live in Copperfield. I live a  
20 few miles away, but this is where I shop and this is --  
21 this is an intersection that I frequent, and so does my  
22 wife here, and I don't want the walls. I would settle  
23 for waiting longer at the lights to keep it on a plane  
24 with the ground. But I think with the walls comes a lot  
25 of the negatives.

1                   MR. PERINO: Thank you. My name is Joe  
2           Perino and I've been a Copperfield resident for about 15  
3           years so I'd like to reinforce some of the comments that  
4           you just heard and make a couple of other points.

5                   I did read the environmental study. So to  
6           comment on the lady's comments about the greenbelt, the  
7           width of Highway 6 right now is 120 feet. That's the  
8           three lanes back and forth plus the turn lane. The plan  
9           calls for the increase to go to 193 feet. That's 73  
10          feet more, which is 36 and a half feet on each side,  
11          which means the greenbelt -- if you look at Jason's  
12          Deli, the greenbelt all the way up to where the little  
13          cut-through road is between the Exxon and the parking  
14          lot is gone.

15                               So that gives you an idea of the  
16       footprint. The footprint on 529 is similar so all of  
17       the utilities and the -- alongside in addition to the  
18       signs, the point you made earlier, that all gets torn up  
19       and ripped up.

20                               In addition to the expenditure, we have to  
21       look at our businesses, the franchise tax, the sales  
22       tax, the property tax. Those things go down because  
23       these businesses aren't just going to relocate. TxDOT  
24       used to use data from several years ago before we had a  
25       Target and a Home Depot at Wortham, before we had the

1 new mall up on the freeway up off of Fry Road and I  
2 think if you notice now our traffic hasn't really gotten  
3 much worse during the rush hour period or the shopping  
4 period notwithstanding the recession where people aren't  
5 shopping as much.

6                   So if you go with this project now, things  
7 are -- you're just going to bury the small business  
8 person who can't -- who can't make it more than three,  
9 four, five months with their current situation because  
10 this will block and reduce the traffic coming into  
11 their -- into their businesses [inaudible].

12                   A third point I'd like to make is that  
13 TxDOT was given one solution to fix the problem, which  
14 is the overpass is the answer. So there's a pack and we

15       only have one [inaudible]. And what we'd really like to  
16       see is a plan that goes up and down all of Highway 6  
17       which has some -- I drove it -- I don't know. A couple  
18       of years. There's over 50 lights between 290 and 6 so  
19       we're only saving one light here.

20                               And when the other two overpasses were  
21       defeated at Bellaire and West Oaks Mall, there was only  
22       one light there. And I go back long enough because I  
23       used to live on Harwin Drive and that intersected 6 so I  
24       remember if you go and drive over that overpass you'll  
25       see the bank -- the Chase Bank empty and the strip not

1 too occupied, so this is what happens with this stuff.

2 And there's no railroad. There's no  
3 ditch. There's no river. There's nothing -- we don't  
4 need to do that here. So the evidence that -- the  
5 effect that this will have on local businesses and so  
6 forth is not going to be good and we're basically going  
7 to cause job loss by doing this while at the same time  
8 spending the \$30 million that you mentioned earlier.

9 What we really need is a solution up and  
10 down 6 with medians and lights. In fact, I think with  
11 the -- the light at West Little York now is getting  
12 worse because I just -- I just walked in. I drove home  
13 and it took me an hour to get here and I just drove up  
14 the road and it's probably worse than it is at our

15 intersection at 6 and 529.

16 So this is not a comprehensive solution.

17 And what we need is a comprehensive solution which is

18 probably medians and lights to keep us from trying to

19 cut across traffic during rush hour on three or four

20 lanes. This is probably the largest cause of accidents

21 that we find around here.

22 Now, the statistics that -- TxDOT

23 basically say an accident at intersection or an accident

24 at the corner or one -- within one half mile and there's

25 no way you can conclude that that tells you that an

1       overpass is the only solution to that problem. I  
2       suppose the data exists -- you would have to talk to the  
3       sheriff's department about finding out about the  
4       specific accidents that that happens on.

5                    So these are serious issues. The fifth  
6       reason, as I say, is the -- probably the most  
7       significant traffic activity at that corner is 6 coming  
8       north, making a left and going westbound on 529. And  
9       that doesn't get solved by an overpass because you know  
10      what's going to happen.

11                   You're going to be on 6. You're going to  
12      go to the right side then you're going to make a left  
13      underneath the free -- underneath the big -- you go that  
14      way, so you don't get the four lanes going over and back

15 because most of the traffic is basically flowing out

16 that way, so this doesn't solve that problem either.

17 So when you add it all up, I think we'd

18 really like to see an alternative solution. And it was

19 the -- was it the Texas Transportation Institute that

20 actually -- from Austin that said, "TxDOT, this is the

21 only weapon you have. It's an overpass or nothing"?

22 And that's unfortunate that we don't have

23 a chance to ask them to spend the money more wisely and

24 probably -- you would probably spend a third -- or 5 or

25 \$6 million just to do the medians and all this in the

1 area. So it's unfortunate that that's what we're stuck  
2 with, but probably for the time being it's better to  
3 probably have no overpass than to do the wrong thing in  
4 a rush to fix something that isn't as bad a problem,  
5 not -- it's still a problem, but it isn't as bad a  
6 problem as projected. Thank you.

7 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I'd like to  
8 just say as a long-time business owner in this area the  
9 unique thing about Copperfield is the community feel.  
10 It is the fact that you can drive down our area and  
11 there is no massive amounts of signs. There is no --  
12 that lower values.

13 Copperfield really insists on us as a  
14 business owner to uphold values at high standards and we

15 bring in our community for the most part. And as I see  
16 these shopping centers opening out further out 290, I  
17 notice that my clientele is my Copperfield customer.  
18 And by taking that away from all of those businesses in  
19 that corridor and putting the bridge up there, you're  
20 making them have a difficult time to shop in their  
21 community and you're making them feel like it's not  
22 really their community anymore. It now is a highway and  
23 you lose that feel of closeness. And as I can say,  
24 that's probably the most unique thing about my business  
25 and my husband's business is that we have a family-owned

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1 business and it's a family donated business as far as  
2 all of our customers are very family oriented. I think  
3 you lose that with a bridge.

4 MS. WASKOWIAK: Thank you.

5 And, ma'am, can we get your name, please?

6 MS. FOTEN: Janice Foten.

7 MS. WASKOWIAK: Thank you. I do want to  
8 make sure that everyone understands what the action is  
9 here on the table tonight. We are talking about an  
10 amendment to remove from the 2008 to 2011 Transportation  
11 Improvement Program, a proposed grade separation at  
12 State Highway 6 and FM 529.

13 There are no other options on the table  
14 for the TPC's consideration at its February meeting.

15       And I only say that because I've heard a number of  
16       people talking about, you know, different considerations  
17       and long-term considerations. And I think all of those  
18       are legitimate points to raise, but that's not what  
19       they're going to be looking at.

20                        What's in front of them is the grade  
21       separation or no grade separation, and that's what the  
22       policy council will be deciding.

23                        UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: No grade.

24                        UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: No grade.

25                        MS. WASKOWIAK: Okay. I think we heard

1       that. Now, you have -- there are comment cards on the  
2       tables. If you filled out your comment card, if you  
3       could hand them to me or some of the staff members at  
4       the back, we would like to gather those up.

5                   I'm sorry.

6                   UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: I had a  
7       question.

8                   MS. WASKOWIAK: Sure.

9                   UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Is a comment  
10      card the same as oral -- as oral comment?

11                  MS. WASKOWIAK: Absolutely. And I want to  
12      say the public comment period extends until  
13      February 26th. So if you heard something during this  
14      meeting tonight that you have a question about or if

15 later on you think, what did that woman say? That  
16 doesn't make any sense or I need more information,  
17 please contact us.

18 You can go to the H-GAC website,  
19 transportation on the front page, and it says public  
20 information and you can e-mail us. You can phone us.  
21 You can fax. You can do -- however it works for you as  
22 far as getting comments in, please do so.

23 If you want to call me and ask me a  
24 question, I'm happy to answer it. Anytime, if I don't  
25 know the answer, I'll find someone who does.

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1                   And, again, I want to thank you-all for  
2           coming out here and staying for an hour and a half on a  
3           Tuesday evening. And have a safe drive home.

4                   (7:33 p.m.)

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4 TO THE PROCEEDINGS TAKEN ON  
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6 I, DIANA RAMOS, a Certified Shorthand

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8 certify that this transcript is a true record of the  
9 proceedings.

10 I further certify that I am neither  
11 attorney nor counsel for, related to, nor employed by  
12 any of the parties in these proceedings. Further, I am  
13 not a relative or employee of any attorney of record in  
14 this cause, nor do I have a financial interest in the  
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15

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16

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17

18

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