



CTRMA

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c/o Mopac South Environmental Study
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The Travis County Commissioners Court wishes to submit the following comments on the MoPac South Environmental Study virtual open house as official comments for consideration.

We understand that the CTRMA is restarting the MoPac South Environmental Study and that this virtual open house is “intended to re-engage the public on where we left off in November 2015.” The materials presented at this virtual open house are the same materials that were publicly available in 2015. They are based on data from the CAMPO 2035 model and have not been updated to reflect the CAMPO 2045 model. However, the CTRMA has announced that they intend to update the materials for the next public meeting where the recommended preferred express lane(s) alternative will be presented. We are concerned that all public comment received during the current comment period will be based on outdated information and should not be used to inform the selection of the preferred alternative.

Major changes have occurred since 2015.

- Changes that affect traffic patterns
 - Major projects opened to traffic include:
 - US 183 South Toll lanes
 - SH 45 SW
 - SH 71 W Safety Improvements
 - Mopac North Managed Lanes
 - SH 71 E Toll Lanes
 - SH 130 N Toll Lane in each Direction
- Regional and local long-range plans have been updated
 - Major plan changes since the CAMPO 2035 Plan include:
 - I-35 Capital Express project added
 - Project Connect added
 - Loop 360 Interchanges added

- “Y” at Oak Hill tolls removed
- Lone Star Rail removed
- Managed Lanes on Loop 1 South increased from 1 to 2 lanes in each direction
 - Local plan changes increased density and housing units in downtown Austin.
- Development and population have increased significantly since the 2005 base year used to develop forecasts for the 2035 CAMPO Plan and model.
- Current commuting patterns have been affected by the COVID pandemic and increased teleworking. These changes may continue into the future.

Current public engagement process could seem disingenuous and problematic.

Asking the public to comment on outdated materials confuses the public and complicates the environmental study process. It is problematic since the CTRMA stated that the recommended preferred alternative will be selected based on public input and scores using new data. At this time, the public has no opportunity to provide input on the alternatives based on the new data. There is no benefit from collecting public input based on old data that creates faulty assumptions. The current virtual open house public input is largely irrelevant and should not be used to advance the environmental study process.

We strongly urge the CTRMA to repeat this virtual open house public engagement opportunity with updated data and information for all alternatives when it is available, before a preferred alternative is recommended. This will ensure that the public has the best information available when providing input. It also will provide the CTRMA with useful, informed public input to consider when selecting the preferred alternative, rather than public input based on alternatives analyses done several years ago.

Additional Items Needing Clarification

Environmental Assessment (EA) versus Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Since the project study area is located in a very environmentally sensitive area that includes Barton Creek, Barton Springs and the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, locations of endangered species and Lady Bird Lake, many people believe that the environmental study already should be conducted as an EIS rather than an EA. A clearer explanation is needed so the public understands why you are doing an EA instead of an EIS, and how the CTRMA will ensure our environment is adequately protected when constructing and operating the project.

Visual Information Improvements

The public information needs to include better visual material so that the public understands graphically the impacts on the study area and how the project will function. We suggest updating the materials with profile renderings, cross sections, updated videos and possibly traffic simulation models for the next update.

Operational Evaluation at RM 2244 Intersection and the Barton Skyway Relief Project

Revise the project scope to include evaluation of operational improvements to the RM 2244 intersection at the MoPac frontage road and elements of the CTRMA Barton Skyway Ramp Relief Project. The public should be allowed to comment on these proposed improvements prior to selection of the recommended preferred alternative.

Extension of Public Comment Period

Please extend the current public comment period for an additional 30 days since this comment period occurred during the holiday season and the resurgence of COVID cases throughout the region.

Additional Operational Alternative

Evaluate an additional alternative that includes restriping existing lanes to accommodate peak hour High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes. The public should be allowed to comment on this proposed improvement prior to selection of the recommended preferred alternative.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. The Commissioners Court is confident that the CTRMA and the region working together, with public input on updated alternatives, can realize significant mobility and access improvements while also preserving our valuable environmental resources along the MoPac South corridor.

Judge Andy Brown
Travis County

Commissioner Jeffrey W. Travillion
Precinct One

Commissioner Brigid Shea
Precinct Two

Commissioner Ann Howard
Precinct Three

Commissioner Margaret J. Gomez
Precinct Four