

# US 290 Fredericksburg Relief Route Study

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## Meeting Minutes

### Gillespie County Relief Route Task Force Meeting #4

**DATE:** November 15, 2018

**TIME:** 3:00 to 5:15 p.m.

**LOCATION:** Fredericksburg City Hall, 126 W Main St., 78624

➤ **Opening Remarks and Introductions - Kory Keller, Chairman, Gillespie County Relief Route Task Force**

Kory Keller, Task Force Chairman, gave a brief welcome and thank you to all attending the meeting. Working group members were provided with a copy of the agenda.

➤ **Approval of Task Force Minutes for August 20, 2018 -**

No action was taken; this was deferred to next Task Force meeting.

➤ **Summary of Workshop #2 Public Comments and Online Survey Results - Melissa Hurst and Crystal Wotipka, Rifeline**

Melissa Hurst and Crystal Wotipka, Rifeline, began by presenting a summary of the comments received and online survey results from the most recent public workshop (Public Workshop #2). The corresponding presentation is included in Appendix C. Wotipka explained that based on the online survey, the Pink (11), Blue (1), and Gray (12) route received the highest percentages of favorable comments, and the Purple (8), Green (5), and Aqua (7) routes received the lowest percentages of positive comments. Wotipka then went on to describe how the Purple, Green, and Aqua routes were the three least favorably ranked routes.

Cord Switzer, Task Force Member, asked for further explanation of how the number of participants were counted and how the percentages were estimated. It was explained that the numbers were directly from the online survey. Not every participant of the survey indicated a “like” or “dislike” for every route, which was why the total number of votes per each route varied, and why it did not necessarily equal the total number of people that participated in the survey.

Wotipka continued by showing a slide that displayed the four most favored and four least favored routes based on the online survey results.

Wotipka continued the PowerPoint presentation by summarizing the written (non-online survey) public comments that had been received either during the public workshop or within the 15-day public comment period. These comments included letters, emails and completed comment forms. She noted that the written comments were generally consistent with the survey responses; however, the written comments also indicated considerable oppositions to the Red (3) route.



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She then explained how all comments pertaining to a specific route segment were combined and used to calculate a “raw score” for each segment. The raw scores were used to determine the relative support for or opposition to each segment. Based on the raw scores, the project team’s recommendation is to eliminate the Purple (8), Red (3), White (4), and Aqua (7) route segments from further consideration.

The Task Force asked that they receive a copy of the summary of the data results that was presented in the meeting, and Rifeline and CP&Y confirmed they would.

Kent Myers asked if the summary included the comments from the Main Street Merchants meeting. Stacey Benningfield, CP&Y, explained that the merchant meeting was focused on Main Street issues rather than route options; therefore, the comments from that meeting are not pertinent to the Open House. She stated that a report summarizing the Main Street meeting and input received during that meeting is currently being prepared.

The Task Force expressed several concerns after being presented with the survey data and recommendations. The following was discussed:

- Switzer questioned comments pertaining to the cost of the various route options. He indicated that “we don’t yet know how much each segment costs.” Benningfield responded that although we have not yet prepared cost estimates, the amount of right of way required is a good indicator of overall cost. She also noted that preliminary cost estimates will be prepared as part of the evaluation process.
- Switzer asked, “Are we really going to let 300 people tell us where to put a relief route?” Benningfield responded by stating that from the beginning the feasibility study has been community driven. The conceptual route options were developed from input provided by the community and, keeping with the community driven process, we are using the input received from Public Workshop #2 to help reduce the number of route options to be evaluated. She noted that we need to get the number of routes down to a manageable number so that more detailed studies could be performed. Input from the public is the best available data for objectively reducing the number of options. Rifeline and Benningfield added that we cannot force people to participate in the process and, at this point, we must assume that the input received is reflective of the community. Joe Muck, TxDOT, agreed by saying that the point of a feasibility study is to get public support. If there is no public support behind a route, then it is likely not going to happen. He also noted that the turnout for these public workshops has been quite high compared to workshops/meetings held for other projects in the area.
- Peggy Matli, Task Force Member, made the comment that just because people aren’t participating now does not mean they are not going to vote (referencing a possible future bond initiative for the purchase of right of way). Benningfield stressed that the goal of the feasibility study is to identify a locally preferred (community supported) route option; thus, it is critical that the community participate in the process. The Task Force can help by encouraging the community to get involved, participate in workshops and open houses, and provide input.
- Switzer questioned who was paying for the route and said the public understands that the Task Force are only accommodators, but that TxDOT is the final decision maker. Cathy Kratz, TxDOT, and Muck both responded by saying that although TxDOT has set parameters which must be satisfied in



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order for TxDOT to participate in the project (and the city/county have agreed to those parameters), it is ultimately the public who is making the final decisions because a route will not happen without public support. Benningfield stated that the purpose of the study is to gauge whether sufficient support exists for a relief route and, if so, to identify a locally preferred (locally supported) route option. At the end of the study, TxDOT, the City and the County, will have to decide whether there is sufficient support for the project to be viable. If it is viable, the project could advance to NEPA studies, schematic develop and design (as funding becomes available). If it's not viable, no further action would be taken. Switzer asked that the next Task Force meeting include a review of the planning and design parameters agreed upon by TxDOT, the City and the County.

- Further questions were asked regarding cost, traffic, access, and design criteria. Benningfield reminded the Task Force that we are currently conducting a feasibility study to determine whether the project is viable and supported by the community. The team does not have – and will not have – answers to specific design questions. Those questions will be answered during future (schematic and design) phases of project development assuming the results of the feasibility study are positive and the community supports the project. She stated that it is not feasible for the team to develop full schematics, plans and detailed cost estimates for each of the route options as doing so would be both cost prohibitive and time consuming. Muck agreed that creating that many schematics, especially at this stage in the planning, was unrealistic. Myers told the Task Force that we need to focus on reducing the number of route options in order to progress the study. Keller indicated that he likes the process the team is taking to analyze data, and that it is up to the Task Force to encourage more public involvement so that the process can continue to move forward.

### ➤ Viability of Friendship Lane – *Andy Atlas, CP&Y*

Next, Andy Atlas, CP&Y, discussed Friendship Lane. He noted that although the number of comments suggesting Friendship Lane as a location for the potential relief route dropped between Public Workshop #1 and Public Workshop #2, we still received approximately 77 comments in support of Friendship Lane at Workshop #2. He stressed that Friendship Lane does not comply with the project parameters agreed to by TxDOT, the City and the County. None-the-less, in order to document the issues that would result from a Friendship Lane route, the team explored two possible Friendship Lane route options. He noted that the existing right of way width is approximately 100 feet. Upgrading Friendship Lane to meet TxDOT criteria would require frontage roads (to maintain existing local access). To accommodate the frontage roads the right of way width would quadruple (400 feet). Portions of the roadway would require realignment to accommodate a 70 MPH design speed. Numerous residential, commercial and other displacements would result from the right of way acquisition and/or roadway realignment. Using a KMZ file and Google Earth, he presented the two options and discussed the various displacements that would result from each. Depending upon the alternative, resulting displacements would include: shopping centers, law enforcement offices, apartments, single family homes, city utility building, school complex, etc. Atlas noted that the apartments are among the most affordable housing options in the city and an estimated 200-300 people would be displaced. Amy Redmond, TxDOT, stated that this needs to be explained step-by-step and in detail to the public. While recognizing that Friendship Lane is not a viable location for the potential relief route, Mayor Langerhans stated that the City's transportation plan includes improvements to Friendship Lane – separate and distinct from the potential relief route.



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### ➤ Route Options and Project Team Recommendations - *Stacey Benningfield, CP&Y*

Benningfield walked the Task Force Members through actions taken in response to input received at the September 24<sup>th</sup> workshop and recommendations of the study team. She explained that in response to the September workshop, suggestions were made for route modifications at six locations (four of which duplicated other concepts; thus, are considered redundant). In two other instances, individuals suggested new connections between route options. In two instances, two different individuals suggested the same basic modification, but at slightly different locations (redundant concepts). And, in two cases, individuals suggested shifts in the alignment of a route option (resulting in redundant concepts). She explained that to reach a recommendation regarding the redundant concepts, the team performed a brief evaluation. Factors considered during the evaluation included amount of right of way required, number of anticipated displacements, number of structures located within 200 feet of the route option, number of water crossings, and acres of floodplain impacted by each option. Benningfield shared the evaluation results and the team's recommendation for each concept/location. A map showing the modified (post-evaluation) conceptual route options was presented.

Next, using the modified conceptual route options map as the starting point, Benningfield identified the routes that the team is confident in eliminating based on the input received during public workshop #2 (see earlier discussion). Using a series of slides, one-by-one the routes recommended for elimination were removed from the map. Then, unneeded remainders (those route segments that no longer served a function because they no longer connected to a viable route) were removed. This methodology/thought process was followed consistently except for the Red Route. For that route, Benningfield noted that most of the opposition was voiced by residents of the Settlers Ridge Subdivision (north of US 290). Benningfield explained that the team recommends retaining a portion of the Red Route, south of US 290, and modifying it to connect to the Blue Route. By doing this, a center route (north of the river) is preserved for further consideration and evaluation.

The Blue Route was then discussed. Benningfield explained that significant portions of the Blue Route fall outside the study area. She discussed the complications and concerns associated with that fact. She indicated that the team's recommendation is to modify the Blue Route by removing the segment that crosses the river near Dead Man's Curve. Shifting that segment inward, to correspond with the other remaining segments, greatly reduces the area outside the study area while being consistent with public comments to reduce cost, minimize right of way requirements and minimize the potential for impacts. She explained that even after making the recommended shift, the eastern-most portion of the Blue Route and some isolated areas north of US 290 are still outside the study area. To ensure that the potentially-affected property owners in these areas are aware of the project and the route options, the team recommends that each property owner be sent a letter prior to the next public workshop. The letter would explain that their property is potentially-affected by one of the relief route options and encourage them to attend the workshop.

The Task Force discussed the possibility of removing the Blue Route entirely. In the end, it was agreed that the Blue Route, with the modifications recommended by the team, would be retained as route option.



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After much discussion about the various route options, the Task Force elected to include an additional option. The additional option would connect from the modified Red Route (south of US 290), from a point west of the airport, park and fairgrounds, to the Tan Route (Segment 9). With this additional route, eight potential end-to-end route options remain. The Task Force agreed that the eight end-to-end alternatives (the “preliminary route options”) would be presented for public review and comment at Public Workshop #3. Input received from the workshop will be considered as the preliminary route options are screened/evaluated.

### ➤ Next Steps (Screening Process) - *Stacey Benningfield, CP&Y*

Benningfield explained the screening/evaluation process that would occur after the Public Workshop #3. She explained that the evaluation would occur in two steps: First Screening and Second Screening.

She explained the goals and objectives, previously approved by the Task Force, would become the basis for the criteria/performance measures used to screen the route options. The eight preliminary route options would be evaluated during the First Screening. The First Screening will be limited to non-traffic related factors (such as the number of anticipated displacements, number of water crossings, number of bisected parcels, amount of right of way required, acres of habitat impacted, etc). The goal of the First Screening is to identify a set of Primary Route Options (anticipated to be 3-4). In conjunction with the Second Screening, traffic modeling/operational analyses will be performed. The results will be used during the Second Screening to further evaluate the primary route options in order to identify a Recommended Route Option. She noted that the plan is to present the Primary Route Options for public review and comment at an Open House tentatively planned for late spring/early summer 2019; the Recommended Route Option would be the subject of a second Open House (anticipated to be held in the fall of 2019).

### ➤ Public Workshop #3 – Planning and Logistics - *Stacey Benningfield, CP&Y*

Plans for Public Workshop #3 were then discussed. Subject to concurrence from the Task Force, Benningfield identified January 24<sup>th</sup> as the tentative date for Public Workshop #3. She explained that the high school gym has holiday-only availability in January (due to after school activities and potentially basketball playoffs), so the team has talked with the Pioneer Museum. The Museum’s sanctuary is available.

She explained that the team suggests a combined come-and-go and presentation format. The presentation would focus on the route options process (“how we got to the eight preliminary route options”). She noted that there are two large rooms in the sanctuary. The presentation would be held in one room. Maps, boards and other information would be set-up in the second room for the public to review. Staff would be available to answer questions about the boards, maps and the potential relief route.

Benningfield explained that the team had talked with Museum staff about parking. Museum staff has indicated that large events are frequently held in the Sanctuary and parking has not been a problem. Street parking is available. Additional parking is available at a nearby church. The team has talked with the church and confirmed that it is okay to use their parking. The church agreed and confirmed that they do not have an event planned for the evening of January 24<sup>th</sup>.



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Matli suggested having the next Workshop at the Farm Bureau building, but the group decided that the rooms would not be large enough to accommodate the expected crowd, and that parking might be a problem. It was agreed that the Farm Bureau building would be considered as a possible location for future events, should it be suitable.

The Task Force concurred with the date, location and format for the Workshop. Kent Myers suggested that the presentation be made hourly, at the beginning of each hour. Redmond expressed concern about notifying the public as the 30-day mark was Christmas Eve. Benningfield explained that the plan would be to do the same type of outreach as was done for the first two workshops: website postings, email blasts, flyers, postcards, newspaper display ads. However, the team's recommendation is to begin the initial outreach (website postings and email blast) a week before Christmas (on or about the 19<sup>th</sup>). A second ("reminder") email blast would be sent after the holidays (early January) Flyers, postcards, display ads would all take place after the holidays, closer to the date of the actual event. The Task Force agreed with this plan. Redmond asked if an online survey would be used at the workshop to collect public input. Benningfield responded affirmatively.

The Kinder Morgan pipeline was brought up with the question of how it would potentially impact relief route locations. CP&Y agreed to contact the pipeline contractors to further discuss the matter and obtain more information.

### ➤ Wrap Up - Kory Keller, Gillespie County Relief Route Task Force

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:15 p.m.



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