



The following report is brought to you by the Relief Route Task Force in an effort to help residents of Gillespie County better understand the concept and process of the proposed Fredericksburg Relief Route. Our hope as a Task Force is that this information will provide the community what it needs to feel comfortable making a responsible decision about this topic.

What is the purpose of the Task Force and how was it formed?

Since the 1960's, our community leaders have been debating the concept and need for a relief route around Fredericksburg, Texas. We all know that traffic will continue to increase, and that at some point there will be an oversaturation of local, thru, and tourism traffic. This may result in a deterioration of the efficiency, mobility, and traffic safety in our community. The question is when will that saturation point tip and is the burden worse than the cost of relief?

Several attempts have been made over the decades to promote a relief route to resolve the issue proactively. In each historical attempt, the concerns resulted in the leaders at the time stopping the process. However, the questions unanswered in these exercises were 1) what would be the best solution to this problem, and 2) what does the majority of local residents feel should happen?

In September 2013, a group of interested citizens once again gathered to discuss the viability of a relief route. The group studied the previous efforts and determined that our purpose should not be to advocate for or against a route, but rather do the work to provide a viable solution, inform the public of that solution, and trust the community's ability to responsibly make this decision as well as live with the consequences of any decisions that were made.

The Relief Route Task Force was formed as a diverse body, drawing from property owners, City Council, County Commissioners, the Chamber of Commerce, the EDC, the Farm Bureau, and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). The Task Force compiled with the direction given them by resolutions of the City and County and developed Vision, Mission, and Value (VMV) statements accordingly. The resolutions, the VMV, and Task Force membership and representation may be found at <https://www.fbgtx.org/744/Relief-Route-Task-Force>.

What is the Technically Preferred Route (Route E)?

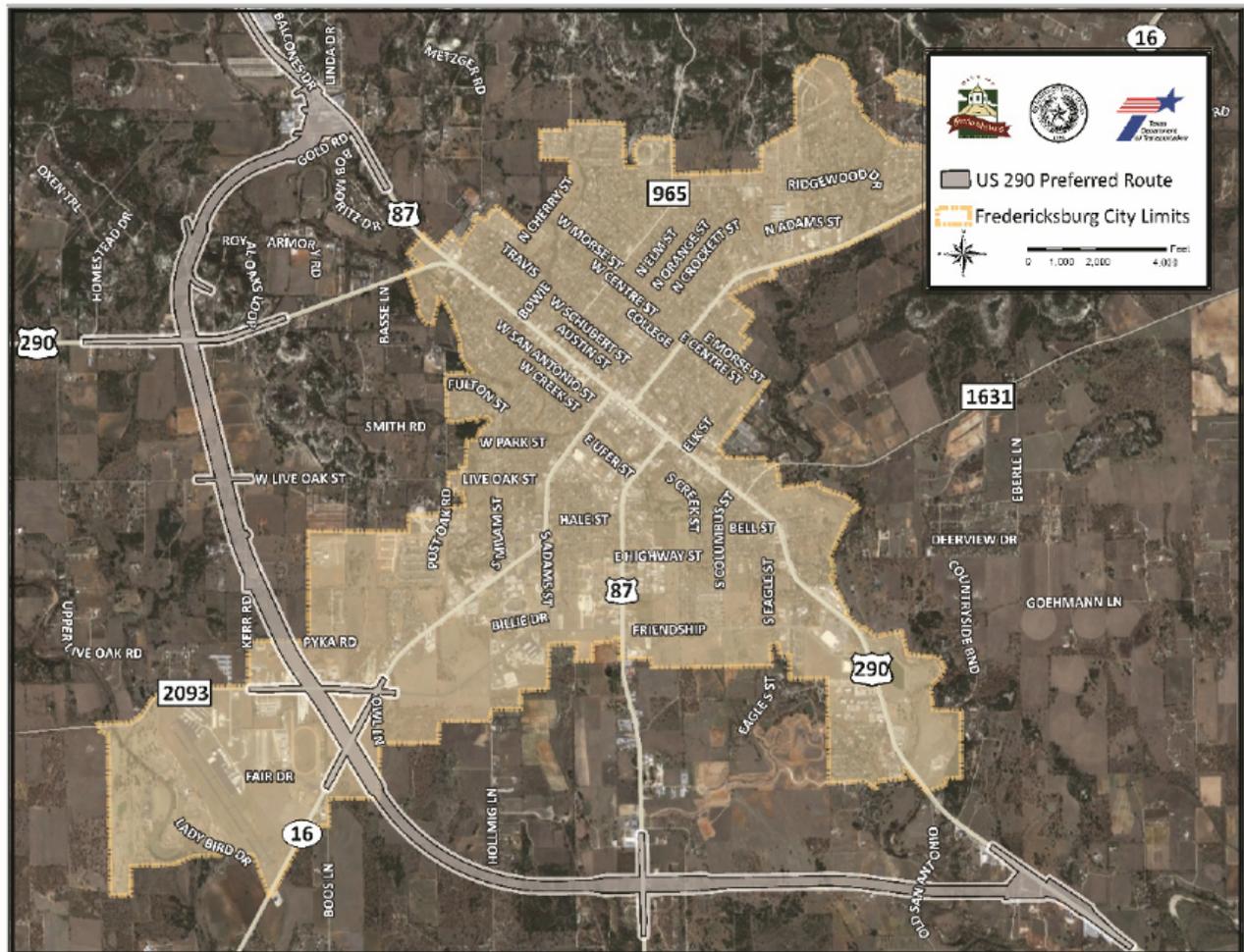
Approximately four years ago, the City, County, and TxDOT funded a feasibility study of the proposed Relief Route. This study, which is included in the appendix to this report, evaluates different route options. Throughout this route evaluation process and with the benefit of public input at each step, the range of options was narrowed down from "conceptual route options", to "preliminary route options," then "primary route options" and ultimately to a "technically preferred route option" which

was determined to be Route E (refer to exhibit below). Route E, as presented, would be 8.6-miles-long and would require the acquisition of 294 acres of additional right-of-way. The current estimated construction cost of Route E is \$226.3 million. This route alignment represents the starting point for the next step in the environmental study, commonly referred to as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

During the NEPA process, exact alignment is settled upon with respect to environmental, historic, and physical constraints and sensitivities. Right-of-way (ROW) width is also determined during this process. The ROW can vary from 200 feet for a controlled access section of roadway to 400 feet wide where adjacent landowners prefer an access point to the facility. Intersections would require a wider footprint as well to achieve grade separation points.

Generally speaking, TxDOT is in agreement to construct a Farm to Market style roadway as a first phase of the facility, but with grade separation intersections. The acquired ROW of 200-400 feet is necessary for future expansion and development as deemed necessary by TxDOT.

Figure 1: Technically Preferred Route Option (Route E)



What does it cost and who pays for it?

The proposed tri-party Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the State of Texas, the County of Gillespie, and the City of Fredericksburg details the roles and responsibilities of the State, and the County and City, together called Local Government (LG).

According to the proposed MOU, the State will perform and fund schematic design, obtain environmental clearances, and perform and fund plans, specifications, and estimates. In addition, the MOU provides that the State will be responsible for applying for and obtaining the necessary funding for the construction phase of the project. It is noted that local contributions to the construction phase of the project would enhance the strength of the State's application for funds, but the MOU does not require LG to participate in funding of the construction phase. The current (2021) estimated cost of construction of the project is \$226.3 million. This does not include right-of-way acquisition costs.

According to this same MOU, the LG will be required to acquire and provide the ROW to the State based on the full ROW footprint designed and environmentally cleared by the State. The LG is responsible for overseeing the ROW acquisition process and is required to provide 100% of the funding for purchasing the necessary real estate and relocating affected utilities. The current (2021) estimated ROW acquisition and related required costs are approximately \$40 million. However, it would likely be several years before ROW acquisition would begin.

How would right-of-way be acquired?

To acquire ROW, the County would need to establish a Strategic Transportation Plan which would seek to address current and future transportation-related needs in and around the County. The plan would serve as a blueprint for future bond programs as well as provide opportunities for partnerships with other entities. The Task force discovered that Gillespie County would not need to invent this process but could seek assistance from neighboring counties willing to help. Many of the more congested counties to our east have adopted such plans to manage their increases in mobility needs.

What are the next steps in the process?

If elected officials wish to pursue the relief route, then the LG would need to establish a transportation plan and sign the MOU with TxDOT. TxDOT would then proceed with the NEPA process. Upon conclusion of NEPA, TxDOT would then design plans and prepare to fund construction while the LG acquires right-of-way through the transportation plan process. At such time right-of-way acquisition would be complete in a given section of the route, TxDOT could prepare for funding and construct a section of the route. It could take 5, 10, 20 years or more to complete all these steps depending on how aggressively pursued.

Relief Route Task Force Conclusions and Recommendations

The Relief Route Task Force was charged with conducting a feasibility study for a TxDOT joint venture relief route. To the point of the possibility of a joint venture project between the LG and TxDOT, the answer is yes, it is possible. Although the costs are high, they can be managed over time and in stages and phases of design and construction. There are several funding mechanisms available to the LG for consideration other than just bonds. The Task force has outlined the steps in the process as part of this study for how our government entities can work together to accomplish this project. The larger and more relevant issue is to decide whether the community wants to proceed with the Relief Route or continue to experience traffic problems and congestion.

This report is part of an informational campaign to the community to explain the process of the Relief Route. Upon completion of the informational campaign, the Task Force will have concluded its work as directed by the culmination of City and County resolutions.

Upon completion of the informational campaign, the Task Force's only recommendation is that our local elected officials, both City and County, work together to determine the will of the people by asking their constituents to provide their input to answer the question of whether or not to commit to the process of establishing the proposed TxDOT/LG joint venture Relief Route.