



# AUSTIN AVENUE BRIDGES PROJECT

# PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

MARCH 2016



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## APPENDICES

Appendix A – Sign-in Sheets & Meeting Exhibits

Appendix B – Completed Comments

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# Austin Avenue Bridges Project

## Public Meeting Summary

The City of Georgetown began a study of Austin Avenue from Morrow Street to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street including the two historically significant bridges crossing the San Gabriel River in January of 2016. This study will evaluate a range of both short and long term solutions for Austin Avenue while balancing considerations such as safety, mobility, public input, impacts to property owners, and cost.

### MEETING DETAILS

The City of Georgetown hosted the first public meeting for the Austin Avenue Bridges Project as an open house format with no formal presentation. Attendees were able to view public meeting exhibits, visit with members of the project team, and provide their input on the project and process.

Thursday, March 31, 2016  
4 – 7 p.m.  
Georgetown Public Library  
402 W. 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Georgetown, TX 78626



Austin Ave. Public Meeting

### NOTICES AND ADVERTISEMENTS OF THE PUBLIC MEETING

The following methods were used to contact and inform the community of the meeting:

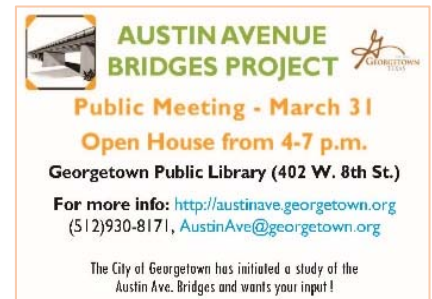
#### Direct Mail

A letter was mailed to 49 property owners abutting the project limits on March 4, 2016, notifying them of the public meeting.

#### Published Notification

The *Williamson County Sun* published an article with public meeting details on March 23, 2016.

A City sponsored display advertisement was published in the *Williamson County Sun* on March 27, 2016.



Advertisement in the *Williamson County Sun*

#### E-Mail Notifications

An email notification was sent on March 4, 2016, to 524 individual email addresses in the project database which included public officials, landowners, businesses, community organizations, and any other interested parties who signed up for updates. A reminder email was sent on March 21, 2016, to 534 individuals.

#### Signage

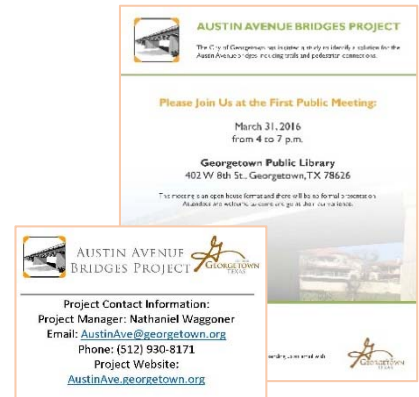
Large signs were placed on the north and south end of the San Gabriel Trail on March 25, 2016. The signs displayed public meeting details and project contact information.

Notification signs were also placed at the Georgetown Public Library, the Georgetown Recreation Center, the Georgetown Municipal Complex, City Hall and the Williamson Museum. The meeting information was also shared on the digital display monitors at both the Recreation Center and the Georgetown Public Library.

### Additional Outreach

Public meeting flyers and contact cards with project information were distributed to local business and City offices on March 10, 2016.

Members of the project team also attended Georgetown Market Days on March 12, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Attendees were able to visit with the project team to learn about the project, as well as public meeting details. Attendees were also able to sign up for project email updates, and contact cards and public meeting flyers were distributed.



Public Meeting Flyer and Project Contact Card

### PUBLIC MEETING EXHIBITS

As attendees entered the first public meeting, they were asked to sign-in and were provided name tags. There were 104 people signed in at the public meeting. Comment cards as well as additional share your story cards were provided to attendees.

Exhibit boards shared the following information:

- Project Purpose and Need
- Project History
- Project Overview
- Goals and Evaluation Criteria
- NEPA Process
- Historical Significance
- Environmental Constraints
- Existing Conditions
- Aerial Maps of Project Area



Austin Ave. Public Meeting

Comment and survey stations with 8 laptops and iPads were also available for attendees to provide their input.

### PUBLIC INPUT

Input on the project was collected through several methods. The official comment period was open from March 31 to April 22, 2016. Two email notifications of the comment period were sent to the project database on April 4 to 587 email addresses and on April 20 to 590 email addresses.

Attendees were able to participate in a mapping exercise where they shared project or area specific concerns on post-it notes placed directly on large aerial maps. In addition, input was collected through an online project survey, written comment

### Summary of Participation

- 104 – Meeting Attendees
- 31 – Mapped Comments
- 128 – Survey Responses
- 175 – Additional Comments Included in the Survey
- 14 – Written and Email Comments
- 2 – Shared Personal Stories

cards, and via email. All comments are included in Appendix B and a complete survey report can be found in Appendix C.

### Mapping Exercise

There were 31 comments collected through the mapping exercise at the public meeting. Most comments indicated a need for pedestrian and bicycle improvements and connections. Comments also referenced construction concerns and specific design considerations.



Mapped Comments

### Written & Emailed Comments

Ten written comments were collected at the public meeting. No comments by mail were received. Four additional comments were received via email. Generally, most comments indicated a need for pedestrian and bicycle improvements and connections. Some comments referenced concerns for the impacts of construction and a preference for rehabilitation of the bridges.

### Project Survey

An online project survey with 15 questions was open from March 31 to April 22, 2016. There were 128 individual responses received with 175 additional comments. Highlights of survey responses include:

- A majority of respondents found the public meeting and the information provided to be helpful
- 98% of survey participants use Austin Ave. for vehicular travel, 36% bike/walk on Austin Ave., and 43% use the bike/pedestrian trails under the Austin Ave. Bridges
- When asked if the bridges met the needs of residents and visitors, respondents reported:
  - Vehicular traffic – 43% needs are met; 39% needs are met but there are opportunities for improvements; 17% improvements are needed
  - Load limits – 31% needs are met; 25% needs are met but there are opportunities for improvements; 37% improvements are needed
  - Bike/Ped traffic – 13% needs are met; 30% needs are met but there are opportunities for improvements; 54% improvements are needed
  - Bike/Ped trails – 34% needs are met; 29% needs are met but there are opportunities for improvements; 31% improvements are needed
  - Considering aesthetics there was an equal split – 40% needs are met; 40% needs are met but there are opportunities for improvements; 17% improvements needed
  - Considering the Gateway into Downtown, again there was an equal split – 38% needs are met; 38% needs are met but there are opportunities for improvements; 22% improvements are needed
- When asked about the criteria considered to evaluate and enhance safety, the majority of respondents agreed
- When asked about the criteria considered to evaluate and reduce impacts, the majority of respondents agreed
- When asked about the criteria considered to meet infrastructure needs, the majority of respondents agreed, with the exception of removing load restrictions where 41% agreed, 30% were neutral, and 29% disagreed
- When asked about the criteria to evaluate cost considerations, the majority of respondents agreed

- When asked about incorporating enhancements including providing a gateway, aesthetic opportunities, and scenic viewing opportunities; the majority of respondents agreed

## COMMENT SUMMARY

There were a total of 220 comments received on maps, via comment cards and email, and the open comments in the survey. These comments shared valuable information with the City and the project team. Full text of all comments received is included in Appendix B. To further analyze these comments, the project team identified topics and created the summary below. Note - some comments included more than one topic.

Comment Topic	Number of Comments
Project Development Process (decision making, timeline, public involvement)	57
Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trail Components	53
Construction (impacts to business, suggestions, lane closures)	49
Prefer Rehabilitation or Opposed to Replacement	27
Safety	23
Aesthetics, Historic Characteristics, and Character (gateway)	22
Need, Purpose, and Premise of Project (traffic counts, data analysis, current condition, study results)	21
Travel Lanes (number of lanes, turn lanes, width)	18
Concern for Downtown Traffic (additional traffic, commercial traffic, large trucks)	11
Prefer Replacement of Bridges	7
Design and Considerations (speed, landscape, etc.)	6
Other Traffic Issues and Transportation Planning (bottlenecks, alternate solutions)	4
Cost	4
Prefer No Improvements	2
Impacts to Environment	1

## RESPONSES TO COMMENTS

The City and the project team have been working to review the comments, concerns, and suggestions submitted and understand the preferences of the community. Many of the comments will be incorporated into the project as it progresses. Below is additional information and responses to the general themes above as identified in the 220 comments received.

## Comments on Project Development Process

57 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Only high level data was shared at the meeting
- Survey questions were too general and there was confusion on questions 5 through 8
- Survey should have asked what should be done with the bridges so the community could more directly weigh in on options
- The project is biased and there is a conflict of interest in using the design engineer
- Questions on how the budget was being spent and why landscape plans were being developed now
- Need to be transparent about safety of bridges
- Appreciation for the process and public involvement approach
- Suggestion for advisory committee

The meeting on March 31, was the first of four public meetings planned for this project. The City and project team presented high level information to generate understanding and allow participation in the alternative evaluation process. The survey asked for general input to help the City and project team further refine the evaluation of all possible options. The intent was to gauge levels of consent or disagreement with criteria that would be used to evaluate different alternatives. The project team will continue to refine the public involvement process to allow for a range of public interactions and comment opportunities. We did not ask “What should be done with the bridges,” as we do not believe the City, the public, or the project team could fairly assess this at this time. We will be seeking public comment on the different alternatives as we progress through the technical environmental clearance process and look forward to continuing to work with the public. The input received in the survey and additional comments provided valuable feedback on the public’s preferences for the bridges.

In 2014, Aguirre & Fields, LP performed an initial assessment of the Austin Ave Bridges to assist the City of Georgetown in developing a bond package. Ultimately, the City decided not to include the bridges in the 2015 bond election. Because the maintenance, load restrictions, and safety concerns persisted, the City again hired Aguirre & Fields in January of 2016 to develop a recommended set of solutions for the bridges. Aguirre & Fields has worked on over 250 bridges in the state of Texas and on several bridges in Williamson County. The City believes their history and familiarity is an asset to this project, not a conflict. This project includes assessments of different alternatives, NEPA documentation, public outreach, and design of aesthetic elements. Once a preferred alternative is identified, up to 30% of engineering design will be completed. All contract information is public record and available through public meeting agendas and minutes which can be found here: <https://agendas.georgetown.org/>

Landscape architects are included with this project so that aesthetic considerations can be incorporated in the design. There are also opportunities to develop trail connections, and the Landscape Design firm, SEC, will work with the public to design transition zones and connections.

The City and the project team are committed to a transparent process. There are many safety concerns for the bridges, including the falling concrete to the trail below and pedestrian and bicycle accommodations. Safety is not the only consideration for this project, but rather we are working to

develop a solution that balances safety, mobility, public input, community impacts, and cost. While an advisory committee is a great idea, the approach for this project is to work closely and extensively with the public throughout the project. The project team is available to meet with anyone interested in the project, rather than just those on a committee.

## Comments on Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trail Components

53 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Interest in enhancing bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Need to widen sidewalks and provide separation or barriers between sidewalks and the roadway
- Need to provide separate bicycle and pedestrian facilities and a separate bridge

This project provides a unique opportunity to enhance bicycle and pedestrian facilities. There are many options available and the City and project team look forward to identifying opportunities to provide improved access and better facilities. Over the next two public meetings we will work through options and how they tie into the different alternatives for the bridges.

## Comments on Construction

49 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Questions on construction impacts and timeline for construction
- Concern the bridges will be closed
- Concern for loss of business due to construction impacts
- Reference to Salado project and impacts of construction on businesses
- Concern for night construction
- Preference for night construction
- Need 2 lanes in each direction
- Suggestion for suspension bridge over existing to avoid closures

The City understands the concern business owners and residents have for the impacts of construction. This is one of the most important considerations as we move forward with the project. While we do not have an identified solution for the bridges, the engineer, through consultation with the City, has developed some baseline criteria for any option exercised.

- Two lanes of traffic will remain open at all times during construction (one lane in each direction)
- The bridges will not be closed
- Access to properties will be maintained to the extent practical with minimal exceptions in the case of short term driveway work or if replacement of the bearings on the bridges is necessary
- Major rehabilitation consisting of raising the deck to replace bearings and repair steel I-beams is estimated to take 14 to 18



- A replacement of the bridges is estimated to take 18 to 24 months

These are early projections and the project team will continue to refine construction techniques and estimates as we learn more about environmental constraints. This is an area where public input can help to develop an efficiently planned construction project. We would like to consider timing of construction, construction hours, and possibilities to hold on construction activities during busy weekends or events, etc. Regardless of the alternative selected, we know this is going to impact the community, and we want to work together to make it as smooth as possible.

### Prefer Rehabilitation or Opposed to Replacement

27 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Preference for repair or rehabilitation
- Concern for construction impacts of replacement
- Preference to maintain historical aspects of existing bridges
- Only maintenance is needed
- Concern for cost of replacement

The City understands there is interest in repairing or rehabilitating the bridges and recognizes the benefits of this including possible cost savings and preservation of infrastructure with historical significance. This project will evaluate all options from maintenance to repair to rehabilitation to replacement while considering safety, mobility, public input, community impacts, and cost. Rehabilitation may be the best solution for the Austin Ave. Bridges, and we will share all evaluations as the project progresses. All considerations, such as historical aspects, maintenance considerations, and costs, will be included in the evaluation.

### Comments on Safety

23 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Safety needs to be a top concern and first priority
- Need to consider both turning and pedestrian traffic

The City places the utmost value on safety, and it is the top concern for this and all transportation projects. As the project progresses, the City and project team will continue to evaluate the safety of vehicular and pedestrian traffic with each option identified. This information will be made public as it becomes available.

## Comments on Aesthetics, Historic Characteristics, and Character

22 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Preference to maintain river views
- Preference to preserve historical appeal and small town charm
- Desire for the bridge to be historic landmark
- Desire to enhance gateway to Georgetown
- Desire to utilize modern technology and design
- Desire to incorporate artistic elements
- Questions about archeological sites

All comments received on the character and aesthetics of the bridges is great input for the City to understand the desires of the community. All suggestions have been noted and the next public meeting will be an opportunity to dive deeper into possible design enhancements that could be incorporated into the project. This is an opportunity to incorporate work by the public and the City to incorporate the Downtown Master Plan and create a uniquely Georgetown gateway. The environmental process includes evaluation and identification of archaeological sites. We do anticipate there may be some in the area, and they will be documented as a part of this project.

## Comments on Need, Purpose, and Premise of Project

21 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Question on why this project is being done if it is not an immediate safety issue
- Engineering reports state with maintenance bridges would last another 50 years
- Questions and comments on how long an updated bridge would last and desire for it to be built to meet future technologies
- Need to build to accommodate the next 70 years
- Questions on load limits

The reason the project is being undertaken now is that there are maintenance and safety issues that need to be addressed on the bridges in the short term. The City staff does not have the in-house capability to design and perform the levels of maintenance needed. CAMPO has awarded \$1.3 million to the City to use on the bridges and additional federal funding may also be available. The City has to go through the federally prescribed National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to qualify for the funds and to ensure the historic nature of their construction is not compromised. Beyond the requirement to adhere to the NEPA process, the City believes that there is a need to fully evaluate all possible options to ensure safety, mobility, public input, community impacts, and cost are considered.

While maintenance to the bridges could potentially keep the existing bridges for up to an additional 50 years, it is important to define the level and frequency of maintenance needed through a direct comparison with replacement over the life of the bridges. We must also evaluate what can be done to

the existing sidewalks through a maintenance strategy. We are looking at all options and will continue to work with the public to evaluate maintenance.

The current bridges have a design life of 75 years. They are now 76 years old. The load limits are in place to prevent accelerated deterioration but there is no imminent danger. The City and project team are working closely with TxDOT to understand what would need to be done to remove the load limit restrictions and will continue to share this information as it becomes available.

## Comments on Travel Lanes

18 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Preference to not reduce lane widths
- Preference to provide 5 lanes with a center turn lane
- Preference to not add a turn lane and concern for the traffic that it would bring to San Gabriel Village
- Make Austin Ave. a 3 lane road with center turn lane and bicycle lanes
- Turn signals needed at San Gabriel Village Blvd.

Roadway design will be considered as alternatives are evaluated. Austin Ave. is a minor arterial which specified in the City's Overall Transportation Plan (OTP), consist of four, 12' lanes with two, 5' bike lanes and 22' median.

This project will evaluate the need for a turn lane on Austin Ave. This involves reviewing traffic counts and the number of cars making left turns. Typically, when 60 vehicles per hour or more are turning, a turn lane can be very helpful if it is possible to include. We do not think a turn lane would bring more traffic to San Gabriel Village Blvd. as traffic is already making these unprotected left turns. Rather the intent would be to provide for safe turning movements.

Reducing the number of lanes on Austin Ave. is not part of current or long range plans. Four lanes of traffic are necessary to maintain traffic flow.

## Concern for Downtown Traffic

11 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Concern that removing load limits will bring more heavy truck traffic to downtown
- I-35 should be used for truck traffic
- Preference to not create an "I-35" in downtown

We certainly understand concern of additional truck traffic in the downtown area. Within the city limits of Georgetown, the population is projected to grow and further development in the Downtown area is expected. Through the development of the Southwest Bypass, the City is working to reduce the amount of east-west semi-truck traffic. Access for truck traffic in the downtown area is necessary for business activity. This includes garbage and 18 wheelers such as delivery trucks.

## Prefer Replacement of Bridges

7 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Preference for replacement
- Need to meet future growth and replace now before there are more people
- Need to include sidewalks and turn lanes, and meet minimum design standards

The City understands the interest in replacing the bridges and recognizes the benefits of updating them and enhancing mobility for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles. This project will evaluate all options from maintenance to repair to rehabilitation to replacement while considering safety, mobility, public input, impacts to property owners, and cost. As alternatives are narrowed, we will share this information with the public.

## Design Comments and Considerations

6 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Need for a buffer and desire to preserve trees for buffer
- Desire for no speed bumps
- Desire to reduce speed

We appreciate these comments and utilizing landscape as a buffer can be further explored in the next phases of the project. There are no plans to place speed bumps on Austin Ave. This project is not being undertaken to increase or reduce speed. Speed limits will be determined as alternatives are narrowed; safety, mobility, and statutory limitations considerations will be included as parameters in establishing speed limits.

## Other Traffic Issues and Transportation Planning

4 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Noted congestion at the Williams Drive intersection
- Desire for the Northwest Blvd. bridge to be new location to connect to the Sheraton development

The City recognizes the congestion along Williams Drive and is beginning a separate project to study the corridor on the west side of I-35 out to the City limits. The City is also working with TxDOT and the My35 program to design intersection improvements as part of the eventual replacement of the Williams Drive and I-35 intersection and bridge. The Northwest Blvd. bridge extension was included in the 2015 bond election and is expected to be completed by 2020. The City believes this is an important project but must still determine a plan to address the Austin Ave. bridges.

## Comments on Cost

4 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Desire to not utilize tax dollars on bridges if they are safe
- Questions on cost of the project
- Comment to utilize budget on Northwest Blvd. Bridge

Cost is a very important consideration for this project. This study will evaluate the short term and long term costs identified with each alternative.

## Prefer No Improvements

2 Comments received. Highlights of comments:

- Leave the bridges alone

Doing nothing to the bridges will be evaluated as a possible alternative.

## Environment Impact

1 Comments received. Highlight of comment:

- Noted environmental impact

This project is following the NEPA process, and impacts to the environment will be evaluated for each alternative.