

FM 150 Character Plan Public Meeting Summary

October 22, 2015



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Introduction

Hays County hosted a public meeting for the FM 150 Character Plan on October 22, 2015. The purpose of this meeting was to share proposed improvement concepts for FM 150 and other area roadways, such as RM 1826 and Elder Hill, and provide the public an opportunity to share comments on the proposed improvement concepts. This was the third public meeting for this study, following the introductory informational meeting held in October 2014 and the public workshop held in March 2015.

Public Meeting Details

Date: Thursday, October 22, 2015

Time: 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Location: Thurman’s Mansion
17900 RM 1826
Driftwood, TX 78619



FM 150 Character Plan Public Meeting – October 22, 2015

Format: A formal presentation was given which defined the purpose of the FM 150 Character Plan study, the process for the study, findings from community input, possible corridor concepts, and the next steps moving forward. Following the presentation attendees were able to view corridor concepts and maps, visit with project team members and Hays County officials, and share their comments and questions.

Attendance: 228 people signed in.

Materials: As attendees entered, they were asked to sign in and share their email address to receive study updates. They were provided name tags and a fact sheet.

FM 150 CHARACTER PLAN PUBLIC MEETING
OCTOBER 22, 2015

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT
We've presented to you and we'd like to hear from you. We've presented to you and we'd like to hear from you. We've presented to you and we'd like to hear from you.

CITIZENS ADVISORY PANEL
At this meeting, you'll hear from the citizens advisory panel members who will be providing input on the project.

HIGHLIGHTS
- Share feedback from the community and other stakeholders
- Share feedback from the community and other stakeholders
- Share feedback from the community and other stakeholders

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
Why is the County studying FM 150?
What are the goals of the study?
What are the next steps?

PHASE 1 PHASE 2 PHASE 3
PRE-PLANNING PRE-PLANNING PRE-PLANNING

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE
ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Call Greg
737.335.4100 ext. 13
ggreg@hayscountytexas.gov

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS
Please email your comments and questions to: ggreg@hayscountytexas.gov

www.improvetx150.com

FM 150 Character Plan – Public Meeting Handout

Email Notifications

An email notification with meeting details was distributed to 305 stakeholders on September 24, 2015. A reminder email was sent to 311 stakeholders on October 15, 2015 and to 312 stakeholders on October 20, 2015. These notifications were distributed to individuals who requested to be included on the mailing list.

Signage

Ten signs were posted along the study limits, informing residents and commuters about the meeting. The signs remained posted from October 15, 2015 to October 22, 2015.

PUBLIC MEETING
FM 150 WEST CHARACTER PLAN
Thursday, October 22
6 - 8 p.m.
PRESENTATION AT 6:15
Thurman's Mansion 17900 FM 1826
characterplan@improvefm150.com

FM 150 Character Plan – Signage Notification

Additional Outreach

The Public Workshop announcement was published on the following webpages:

- Hays County – October 19, 2015
- Dripping Springs Babble – October 2, 2015
- Community Impact – October 21, 2015

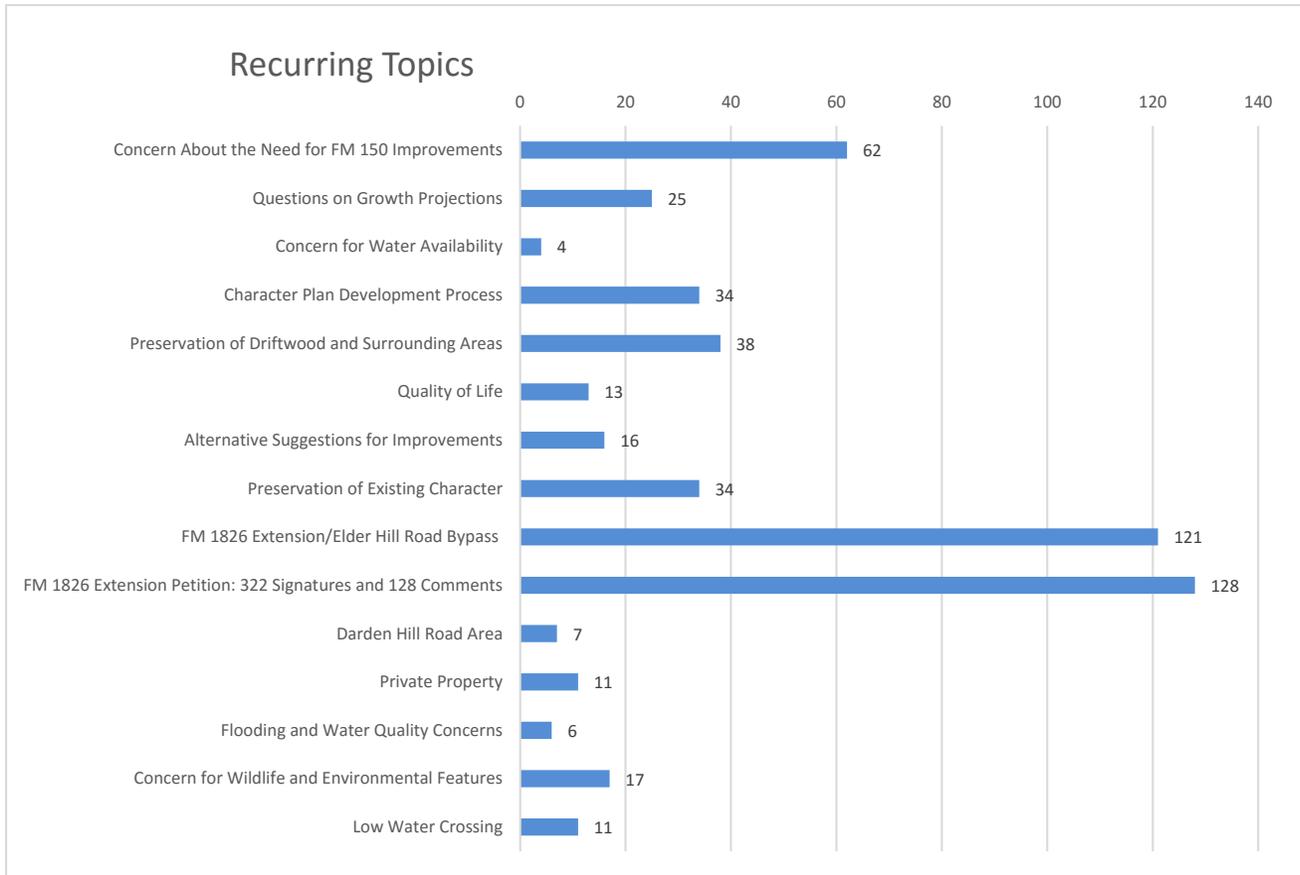
Public Comments

The public was asked to submit their comments in writing at the meeting or to provide them by mail or email by November 6, 2015 to be included with this meeting summary report.

- 185 comments were received
- A petition was received titled “We will not sell our property for an unnecessary and unwanted road expansion” which generally opposed the extension of RM 1826 near Elder Hill Road with 322 signatures and 128 additional comments

Comment Summary and Responses

Hays County and the project team are very appreciative for each comment, suggestion, and question submitted on the FM 150 Character Plan study. The team has identified the most frequently noted topics from the comments, and further analyzed reoccurring themes from each topic. Many comments referenced more than one topic and the chart below represents a summary of recurring topics with an approximate number of comments for each. Responses to recurring topics and themes are provided in this section. Verbatim comments are included in Appendix C.



Concern About the Need for FM 150 Improvements

Input Received

- Approximately 62 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Concern that traffic does not warrant expansion, just minor improvements
- Other roads are better suited for expansion and future traffic (RR 12, US 290, FM 1826, Darden Hill Rd)
- Preference stated to not make any improvements on FM 150
- No expansion needed on FM 150, FM 1826, and Elder Hill
- Comments questioning the use of funds on FM 150

One of the responsibilities of the Hays County Commissioners Court is to address construction and maintenance needs of roads and bridges on the county roadway system. This responsibility is essential to maintaining and supporting the mobility, safety, and long-term quality of life for residents. Without adequate roads, residents would not be able to get to work, activities, school, and receive goods and services in a timely manner.

In 2013, the County adopted the Hays County Transportation Plan (HCTP). This plan documented the following goals:

- Set an overall direction for the transportation future of the County
- Accommodate future growth while maintaining and improving access to destinations for the traveling public (e.g., work, school, shopping, residential, transport of goods and services)
- Address current transportation needs by identifying specific projects
- Address future needs by providing the information and tools needed to preserve right-of-way needed for future transportation projects

In the HCTP, the FM 150 corridor from RM 12 to Arroyo Ranch Road was identified as needing to be expanded to a Major Arterial Divided road with four lanes of capacity at some point in the future. The FM 150 Character Plan was initiated to identify how to best plan for these future needs, while also preserving the unique character of this area of Hays County.

The proposed expansion of FM 150 and other roads cited in the HCTP is not based on current conditions but rather on future conditions and growth projections. Many other roadways identified in the County Transportation Plan will also need improvements and expansion to accommodate forecasted growth and additional traffic.

The County believes it is taking a responsible approach in recognizing the expected growth rate in population and employment, increases in travel demand, and planning for the future via a study process that engages stakeholders. This proactive approach allows thoughtful consideration about how future improvements could be implemented over time.

Questions on Growth Projections

Input Received

- Approximately 25 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Concern and doubt for the source and validity of growth projections
- Concern that improvements will drive growth

Population projections in Hays County have been reported in a number of forums that are consistent with regional planning models. For planning needs, the County uses growth projections provided by the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO – the agency responsible for the region’s long-range transportation plan).

In the spring of 2015, CAMPO approved the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan and the population and employment projections show an expected increase over earlier projections. The Plan indicates the population will more than double by 2030 and more than triple by 2040. To develop growth projections, CAMPO analyzed five possible population forecast scenarios from: the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, the Texas Water Development Board, the CAMPO 2035 forecast, and two scenarios from the Texas State Data Center. In the last few regional transportation plans, CAMPO used conservative population and employment projections which were later considered to be too low. The 2040 Plan utilized an updated forecast prepared by the Texas State Data Center.

The purpose of the FM 150 Character Plan Study is to find ways to accommodate this projected growth while also preserving the unique character of this area. If the County waits until the growth occurs to plan for improvements, there will be fewer options for context sensitive corridor improvements and less ability for the public to help shape the solutions.

Concern for Water Availability

Input Received

- Approximately 4 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- The water supply cannot sustain the projected growth

The growth forecasted for FM 150 is not independent of the debate about water availability. The County and many different water supply entities are working together to develop comprehensive water plans to address current and future water supply needs. The County is engaged in this discussion and recognizes the importance that more water will be needed to accommodate growth projections. Addressing water needs is not part of the scope of the FM 150 Character Plan study. For more information on water planning, please visit your local water planning boards, conservation districts, and the Texas Water Development Board.

The FM 150 Character Plan Development and Process

Input Received

- Approximately 34 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Concern that the process is moving too quickly and without enough consideration for public input
- Comments received on appreciation for the approach, but don't feel the process is doing what was intended
- Concern that the meeting format didn't allow for public comment to be heard by all and that public comment was not available at the meeting

The County has and will continue to engage the community in a comprehensive way very differently from how traditional design projects have been done in the past. The context sensitive approach being used by the County does not force fit a typical highway section into the corridor but rather slows the process down to consider and develop customized corridor concepts to match the study needs. While Phase 1 of this study is coming to an end, the County is still at the very beginning of the planning process and each concept included in the Character Plan will have its own project development process.

The FM 150 Character Plan is a plan for the future. Neither the County nor the project team believe or propose that FM 150 should be expanded to four lanes now. The Commissioners Court, however does acknowledge that a tremendous amount of growth is expected, and the current road system will not be adequate when this growth occurs.

Once future phases of the Character Plan are complete, any identified projects would undergo a detailed development process (including preliminary engineering and associated environmental evaluations) before any improvements are designed or constructed. The development process would include continuous and meaningful public outreach and coordination. For smaller projects such as curve straightening or bridge enhancements, the design and engineering might take one to two years to be complete before the construction phase could begin. For larger projects such as a new bypass, it could take more than three to five years to complete environmental evaluations along with design and engineering before the construction phase could begin. The most important point is that ultimate solutions will go through their own progressive processes. The County is developing this Character Plan now, before improvements become critically necessary so that the best options can be identified, planned for, and implemented at the appropriate time.

Regarding the public meeting format, the project team planned the public meeting anticipating a large number of attendees and knowing a large amount of technical information needed to be shared. The team selected a presentation as the best way to share this information and knew attendees would need to view large format maps of the concepts (as it was difficult to share details on a screen). The team also knew that attendees would have additional questions. Multiple stations were available to share concepts where project team members were available for one-on-one discussions and to answer

questions and address comments. Documenting comments and questions is a major part of this study and in an effort to allow all attendees opportunities to participate, questions and comments were collected in writing.

The project team received more than 180 comments from the public at or after the meeting. All comments are included in Appendix C.

Preservation of the Driftwood Community and Surrounding Area

Input Received

- Approximately 38 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Desire to preserve Driftwood area
- Driftwood character extends for several miles
- Character of Driftwood is rural and sidewalks and bike lanes may not be compatible
- Support for Driftwood bypass concept

The project team understands that Driftwood and the surrounding area is a high priority and has made preserving the integrity of these areas a fundamental objective of this study. By working closely with the Citizens Advisory Panel (CAP) and reviewing comments from the community, the County and project team developed a greater understanding of the Driftwood community's unique character and qualities. While the need for 4 lanes of capacity has been identified to accommodate projected growth, the opportunity to add two additional lanes of capacity on a separate roadway alignment was identified through mapping exercises with the CAP.

The potential bypass concept offers an opportunity to maintain a 2 lane road on FM 150 from RM 1826 to just east of RM 3237 while serving some through traffic on a separate 2 lane facility. Safety improvements will be further studied along the existing section of FM 150. These could include intersection improvements, shoulder widening, and curve smoothing. By continuing to work closely with the community, the project team believes the character of this area can be preserved with these safety improvements.

Quality of Life

Input Received

- Approximately 13 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Potential solutions will burden residents in the area, but do not serve the area
- Expansion will negatively affect quality of life for residents

The County fully recognizes the unique characteristics and values of the community along FM 150. The purpose of this study is to determine the best long term transportation solutions while also maintaining

the quality of life everyone enjoys. The goal of Phase 1 of the study is to understand and then document the values and character of the area. Again, the County and project team want to continue to work closely with the community to preserve the unique characteristics of this area while planning for projected growth.

Alternative Suggestions for Improvements

Input Received

- Approximately 16 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Look at other roads for improvements
- FM 150 should remain 2 lanes with improvements rather than expansion

The 2013 HCTP documented that to serve the projected growth of Hays County, many county roads will need improvements and expansions over the next 20 years. Over time, roads in addition to FM 150 will undergo similar studies or standard project development processes. Many alternate suggestions received were very relevant and valid and the project team recognizes these roads will also need to move forward at some point in the future.

The FM 150 Character Plan will consider and address incremental approaches, such as intersection improvements, turn lanes and curve smoothing as initial solutions. However, to prepare for projected growth, the study will also identify ultimate 4 lane solutions. During the next phases of this study, more work will be completed to identify when and what different incremental approaches will be needed to maintain safety and mobility. Stakeholder engagement will be a fundamental and integral element of any future study activities.

Preservation of Existing Character

Input Received

- Approximately 34 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Community enjoys driving the scenic, curvy, winding, and hilly existing roadway and wants to preserve that rustic rural character
- Many business locations here (wineries, wedding venues, etc.) are enjoyed by visitors due to the current rural nature of the road
- A multilane highway would be out of character for the area
- Concern for losing existing peace, quiet, rural, “country” life qualities
- Preserve historic character

A primary objective of Hays County and the project team is to preserve the history, heritage, and natural qualities of this part of Hays County and the FM 150 corridor. Existing FM 150 in its present form will not

be adequate to serve forecasted growth. The full intent of this study is to frame a concept for the corridor that addresses future needs in a way that does not negatively affect the character of the area.

The County strongly believes that reacting to growth in the future with a typical, generic expansion project would damage the unique character of this area. A one size fits all approach for FM 150 between RM 12 and Arroyo Ranch Road would degrade the highly valued character of the study area. This study is being completed to proactively plan for anticipated growth, while protecting residents, businesses, natural and cultural resources, and the quality of life.

RM 1826 Extension/Elder Hill Road Bypass

Input Received

- Approximately 121 comments received on this topic
- A petition was received opposing this concept with 322 signatures, 128 related comments

Summary and Common Themes

- There should be no extension of FM 1826, it is not needed or wanted, and compromises the character of the area
- More time is needed to study the extension of FM 1826 to RR 12
- Elder Hill Road should not be expanded to four lanes
- Extension of FM 1826 should connect directly to RR 12 (not along Elder Hill Road)

The County has decided to remove the extension of RM 1826 (Elder Hill Road Bypass) from the FM 150 Character Plan study. The County, project team, and the Citizens Advisory Panel (CAP) worked together to develop alternatives to provide additional capacity away from the existing FM 150 through Driftwood in response to public input and input from the CAP. The RM 1826 extension and Elder Hill bypass was considered as it offered an additional connection to RM 12, addressed Elder Hill Road safety and mobility issues, and improved the offset intersections of FM 150.

The County has decided to remove the extension of RM 1826 (Elder Hill Road Bypass) from the FM 150 Character Plan study. As improvements are needed in this area, they would undergo additional study.

Darden Hill Road Area

Input Received

- Approximately 7 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Keep FM 150 a 2 lane roadway in this area
- Improve Darden Hill Road and FM 150 intersection

Based on growth projections in the HCTP and Phase 1 of this study, it is anticipated that at some point in the future, there will be a need for 4 lanes of capacity on FM 150 in the area around Darden Hill. However, there is much that can be done in the interim to maintain the roadway safely and efficiently including smoothing out curves, widening shoulders, and intersection improvements. The next phases of the study will look more closely at how these needs will be addressed and the timing sequence for proposed improvements.

Through study of the intersection of FM 150 at Darden Hill and evaluation of public input, the project team recognizes that safety and mobility improvements are needed at the intersection of FM 150 and Darden Hill Road. Current concepts moving forward to the next phase include considering a new intersection location, evaluating a signalized or roundabout intersection design, and smoothing curves.

Private Property

Input Received

- Approximately 11 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Concern for loss of property
- Desire to protect and preserve private property

Hays County and the project team understand and appreciate the rich history of personal property throughout the County and along FM 150. The purpose of this study is to develop a plan that minimizes impacts to personal property and uses available right-of-way to the greatest extent possible, while still maintaining safety and mobility now and in the future. Without a plan, options for expansion and improvements would be limited. The County recognizes the challenge of balancing the safety and mobility needs of the traveling public with private property rights; however, that is a central goal of this Plan. As the Plan moves forward, the County and project team will continue to work to balance the needs of all County residents.

Input Received

- Approximately 6 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Concern for additional flooding brought on by improvements
- Concern for water quality

Flooding and Water Quality Concerns

Drainage is examined as part of any roadway design process and drainage needs and water quality will be integral considerations of roadway options. As concepts identified in this first phase of this study are further developed into projects over time, drainage and flooding concerns will be addressed along with other project specific design considerations.

Concern for Wildlife Environmental Features

Input Received

- Approximately 17 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Wildlife populations would be adversely affected by road expansion
- Some landowners encourage wildlife on their lands (feeders, etc.)
- Environmental features (caves, aquifer recharge, wildlife, etc.) are important and should be considered as they will diminish if road expansion and growth occur

Examination of wildlife habitat and environmental features is an important part of any transportation planning process. Sensitive environmental features identified during Phase 1 will be carried forward to inform future phases of the Character Study and subsequent project designs. Any projects developed will evaluate environmental impacts and will comply with all applicable laws and regulations that protect sensitive environmental features and wildlife habitat.

Low Water Crossings

Input Received

- Approximately 11 comments received on this topic

Summary and Common Themes

- Concern for protection of low water crossings with mixed comments
- Some felt crossings should be left as is and that infrequent flooding was acceptable to protect the character
- Others felt minor improvements would be acceptable for safety but needed to protect the character

Through study of the area and evaluation of public comments, the project team recognizes the need to protect the character of the low water crossings. As this concept moves forward to the next phase, the project team will work to identify solutions that improve safety and operations while maintaining the character. Potential improvements may include shoulder widening, curve smoothing, and upgrading the low water crossing for flood reliability. Additionally, the potential bypass concept proposed for the Driftwood area offers an opportunity to move some through traffic out of the area of the low water crossings and maintain the existing 2 lane road.

Additional Comments

Input Received

- Approximately 29 comments received on various topics

Summary and Common Themes

- Site specific comments on safety, intersections, turn lanes, etc.
- Comments of support for 4 lane concepts and locations
- Comments referring to addressing school traffic
- Comments referring to priority of improvements
- Comments on speed control and enforcement
- Comments on limiting growth

Several other specific comments on design aspects, specific section improvements, the planning process, maintenance, and others were also submitted. The project team has reviewed these and documented them as a part of the study. As work progresses in the next phases, the team will refer to these comments and continue to incorporate input. The County and project team recognize the impacts of school traffic and will continue to monitor existing and planned school sites.

Any changes to current speed limits would go through state prescribed process. However, as the study continues, the project team will work to document issues and solutions related to controlling speed of vehicles on FM 150.

Regarding growth, neither the County nor this study has any authority to limit growth. This study is intended to accommodate projected growth and associated traffic while preserving the unique character of the area.

Conclusion

The County and the project team will continue to move forward with the revised concepts. Public input and comments have driven this study and will continue to be an integral part of this process.