

Notes on meeting regarding Crystal Hills Bridge replacement project

Friendship Baptist Church, Tuesday 26 April, 2011

Moderators:

Allen R. Crozier, P.E.
Hays County Priority Road Bond
Program Management Team

Ray Whisenant
Hays County Commissioner

Among those in attendance (an informal roster):

From GWW: Karen and Warren Hayward, Steve Johnson, Charles and Jan Greening, Mark and Susan Ruthenbeck, David and Margaret Paine, and several others. Also: Brian Dudley and others. Approximately 40–50 people were in attendance.

1. Environmental impact on area

Allen informed the group that the environmental study has been completed and submitted to TxDOT for review (or will be shortly). The project is slated to begin around November. The communities affected will have about two months to put together recommendations and requests regarding style of the bridge, preferred surface material to be used for finishing the face of the concrete portions of the bridge, preferences regarding side rails or solid sides, and any other aesthetic considerations.

Attendees expressed concern about environmental impact of this construction on existing flora and fauna. Presenters acknowledged that some of this wetland area would certainly be damaged, but every effort would be made to keep this area to a minimum. It is not clear who would accomplish or pay for any recovery efforts.

The large tree to the left on crossing the bridge will be preserved. A smaller tree, to the right after crossing the current bridge, will need to be removed.

Any community expertise and labor offered to assist with this would be encouraged and appreciated by the project team.

The team indicated that they would make the environmental study available to the neighborhoods for review to aide in developing a recovery strategy.

Cleanup of the cement currently in the creekbed, deposited years ago in an effort to control erosion, will be removed by the team.

Allen spoke briefly about the minimal amount of work the crews can do in the stream channel because of the environmental laws that his department must abide by. They would need additional permits that would likely put this entire project on hold for a very lengthy time. Private citizens/neighborhood groups can do the work without needing the permits. [This paragraph added by Steve Johnson.]

2. Sign visibility

It is clear that the existing Goldenwood sign will not be adequately visible from the roadway

once improvements are complete. The Program Team will not recommend how to proceed, but will be open to modifying plans, and possibly helping with repositioning of sign, if the tri-neighborhood area presents a consensus plan to address the problem.

At the last meeting, Wizard Academy representatives offered their designers to assist with aesthetic considerations in this project. Allen encouraged us to contact them and involve them in developing our requests and recommendations. Also he would like to know what they are able/willing to commit to the project.

3. Turn lane

There will be a left turn lane added for use by southbound traffic in the latest version of the plan, as well as a developed shoulder on either side. There will not, however, be a right turn acceleration lane for traffic entering FM 1826 from Crystal Hills. This was eliminated due to the high cost of building a retaining wall which would be needed to support the lane.

4. Number of arches in span

Attendees questioned the current two plans on display regarding the number of arches to be included. One plan included a single 48-foot arch, while a second plan included two 30-foot arches. One attendee commented that supports in the middle of the bridge span would collect debris and may be unsightly. Another attendee commented that an odd number of arches would be more aesthetically pleasing than an even number. It was suggested that the team might consider one central large arch and two smaller arches at either side. The team agreed to consider this.

5. Surfacing materials

Most folks in attendance seemed to indicate a preference for a stone finish on the cement portion of the structure. Ray and Allen acknowledged they expected we'd prefer this. Stone will probably be more expensive than cement, but the team will investigate whether the budget will allow for the use of natural stone. Another possibility is to use cement forms pressed into the cement which create the appearance of stone. Allen claims these can look very authentic and convincing, and would eliminate any maintenance, such as replacement of stones which wear or wash away. Such maintenance may be the responsibility of the tri-neighborhoods.

6. Rail sides vs. Solid sides

Styles for the sides of the bridge at roadway level was discussed, and one image presented by Allen showed a bridge with a railing made with a dark brown or black finish and three horizontal crossbeams along the length of the bridge. One attendee suggested this style resembles the horse fencing enclosing the pasture on the left side uphill of the bridge. Many attendees seemed to like this style. Another option is to have a solid wall which continues up from the bridge support structure to some distance above road level. One attendee expressed the opinion that a lower side wall would be more appealing than a higher one. Many seemed to think that an open style would be preferable because it would permit water to flow through in case of an extremely high water event.

7. Safety concerns

One attendee expressed a concern that special requests and considerations not result in holding up progress on the bridge improvement. She cited safety and aesthetics as both high priority, but in that order, and recalled the tragic loss of a life which occurred there years ago during a flood. Allen and Ray agreed with this order of priorities, also stating that they are eager to get the project underway soon while costs for materials have dropped.

8. Form and timing for input from neighborhoods

Allen and Ray indicated that recommendations and preferences from the three neighborhoods and others served by the bridge would be given serious consideration, but only if it is presented as a unified consensus. They request that these groups get together to develop a list of requests/preferences and present them as a single group. It will be up to the individual POAs to determine how to achieve this, along with Wizard Academy and any others who wish to be involved.