

Harris County Commissioners Court meeting notes

March 10, 2009, 9:00 am

Note: The Commissioners Court covers a wide variety of topics. Houston Tomorrow only reports on issues relating to land use, quality of life, and transportation. Questions or comments regarding agenda items are discussed during the meeting, and some items may be removed. At the end the commissioners vote on the agenda as a whole.

Public comments

Seven Harris County residents spoke against Segment E of the Grand Parkway. Brandt Mannchen, air quality chair of the [Lone Star chapter of the Sierra Club](#), informed the commissioners that the Sierra Club has filed a lawsuit against the [Federal Highway Administration](#) over what he called inadequate environmental impact statements regarding Segment E. He noted that “[the lawsuit] is a measure of last resort, not first resort.”

Adra Hooks suggested that the fact that Segment E has been planned for decades but never built should be cause for concern. “In places of huge expenditures on Segment E,” she said, “consider other alternatives.” Judge Ed Emmett replied that US 290 is the region’s largest transportation problem, but that it was not deemed “shovel-ready” and was therefore ineligible for stimulus funding.

Teresa Allen, a county resident, said, “The whole Grand Parkway concept is a tremendous waste of taxpayer money.” She accused the [Grand Parkway Association](#) of influencing and manipulating the work of the [Texas Department of Transportation](#) (TxDOT). Charlotte Gilpin, a realtor from Spring, said that the Grand Parkway would hurt property values in her area. Commissioner Jerry Eversole (Precinct 4) insisted that property values would go up, and that a strong majority of citizens supported the Grand Parkway. The problem, he said, was that those individuals did not show up at public meetings to express their support.

Carol Caul, a [Citizens’ Transportation Coalition](#) board member, said that the county should not pursue Segment E, and that the state has over \$10 billion in other stimulus-eligible projects. Jon Boyd, also with CTC, told the commissioners to slow down and first conduct a toll feasibility study. A seventh Harris County resident expressed concern that tax money was being used to fund a toll road.

Four individuals representing Katy area business interests

Houston Tomorrow publishes notes from public meetings to help local governments in their mission to provide transparency and to allow a greater pool of Houstonians to participate in important policy discussions. These notes are not official meeting minutes, nor do they record every agenda item.

spoke in favor of the Grand Parkway. Peter Houghton, Vice President of Master-Planned Communities at General Growth Properties, said, “We need this road to continue the build-out of Bridgeland.” General Growth Properties is the Bridgeland developer, and Houghton is the development’s senior executive officer.

Other business groups speaking in favor of Segment E included the [West Houston Association](#), the [Energy Corridor District](#), and the [Katy Area Chamber of Commerce](#). Roger Hord, president and CEO of the West Houston Association, noted the recent decision to remove a planned overpass from the 2008-2011 Transportation Improvement Program. The project was removed after it caused widespread public opposition. Hord said that if the overpass had been built 20 years ago, it would not be a problem. Likewise, he said that if the Grand Parkway was not built now, transportation officials would regret it in 20 years. Instead, he said, it makes more sense to build the road now before many people live in the area.

Commissioners’ comments

Commissioner Eversole expressed strong displeasure with the Grand Parkway Association for making mistakes during the process, saying, “Every time someone has gotten upset with the Grand Parkway, [the Grand Parkway Association has] changed the route.” Instead, he said, the association should have stated, “We’re going to build it here, so get over it.”

Art Storey, executive director of the Harris County Public Infrastructure Department, said that TxDOT was only interested in Segment E because it is part of the larger Grand Parkway. He said he believed the stimulus money is designed for the entire Grand Parkway, but that since only Segment E was “shovel-ready,” TxDOT had directed the \$181 million to that segment. He also seemed to think that the county would be bought out of the Grand Parkway at a later date under the terms of the recently-approved advance funding agreement.

A consultant who worked on a joint study for TxDOT and the Harris County Toll Road Authority testified that Segment E is among the highest-demand segments, with an estimated 12,000-20,000 vehicles per day upon its opening, growing to 50,000-80,000 vehicles per day in 2035. He also said that it had among the highest revenue per mile of all the segments,

assuming the toll rates were consistent with other toll roads in the region. He added that even if the rest of the Grand Parkway is not built, it is likely that Segment E would be toll-viable.

At the end of the meeting, the commissioners unanimously approved the agenda. The Grand Parkway agenda items are listed below and include \$9.8 million in engineering contracts.

Grand Parkway agenda items

Agenda item I.1.b.6. Recommendation that court approve a resolution and order authorizing the Grand Parkway Segment E project in Precinct 3, 31 specific tracts from Franz Road to US-290, with decree of public necessity and convenience to acquire a fee interest in specific property by donation or purchase on behalf of the county, to be funded by the Toll Road Authority, and for appropriate officials to take necessary actions to complete the transactions.

Agenda item I.1.d.1. Recommendation for appropriate officials to take necessary actions to complete the transactions, contingent upon confirmation from TxDOT that the expected supplemental funding in the amount of \$181 million is forthcoming, and for the County Judge to execute agreements for engineering services for Segment E of SH-99, Grand Parkway generally from IH-10 West to US-290 in Precinct 3 with:

a. R.G. Miller Engineers, Inc., in the amount of \$1,263,698 for the segment lead for plans and specifications of Section 3 from Station 2097+00 to 2380, for design and plan preparation for roadway elements of Subsection 3.3 from Station 2205+00 to 2255+00, and bridge design and plan preparation for the future Tuckerton, South Bridgeland Lake Parkway, and North Bridgeland Lake Parkway roads.

b. Michael Baker Jr., Inc., in the amount of \$399,907 for the segment lead for bridge design of Section 3 from Station 2097+00 to 2380+00, and design and plan preparation for the Cypress Creek Bridge from Station 2280+13 to 2314+00.

c. Binkley & Barfield, Inc., in the amount of \$578,945 for design and plan preparation for roadway elements of Subsection 3.2 from Station 2167+00 to 2205+00.

d. Brooks & Sparks, Inc., in the amount of \$465,320 for design and plan preparation for roadway elements of Subsection 3.5 from Station 2299+00 to 2347+00.

e. Edminster, Hinshaw, Russ and Associates in the amount of \$345,232 for design and plan preparation for roadway elements of Subsection 3.6 from Station 2347+00 to 2380+00.

f. Klotz Associates, Inc., in the amount of

\$1,006,383 for design and plan preparation for roadway elements of Subsection 3.1 from Station 2097+00 to 2167+00, and design and plan preparation for the Langham Creek/future Tuckerton Road bridges with exit/entrance ramps.

g. Nathelyne A. Kennedy & Associates in the amount of \$239,933 for bridge design and plan preparation for the northbound and southbound mainlane structures over future Louetta Road in Section 3 from Station 2343+50 to 2346+50.

h. Sander Engineering Corporation in the amount of \$343,689 for design and plan preparation for roadway elements of Subsection 3.4 from Station 2255+00 to 2299+00.

i. LJA Engineering & Surveying, Inc., in the amount of \$1,939,610 for the segment lead for plans, specifications, and estimates of Section 4 from Station 2380+00 to 2410+00, and design and plan preparation for Direct Connector G of the US-290/SH-99 interchange.

j. AIA Engineers, Ltd., in the amount of \$1,010,774 for bridge design and plan preparation in Section 4 for Direct Connector H of the US-290/SH-99 interchange.

k. Costello, Inc., in the amount of \$1,066,985 for bridge design and plan preparation in Section 4 for Direct Connector E of the US 290/SH-99 interchange.

l. HDR Engineering, Inc., in the amount of \$870,059 for design and plan preparation for roadway elements of Subsection 4.2 from US-290 Station 1645+00 to 1722+50.

m. Isani Consultants, LP, in the amount of \$303,382 for design and plan preparation for roadway elements of Subsection 4.1 from Station 2380+00 to 2410+00.

Agenda item I.1.d.8. Recommendation for authorization to request statements of qualifications from consultants who have the experience and ability to provide tolling financial reports, including comprehensive traffic and revenue studies regarding the proposed Segment E of SH-99, Grand Parkway in Precinct 3.