

EDITORIAL

NORTHWEST BEXAR COUNTY RECEIVES RELIEF

February 25, 2010

Traffic congestion affects all of Bexar County. As the 21st century approached, community residents moved farther north and northwest as did the congestion. One thing that is not discussed in the media is that Loop 1604 faces a major gridlock crisis.

Bexar County Precinct 1 extends west of highway 281 South and travels west of Bexar County and back up in a northern loop to the SeaWorld area approaching Culebra and 1604. Precinct 1 is the largest and fastest growing area in Bexar County and where Precinct 1 ends, Bexar County Precinct 2 begins, which is represented by Commissioner Paul Elizondo. Traffic on Loop 1604 is a shared problem Commissioner Elizondo and I face and as such, the solution that recently came to fruition this past week was also a shared vision we have been working on for some time.

My part of the planning began a year and a half ago when Judge Wolff recognized my pleas for solutions for the State Highway 151 at Loop 1604 corridor of my Precinct and agreed to join me on a trip to see the Texas Transportation Commission to request consideration for funding. We were successful and able to secure funding from Category 12 funds-Texas Transportation Commission Discretionary Funds in the amount of \$18 million that would be designated for a SH 151 project. The details of our project were not quite fine tuned but being developed.

The necessity for a project to this area was easily identified with the quickly booming development by Pulte Homes who just completed their initial phases of residential development in the Alamo Ranch and Dell Webb areas. Westover Hills was also quickly growing. Northside Independent School District had new elementary, middle and high schools in the planning and construction phase also which would bring continued growth.

The next phase of the planning was to collaborate with Commissioner Elizondo. We discussed our rapidly growing area of need along Loop 1604 and quickly planned. This past October, Commissioners Court heard our pleas and supported efforts to secure an executed Interlocal Agreement with the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority. Through the Agreement, the Alamo RMA agreed to fund a feasibility study for an improvement project for Loop 1604. The study set to explore a Super Street and Operational Safety Improvement Project along this corridor.

The Alamo RMA quickly completed the feasibility study and hosted meetings to show their results that were developed by Engineers, Pape-Dawson. The feasibility study covered the State Highway 151 intersection at Loop 1604, and outlined improvements focused to provide relief in the corridor with operational efficiencies that would be gained by moving forward with the Super Street concept.

With the leadership of Representative Menendez and Councilman Lopez whose areas are encompassed in this 1604 corridor, Bexar County was able to obtain available funding at the federal and state levels in an effort to advance the project. The selected lead agency chosen for the project was the Alamo RMA in which they agreed to secure the environmental clearance

necessary to develop suggested improvements along Loop 1604 at New Guilbeau, Shaenfield, and SH 151. The Alamo RMA will also perform all oversight as we prepare for construction of the Loop 1604 Super Street. Through a secured Agreement with the Advanced Transportation District to release the Texas Department of Transportation ATD sales tax funding to Bexar County not to exceed \$900,000, the availability of the ATD funds will assist the Alamo RMA to secure the necessary categorical exclusions, allow for community outreach through a series of public meetings, and complete the final design work.

Commissioner Adkisson, who also chairs the MPO was extremely sensitive to the decline in the quality of life for the community living in this area. Commissioner Wolff also expressed frustration for many of his constituents living in the UTSA area because they also faced increased traffic. Because of the joint membership of Commissioners Adkisson and Wolff share with me on the San Antonio MPO, all the funding components were gathered and secured.

An estimated \$6.5 million is projected for the New Guilbeau, Shaenfield segments and the interim improvements to SH 151 at Loop 1604. Funding for these improvements will come from a combined funding source from accumulated cost under runs realized by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and Category 7 funds-Surface Transportation Program Metropolitan Mobility at the San Antonio MPO. There is a re-obligation deadline for the ARRA funds set for September 1, 2010 and this deadline necessitates expediting the environmental clearance and design development.

The final segment of the improvements project is the completion of the underpass at SH 151 to Alamo Parkway with an estimated cost of \$18 million. These are the funds Judge Wolff and I secured from the Category 12-Texas Transportation Commission Discretionary Funds that were previously designated for this specific project.

With the additional help of Terry Briehtel with the Alamo RMA who has championed my dilemmas to TxDOT without fail, they have agreed to secure programmatic categorical exclusions for improvements at Braun Road, and finalize plans for the SH 151 underpass. TxDOT will also assume responsibility for construction oversight and contract management during the construction of the Super Street improvements along Loop 1604 and the proposed underpass at SH 151 at Loop 1604.

The entire collaboration could never have been made possible without the support I received from the rest of the Bexar County Commissioners Court. Planning for the future encompasses economic and residential development, improvements, and infrastructure planning, similar to these projects.

The areas in unincorporated Bexar County used to be deserted rural environments but they are quickly becoming as urbanized as the Central part of Bexar County. My focus has been set on bringing development to my entire precinct; the Southside and the Northwest. As this Loop 1604 and SH 151 project moves forward, there will be a series of large public meetings to educate the community about re-directed driving routes and to ensure that the NISD, NW Vista, and UTSA students, staff, and the parent community are well aware of how their driving patterns will be affected. The return on the construction will be priceless and filled with many benefits.