

PUBLIC MEETING EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT

**Meeting Held on:
April 14, 2016**

**US-77 RAIL OVERPASS & REALIGNMENT BEGINNING
APPROXIMATELY 2,300 FT. NORTH OF JUNCTION SH-153 IN
THACKERVILLE AND EXTENDING 2.7 MILES NORTH**

**LOVE COUNTY, OKLAHOMA
J/P No. 28803(04); Project No. J2-8803(004)**

Prepared for:



Prepared for
**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION**

Prepared by:



**CC Environmental, LLC
PO Box 1292
Norman, OK 73070**

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1.0 PUBLIC MEETING OVERVIEW

As part of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's (ODOT) efforts to keep the public informed and involved in the decision-making process, a public meeting was held. The overall intent of the meeting was to present project information and to solicit public input. The following is a generally summary of the comments received and ODOT's responses.

1.1 MEETING DATE & TIME

Thursday, April 14, 2016
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

1.2 MEETING LOCATION

Thackerville School Cafeteria
18953 US HWY 77
Thackerville, OK 73459

1.3 PURPOSE OF MEETING

The purpose of the public meeting was to present the alternatives being considered for the railroad bridge replacement and realignment of US-77 between SH-153 and Liddell Road, and to obtain public input to aid in selecting a preferred alternative.

1.4 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is proposing to correct a narrow, height-restricted railroad underpass with sharp approach curves on US-77 near Thackerville, in Love County, Oklahoma. The project begins at the US-77/SH-153 junction in Thackerville, and extends north approximately 3 miles to Liddell Road. The existing highway is a two-lane facility with 12-foot wide driving lanes and no shoulders. Current traffic volumes are estimated at 2,200 vehicles per day (vpd) and are projected to increase to 3,900 vpd by 2036.

ODOT tasked a consultant to study two, new alignments to improve this segment of highway as well as consider improving the existing alignment while taking into consideration the cost of construction right-of-way and utilities impacts and environmental constraints. The two alignments being considered for US-77 are to the north and south of the existing alignment.

1.5 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed improvements consist of removing the railroad bridge and constructing a new 40-foot wide bridge on one of the two new alignments being considered. Portions of existing US-77 will be left in place to provide access to properties. The proposed bridge on US-77 will span the railroad and the old US-77. The approach roadway will consist of two, 12-foot wide driving lanes and 8-foot wide, paved shoulders and will be designed to meet 65 mph. The railroad bridge and highway will remain open during construction.

1.6 PUBLIC NOTICES

- ODOT mailed postcard announcements to property owners on approximately March 24, 2016.
- Letters to interested political subdivisions were mailed on March 25, 2016, in an effort to solicit their input.
- Public meeting invitation letters were mailed to interested parties and public entities on March 25, 2016.

- ODOT sent out a press release and general media announcements on April 5, 2016.

1.7 MEETING FORMAT

At the Public Meeting, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) provided a handout to all attendees describing the project and illustrating the proposed project improvements. Attendees were asked to add their name to the sign-in sheet. An introduction and overview of the project was provided by ODOT Division 7 staff. The design engineers, Professional Engineering Consultants (PEC), followed with a presentation explaining the purpose and need for the project and provided details on the proposed alternatives¹. After the presentation, the floor was open to public comments and questions. Once the open-floor comment period was over, personnel from ODOT and the designers were available to answer questions one-on-one. The public was also encouraged to write their specific questions or concerns related to the project on a Comment Form.

2.0 SUMMARY OF COMMENTS & RESPONSES

2.1 PUBLIC COMMENTS

2.1.1 Oral Comments from Public Meeting

The questions entertained during the open-floor comment period were procedural in nature or related to the construction process. For instance, two questions were related to the alternative selection process, one was focused on bridge design, and the fourth was related to construction access. Individual comments are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of property owners, local residents, citizens and business owners' oral comments noted during the public meeting

ORAL COMMENTS DURING PUBLIC MEETING	
PUBLIC QUESTIONS/COMMENTS	ODOT RESPONSES
How will the public be notified of the selected alternative?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ODOT will mail letters, and there will be a media release.
How long will it be until there is a decision for the selected alternative?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 2-3 months.
Will the proposed bridge span the railroad?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes.
What access will be available during construction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to homes, businesses and fields will remain open during construction. • A specific access plan will be developed at a later date. • Access to existing homes, businesses and fields will remain after construction as well.

¹ (Go to https://www.ok.gov/odot/Programs_and_Projects/Public_Meetings_and_Hearings/20160414.html to see the full presentation.)

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2.1.2 Public Written Comments

Thirty property owners, local residences, and/or concerned citizens responded in writing to the information presented at the public meeting. Overall, there was general opposition to the project with twelve entities being specifically against any new alignments. Many wanted to see lights, signage, or other measures used to slow people down rather than replacing the existing underpass. Most expressed strong concern for the several businesses in the area and residential impacts that would occur. Agricultural impacts and potential oilfield impediments were also raised. Twenty-three respondents preferred or would accept the North Option, versus six for the South Option. (One opted for the No Build Option only.) Generalized comments are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of property owners', local residents' and citizens' written comments

PUBLIC WRITTEN COMMENTS	
The written responses were summarized and generically grouped into general categories; each of which are presented below. Next to each item is ODOT's response.	
ISSUE/COMMENT/CONCERN	ODOT RESPONSES
The proposed project is not needed or warranted. Other, less invasive options can be used to address safety issues (e.g., lights & signs).	Given the higher than average accident rate and substandard design, improvements are needed for safety purposes. The curves currently have guardrail, reflectors, posted 35 mph advisory speed limits, and other warning signage, but accidents still occur including several injury accidents and fatalities.
The proposed project is not justified based on traffic counts.	The proposed highway improvement is designed to address safety issues and is not intended to address capacity concerns. Given the poor line of sight, low vertical clearance, and narrow opening, all traffic that travels this segment of US-77 is at risk.
The impacts to local business will be devastating.	Selection of the North Option will have the least impact on local businesses. This alignment would avoid direct impacts to commercial property, in terms of significant right-of-way take, and indirect effects related to altered traffic patterns and business frontage changes. With either the North or South Option, access to all businesses will be relatively similar pre- and post-construction. During construction, access will be maintained to all businesses.
Impacts to local residences is not justified and too great.	Unfortunately, with any new alignment there will be impacts to private property owners. ODOT seriously considers and appreciates the hardship, angst, and distress associated with residential relocations and tries to balance that with highway safety concerns. The designers looked at several alternatives to minimize impacts, but some level of impact is unavoidable.
There are drainage issues and marshy areas along this corridor. The proposed options will cause or exacerbate localized flooding.	As part of the design phase, the hydrology of the project and surrounding area would be evaluated. Drainage structures and ditches would be designed appropriately for anticipated flows to prevent flooding. Each drainage location would be evaluated individually to address water conveyance and flooding concerns. Also, it is anticipated that flow patterns, in some areas, would be improved over the existing conditions--including the current railroad underpass.
Are there other design options than those presented that are less intrusive?	Several conceptual designs were assessed in addition to the ones presented. Options such as improving the existing highway alignment, constructing an at-grade railroad crossing, and designing alternative overpass concepts were considered. Based on the proposed design for an efficient and properly functioning highway that meets current design standards, there are no other practical options available without substantively increasing the construction, maintenance, and operation costs.

Improvements are needed to US-77 in other locations.	ODOT fully appreciates the current condition of US-77 and has developed a longer-term strategy to address deteriorating roads and bridges in Division 7. As part of this plan, ODOT is proposing to improve other segments of US-77, including portions south of Thackerville.

2.2 BUSINESS COMMENTS

Eight representatives of five business interests responded in writing to the public meeting presentation. Two of the eight respondents were against the project, but all eight would prefer the North Option, which did not adversely affect their business. Individual comments are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Businesses and commercial stakeholder groups' written comments

WRITTEN BUSINESS COMMENTS	
The written responses were summarized and generically grouped into general categories; each of which are presented below. Next to each item is ODOT's response.	
ISSUE/COMMENT/CONCERN	ODOT RESPONSES
South Option will adversely impact several businesses, farms and other commercial activities in the area.	<p>The South Option has the potential to affect more commercial businesses than the North Option based on the proposed alignment footprint. Right-of-way will be required from several businesses which may impact their operations to varying degrees. There could be traffic pattern changes and the commercial building frontage may flip. However, access to the businesses will be relatively the same post-construction, and access will be maintained during construction.</p> <p>Conversely, the South Option avoids impacts to other commercial entities that the North Option does not. For instance, there are less severe impacts to ranching operations, and there is no oilfield activity associated with the South Option's footprint.</p>
One business representative expressed preference for the North Option and would be willing to work with ODOT in regard to R/W acquisition.	Comment noted: ODOT appreciates the willingness of local businesses to facilitate construction projects.

2.3 AGENCY COMMENTS

Forty-nine agencies, stakeholders, and/or political representatives were specifically contacted to solicit input for this project. Five agencies responded. Individual comments are summarized in Table 4 followed by ODOT’s response.

Table 4: Federal, state, & local agency written responses to the solicitation letter

AGENCY COMMENTS	
AGENCY	INPUT
Bureau of Land Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research shows there is no impact to Federal minerals or Federal Land in the project area managed by BLM. • No concerns or objections.
National Park Service Intermountain Region External Review Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed, but found no comments at this time.
Oklahoma Corporation Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCC found five (5) pipelines in the area of the project.
Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommended ODOT obtain a construction storm water permit (OKR10). • Attached DEQ Fact Sheet Recommendations for General Construction/Improvement Projects.
Oklahoma Department of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive of the option that most protects the movement of workers, goods, and services.
ODOT RESPONSES	
<u>Bureau of Land Management (BLM):</u> The BLM stated that they have no issues or concerns. Comment noted.	
<u>National Park Service:</u> The National Park Service found no comments. Comment noted.	
<u>Oklahoma Corporation Commission (OCC):</u> OCC found five (5) pipelines in the area of the project. Comment noted.	
<u>Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ):</u> The DEQ stated that ODOT should obtain a construction storm water permit authorization under OKR10. ODOT is aware of the permitting requirements and the process involved. ODOT requires construction contractors to obtain a permit authorization (when applicable) prior to starting any construction activities.	
<u>Department of Commerce (DOC):</u> The DOC stated that they would be supportive of the option that benefits commerce. Improving US-77 facilitates the movement of goods and services both locally and regionally. Both options would meet DOC’s stated objectives.	