

Meeting Summary
Tower 55 Technical Advisory Group
June 19, 2009

Attendees

Edward Adelman, UPRR	Peter LeCody, Texas Rail Advocates
Chris Anderson, NCTCOG	Curtis Loftis, TxDOT- Fort Worth
Nate Asplund, BNSF Railway	Greg Likness, FRA
Lonnie Blaydes, Blaydes Consulting	Eric Lyman, MainLine Management
Patricia Bostic, Congressman Burgess	Mike Marler, Jacobs
Amanda Breitling, Jacobs	Curtis Morgan, TTI
Numa Bulot, DART	Bonnie Murphy, FRA
Tim Cooper, Amtrak	Jeff Neal, NCTCOG
Darwin Desen, Jacobs	Andy Oberlander, TxDOT-Dallas
Clarence Duer, Fort Worth PD	Clint Schelbitzki, UPRR
Eric Fladager, City of Fort Worth	Tom Shelton, NCTCOG
D. Guido, FWWR	Randy Skinner, Tarrant County
Vence Haggard, FRA	Darrell Thompson, Jacobs
Randall Heye, NCTCOG	Paulette VanderKamp, URS
Grant Janke, UPRR	Cinde Weatherby, City of Fort Worth
Becky Karasko, NCTCOG	Carl Weckenmann, The T
Kim Kendrick, NCTCOG	Mark Werner, TxDOT-Multimodal
Renee Lamb, Tarrant County	Sandy Wesch, NCTCOG
Brian Large, BNSF Railway	Russ Wiles, City of Fort Worth

- 1. Welcome and Introductions:** At approximately 10:00 a.m. Jeff Neal of the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) began the meeting by welcoming those in attendance, reviewing the agenda for the morning and asking persons in attendance to introduce themselves. There were approximately 40 attendees.
- 2. Approval of the April 17, 2009, Meeting Minutes:** Jeff Neal requested the approval of the meeting minutes from the April 17, 2009, Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meeting. Cinde Weatherby with the City of Fort Worth motioned for approval. The motion was seconded by Lonnie Blaydes of Blaydes Consulting and approved without opposition.
- 3. Review of Project's Original Federal Grant, Project Goals and Objectives:** Randall Heye with NCTCOG briefly recapped the project history and major accomplishments since a 1992 agreement between railroad stakeholders and Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to preserve a north-south corridor for a railroad trench at the I-30/I-35W interchange. Clint Schelbitzki questioned if the 1992 north-south corridor was preserved in its entirety and asked that this be verified. Mr. Heye also referred to the congressional earmark of \$1,600,00 obtained by Congresswoman Kay Granger to execute the Tower 55 Rail Reliever Study. Partners which provided the required local match included with City of Fort Worth, City of Arlington, Tarrant County, Fort Worth Transportation Authority, Union Pacific Railroad and BNSF Railway. Each of which contributed \$66,000, except for the City of Arlington which provided \$67,000. Tom Shelton, also with NCTCOG, reviewed the original project objective: to develop an

agreement in principal for a conceptual mid-term (grade separation) improvement and successfully obtain federal environmental clearance necessary prior to additional engineering, funding, and eventual construction.

Tom Shelton first thanked the staff attending from TxDOT, recognizing that all TxDOT employees had the day as a state holiday. Mr. Shelton highlighted their attendance at this meeting confirmed their personal commitment to this project and that NCTCOG appreciated their attendance and interest in this important meeting.

Tom Shelton reviewed the original list of project goals and objectives, as approved by the TAG Committee at the initiation of this project nearly three years ago. He further explained that the purpose of this study is not to develop final engineering design of a mid-term improvement (grade separation), but to develop an agreement in principal amongst the project partners of the best improvement alternative and successfully obtain federal environmental clearance from FHWA. The many details of specific trackwork layout and operational efficiencies will best be addressed at a later time, as long as the project partners reach a mutual agreement on the improvement corridor and concept description.

- 4. Status of “At-Grade Improvement” Design & Funding Application:** Tom Shelton and Nate Asplund with BNSF Railway (BNSF) reviewed the importance of the at-grade improvements, estimated at \$70 million, for the immediate improvement addressing many of the Tower 55 needs. First, if funding is secured, the construction of the improvements could be underway in 2010 which would bring immediate relief to congestion issues caused by Tower 55. Second, these improvements are assumed to be in place, as part of the baseline condition for the mid-term improvements proposed in the Tower 55 study and environmental document. Mr. Asplund explained that the criteria for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The criteria has been released by the USDOT and it appears that the at-grade improvements at Tower 55 meet or exceed the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant criteria for chokepoint improvements, safety, intermodalism, congestion relief, air quality, and economic development benefits. BNSF and UP are currently working with TxDOT to submit the application by September 15, 2009. Both BNSF and Union Pacific Railroad are seeking letters of support from Tower 55 partners and the NCTCOG for the TxDOT application.

Cinde Weatherby, with the City of Fort Worth, reiterated the importance of recognizing the many benefits of the immediate at-grade improvement solution and that she believes the City will fully supports the railroads’ efforts in pursuing all needed funding to implement this project. Russ Wiles, with the City of Fort Worth, has been working in close coordination with both Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and BNSF, in identifying the various public improvements such as street crossings and pedestrian grade separations. She further said that this improvement package should be seen as a product of the Tower 55 study and celebrated. The coordinated work of the NCTCOG staff and consultants, City staff, and the railroads led to a much more full-blown package of improvements and benefits than expected.

- 5. Receipt of Comments from Union Pacific Railroad:** Tom Shelton reviewed the north-south Draft Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) as presented and discussed during the months of January and February 2009 at the TAG Committee and public meetings. Tom Shelton shared comments regarding the Draft LPA that were received in April and May 2009 from the Union Pacific Railroad. Specific reference was made to a recent May 18, 2009 letter received from the Union Pacific Railroad.

Clint Schelbitzki and Grant Janke with UPRR explained to the TAG that the draft LPA creates challenges with future operations at Tower 55 and they are not able to justify going to their customers explaining why there could be a 2-3 year delay in their deliveries during the construction of the North-South Trench concept. Clint Schelbitzki and Grant Janke with Union Pacific Railroad enumerated the Union Pacific's concerns with the proposed north – south trench:

- Constructability issues would adversely impact operations at regional, state and national levels. Union Pacific underscored firstly the importance of Tower 55 as a pass through for west-coast goods bound for points east, north and south, and secondly, Union Pacific's system in the region does not provide the flexibility of alternative routes to Tower 55 without adversely impacting their operational costs and schedules.
 - There is concern that some of the \$70 million in immediate at-grade improvements would need to be relocated under the north-south alternative.
 - Adverse impacts to Davidson Yard operations.
 - Loss of use of the southwest quadrant estimated at 11 months due to construction
 - Loss of use of the northwest quadrant estimated at 7 months due to construction
 - Given the uncertain, current state of the economy, and its impact on current freight customers, such adverse operational impacts would not be tolerable to Union Pacific management, due to the foreseen loss of customers during construction and a subsequent shift of some rail freight to the trucking industry.
- 6. Status of Improvement Alternatives Responding to UPRR Comments:** In response to the UPRR comments, Tom Shelton stated the Tower 55 Team has taken steps to study the concerns of UP. This includes the potential for incorporating a third at-grade track running north-south during construction so that new base capacity may not be lost (a recent revised design drawing has been provided for TAG membership review incorporating a new 3rd track). Additionally, construction phasing would be utilized to minimize construction impacts, and the NCTCOG team wanted to explore with Union Pacific Railroad and BNSF, the possibility of diverting some trains to other corridors.

Mr. Shelton stated that without the Rail Traffic Controller (RTC) modeling results and the opportunity to meet directly with Union Pacific Railroad operations staff, the Tower 55 Team cannot understand the details of north-south trench infeasibility for Union Pacific Railroad. (Note: NCTCOG staff has had two separate meetings with Union Pacific Network Planning and Operations to discuss the North-South Trench alternative. Union Pacific and the NCTCOG staff are currently working on another meeting to discuss the most recent East-West

and North-South options). Given the uncertainty as to what train volumes would be once construction is underway at some point in future years, Nate Asplund recommended that the constructability – operations impact issue – be evaluated under various train volume scenarios. Ed Adelman with Union Pacific Railroad reiterated the importance that Union Pacific Railroad staff meets with the Tower 55 Team to discuss operations and phasing concerns as it relates to any improvement. Tom Shelton agreed and stated that the Tower 55 Team has been awaiting available dates and times from Union Pacific Railroad on when a meeting could be arranged as well as the release of the RTC modeling results.

Grant Janke raised concerns that the same level of analysis for an east-west trench has not been completed as the north-south trench. He asked that the TAG move forward with an east-west trench alternative and evaluate it to the same level as the north-south trench. Tom Shelton stated that NCTCOG staff believes that the two trench alternatives currently have an equal level of evaluation based on the recent efforts, including design (plan and profile), preliminary cost estimates and an equal level of assessment of issues and analysis. Darwin Desen, Jacobs, indicated that some additional evaluation of the highway impacts and possible mitigation actions for the East-West Trench remain to be completed, once he secures additional engineering/ profile drawings of affected structures. Mr. Shelton requested that if any members of the TAG Committee feel that an important issue or effort has not been completed equally on both of the remaining two alternatives; please inform NCTCOG staff of those issues that need additional attention.

There was some discussion as to what additional elements might be needed to be analyzed for the east-west trench analysis to be on parity with the north-south trench evaluation; these elements included: right-of-way impacts, as the east-west trench would fall outside of the railroad's existing right-of-way and impact cross streets such as Henderson Street, the proposed Hemphill-Lamar Connector, Jennings Avenue, Main Street, Interstate Highway 35W, and Tennessee Avenue. Clint Schelbitzki requested a more thorough understanding and analysis of what mitigation would be required for impacts associated with both the north-south and east-west trench options.

Grant Janke suggested that both alternatives should be advanced and the right-of-way preserved because we do not know what the business and economic conditions may be in 10 years. At that time, a decision could be made and the project built.

7. **Comments from City of Fort Worth:** Ms. Weatherby applauded the efforts of the region's Congressional delegation regarding their interest in Tower 55, including Senator Hutchinson, Senator Cornyn, Congressman Burgess, and Congresswoman Granger. She also stated that city staff supports current NCTCOG progress to date regarding an improvement at Tower 55 and if the north-south trench and east-west trench were placed side by side, City staff would support the north-south trench. However, if additional detailed work on evaluation of the east-west trench is prepared in full partnership with the railroads, they would like to see continued evaluation of an east-west trench before a formal position is recommended to the City Council. She applauded the NCTCOG Tower 55 team for its quick reaction to UPRR's request and the

detailed evaluation of its impacts. She also said that public comments will be necessary for any east-west trench, just as they were for the north-south trench.

- 8. Comments from BNSF Railway:** Nate Asplund stated that BNSF does not oppose either of the trench alternatives and concurs with UP that NCTCOG needs to evaluate the east-west trench to the same level of analysis as the North-South, in order for stakeholders to have an opportunity to weigh the merits and trade-offs between both options equally and on an objective basis. He stated the constructability of either solution is a critical issue to the railroads and impacts to the railroads, customers and public and needs to be addressed. From a constructability perspective, the East-West option would have much less impact on the railroads due to the ability to maintain current operations for most of the construction period, as opposed to the North-South which would be far more complex. Properly planning and determining whether construction impacts can be mitigated is extremely important because it will literally affect nation's passenger and rail network in the entire south-central region of the United States. Mr. Asplund also applauded the TAG's partnership in working together, reminding TAG members that the proposed short-term at-grade improvements originated from ideas exchanged during earlier TAG discussions.
- 9. Review of Improvement Alternatives Evaluation and Schedule for Public Comment:** Tom Shelton reviewed the Tower 55 Team's initial assessment regarding an east-west trench without having access to the RTC modeling efforts to supplement their analysis. He also provided the TAG a schedule identifying next steps and opportunity for public comments regarding the remaining two alternatives. Public meetings have been scheduled for August 3rd to present both the North-South Trench and East-West Trench to the community. The Tower 55 Team will also schedule presentations to the project stakeholders in July/August timeframe. Specific focus was emphasized on the following milestones:
- July 14, 2009: Fort Worth City Council; Infrastructure and Transportation Committee (confirmed)
 - July 21, 2009: Tarrant County Commissioners Court presentation (confirmed)
 - July 28, 2009: Fort Worth City Council (tentative)
 - August 3, 2009: Public Meetings at Fort Worth ITC (confirmed)
 - August 7, 2009: TAG Committee Meeting (confirmed)
 - August 11, 2009: Fort Worth City Council (tentative)
 - August 13, 2009: Regional Transportation Council Meeting (confirmed)
 - June/July 2009 (TBD): Briefings with Arlington City Council, TxDOT-Fort Worth, TxDOT-Austin (tentative)

Some members of the TAG expressed concern that the proposed schedule appears to be very ambitious and emphasized the importance of having open

issues regarding impacts and mitigation of the East-West Trench evaluated before these events. Mr. Shelton said that NCTCOG is responding to inquiries from decision-makers on project progress; as well as adherence to the approved schedule for obtaining environmental clearance and needs to keep the project moving forward to meet the expectations of the Regional Transportation Council.

Mr. Shelton stated that he hopes an operational meeting can be scheduled to further discuss the east-west trench and will be awaiting contact from UPRR.

Mr. Shelton also requested that Tarrant County consider an opportunity for the team to present to Commissioners Court the current status of the Tower 55 Project. Randy Skinner committed to verifying the date of the next Commissioners Court meeting and reporting back.

Mr. Schelbitzki stated that Union Pacific Railroad – Omaha headquarters has clearly indicated that the railroad would “walk and remove themselves” from the project if the North-South Trench Alternative moves forward as the only alternative being studied. Mr. Schelbitzki further stated that operations through Tower 55 are so critical to their network that Union Pacific is not willing to subject its customers to this level of risk. He stated that the current North-South design and the 2-3 year construction phasing required to build the trench will not allow an acceptable level of rail service. Mr. Shelton, in response, requested that all project partners remain as participants in this important regional project and not to conclude any final judgment until the full evaluation was complete and public comment had been obtained. He said the TAG Committee and NCTCOG staff was charged with the responsibility of completing the mission in the use of the provided federal funding and everyone needs to remain “advocates of the process” in fairly evaluating the criteria, goals, and objectives for all beneficiaries. Ms. Weatherby asked if UPRR was prepared to sit down soon in a workshop setting and provide the Tower 55 team with the operational information necessary to continue evaluation of the two alternatives. Mr. Schelbitzki and Mr. Janke said they are still committed to that and will attempt to schedule that soon.

Next Steps & Questions: Ms. Weatherby shared that a matrix, similar to the meeting handout entitled, Summary of Tower 55 Alternatives Evaluation, should be provided to the public showing the benefits of at-grade improvements. These improvements and benefits should also be listed so that the public understands what is proposed.

Mr. Shelton said that the next TAG Committee will be on August 7, 2009 with COG staff reporting back on receipt of comments from the public meetings. Mr. Shelton also encouraged all project partners to contact COG if additional meetings are needed to discuss any item.

There was no other business and the meeting was adjourned.