

Credit: Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority

183 North Mobility Project

Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority and
Texas Department of Transportation

Travis and Williamson Counties, Texas

Addition of two dynamically-priced express lanes in each direction within an existing corridor.

NOTABLE PRACTICES

Environmental Analysis

- Alternatives included general purpose, high-occupancy vehicle (HOV), and express lanes

Environmental Justice

- Regional tolling analysis set the context for a project-level analysis

Meaningful Public Involvement

- Project website used to hold 10-day “virtual public meetings”
- Shared use paths and sidewalks incorporated based on public engagement

The purpose of the project is to facilitate congestion management in the corridor, provide a reliable route for transit, and facilitate reliable emergency response. In 2013, under free-flow conditions at the posted speed limit (65 miles per hour), travel time from SH 45/RM 620 to MoPac was about eight minutes and average peak period travel times were 12 minutes (southbound – AM) and 13 minutes (northbound – PM). By 2035, under the no build condition, CTRMA forecasted average peak period travel times to be 50 minutes (southbound – AM) and 42 minutes (northbound – PM).

As congestion worsens and travel times increase, the corridor becomes less reliable for transit and emergency response. Travel time reliability is a major factor in establishing effective transit routes. Capital Metro provides transit service within the project area. During peak periods, the agency reduces the frequency of service along the US 183 corridor because of congestion and unreliable travel times.

As planned, the 183 North Mobility Project includes the construction of two dynamically-priced express lanes in each direction, an additional (fourth) general purpose lane to alleviate an existing bottleneck (southbound from approximately Lake Creek Parkway to the entrance ramp from SH 45; southbound from north of McNeil Drive/Spicewood Springs Road to MoPac; and northbound between Braker Lane and McNeil Drive/Spicewood Springs Road) and direct connectors to and from SH 45/RM 620 on



INTRO & BACKGROUND

The Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (Mobility Authority or CTRMA, project sponsor) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) worked with local partners to analyze mobility improvements on U.S. Highway 183 (US 183) in Austin. The resulting study – the 183 North Mobility Project – evaluated a nine-mile section of US 183 between State Highway (SH) 45/Ranch-to-Market Road (RM) 620 in Williamson County to State Loop 1 (MoPac) in Travis County. Because TxDOT has assumed NEPA Assignment under 23 USC 327, TxDOT was the lead agency for the project. TxDOT oversaw CTRMA’s preparation of the analyses in support of the Environmental Assessment (EA). TxDOT prepared the EA.

the north and MoPac on the south. In addition, CTRMA planned transitions between the improved section of US 183 and existing facilities along SH 45/RM 620, MoPac (south to RM 2222) and on US 183 north and south of the project area. See Figure 1.

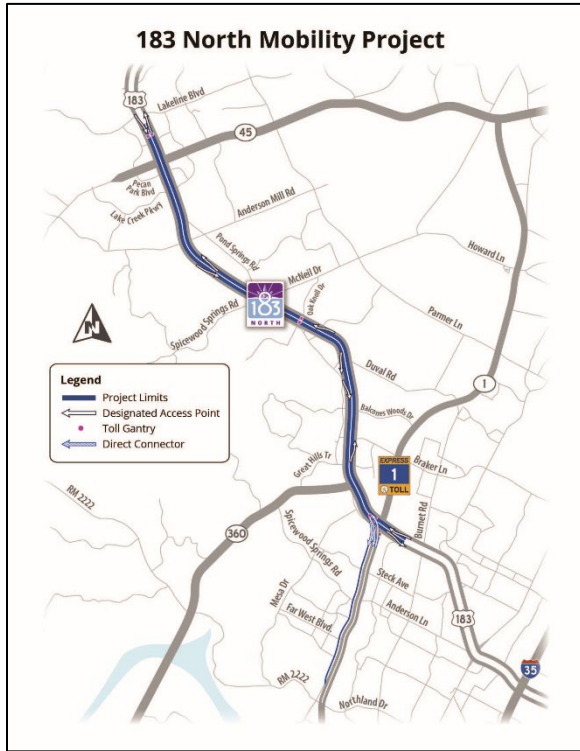


Figure 1. 183 North Mobility Project Location Map. Credit: Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The EA included an alternatives analysis technical memorandum and community impact assessment, indirect impacts, and cumulative impacts technical reports.

The alternatives analysis technical memorandum evaluated transportation system management, transportation demand management, as well as build alternatives including general purpose, HOV lanes, and express lanes. TxDOT evaluated the Express Lanes Alternative and No Build Alternative in the EA.

Ultimately, TxDOT selected the Express Lanes Alternative as the preferred alternative for

meeting the purpose and need: managing congestion and providing a reliable route for transit and emergency response. Additionally, dynamic pricing would provide funding to construct and operate the proposed project, as included in the region’s financially constrained long-range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

CTRMA calculated project-level travel time differences using Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (CAMPO) July 2011 travel demand model. The results showed a reduction in travel time for the express lanes and the general purpose lanes.

TxDOT issued the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) in April 2016. CTRMA anticipates construction activities to commence in early 2022.



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

As part of the community impact assessment, CTRMA and TxDOT conducted a project-level environmental justice (EJ) tolling analysis for the 183 North Mobility Project and evaluated the potential economic impacts of using the dynamically-priced facility. The project-level analysis relied on the conclusions of the Texas Transportation Institute’s *Toll Road Opinion Survey* (2008), which found that the frequency of toll road use was similar between EJ and non-EJ respondents, with about half the respondents reporting that they used toll roads to avoid congestion and for convenient trips. However, EJ respondents were more likely to use toll roads for non-discretionary trips (e.g., trips to work or school). The survey researchers concluded that using toll roads is based more on choice rather than necessity (TTI, 2008).

The results of the project-level EJ and tolling analysis showed that costs for using the express lanes would require a greater percentage of a low-income users’ household income. The travel time analysis noted that implementation of the project would result in substantial improvement in projected 2035 travel times in the general purpose lanes. Additionally, Capital Metro buses would be able to use the express lanes toll-free, enabling more reliable transit along this route. As a result, TxDOT does not anticipate

disproportionately high and adverse effects to minority and/or low-income populations.



MEANINGFUL PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Throughout the environmental review process, CTRMA undertook a comprehensive public engagement strategy that included two open house style community meetings, a project website with virtual engagement opportunities, twitter campaign, and a public hearing.

Input gathered during the first community meeting resulted in the refinement of the purpose and need for the project. CTRMA presented the refined purpose and need statement and the alternatives evaluation criteria at the second public meeting. In addition, the agencies used the project website concurrently to hold virtual public meetings for 10 days in conjunction with the live meetings.

CTRMA noted that meetings with the Northwest Austin Coalition, an organized community group, resulted in reconfiguring ramps to lessen the effects of cut-through traffic on Anderson Mill Road.

CTRMA used the project website to provide virtual access to the materials presented at the public hearing. The slide deck and an audio recording of the technical presentation as well as videos provided at the in-person public hearing were also available in the virtual format.

Though bicycle and pedestrian components were not initially part of the project, based on stakeholder and public engagement, CTRMA

incorporated a shared use path where feasible and sidewalks where the shared use path was infeasible. The two shared use (bicycle/pedestrian) paths will eliminate gaps in the existing bicycle network. In addition, CTRMA will fill gaps in existing sidewalks along the frontage roads throughout the project limits, and all cross streets that do not currently have bicycle lanes will be restriped to include bicycle lanes under US 183.

In addition to the bicycle and pedestrian connectivity, a notable outcome of the public involvement process was implementation of context sensitive solutions for landscaping, water quality and public art.



COMMUNITY BENEFITS

CTRMA will implement dynamic pricing on the express lanes to ensure near free flow conditions and maintain reliability of the facility. Trips on transit vehicles using the express lanes will be more reliable, which could facilitate more frequent service during peak travel times. Furthermore, in 2035, CTRMA anticipates the addition of express lanes to improve average peak period travel times in the general purpose lanes by 9 minutes (southbound – AM) and 11 minutes (northbound – PM).

Bicycle and pedestrian mobility would improve under project with the construction of new shared use path connections, new sidewalks along the frontage roads in the project corridor, and cross-street connections for bicycles/pedestrians.



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PHOTO CREDITS

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RESOURCES

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