



ALAMO RMA
Alamo Regional Mobility Authority
"Moving people faster"

October 17, 2008

Dear Friends and Neighbors;

The recent, sudden withdrawal of federal environmental clearance for improvements to the 281 North corridor has raised some questions from residents and businesses in this area. As the local entity responsible for transportation options in our community, the Alamo RMA would like to provide some answers and other options as the effort to relieve traffic in San Antonio's fastest growing area moves forward.

Two weeks ago, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) withdrew the environmental clearance for improvements on US 281. This devastating action has stalled any additional capacity on US 281 until a new environmental clearance can be granted. A new study is estimated to take between 2 to 5 years to complete.

This action was requested by the Texas Department of Transportation after it discovered irregularities in its procurement of portions of the scientific study team. TxDOT's requests, and FHWA's action, were not based on any finding that the environmental studies were flawed or inaccurate- their actions were based solely on procurement irregularities. The Alamo RMA was not involved in any way in the procurement or preparation of the environmental studies.

The withdrawal of the environmental clearance delays planned traffic relief efforts in the 281 North corridor. The project, which would have been publicly owned and operated, would have contained non-tolled and tolled lanes and was expected to open in approximately 44 months from the time construction started. The decision to remove the clearance - the second official clearance that this corridor has received this decade - means that no capacity improvements to the 281 North corridor, tolled or non-tolled, can happen until a new environmental study is completed.

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This situation raises questions about the near-term and long-term future of the corridor, which the Alamo RMA would like to address:

- An overpass only plan raises serious safety concerns for the driving public. As part of the last environmental clearance study, the FHWA found that building overpasses only is not a solution to relieving traffic congestion along this corridor; and it rejected plans that involved building overpasses only without building the expressway sections, similar to the rest of 281 south of Loop 1604. The FHWA determined that overpasses only, without additional lanes, would create unsafe driving conditions due to the number of driveways, which would still need access to the roadway to allow residents and customers to enter subdivisions and businesses.
- County Judge Nelson Wolff has requested the Alamo RMA take the lead role in preparing a new environmental document for 281 North and to find ways to improve the safety in this corridor while that new study is ongoing. It is the Alamo RMA's intent to manage the environmental process from this point forward. We are exploring options to alleviate traffic and improve safety along the corridor prior to the time new capacity can be added. New capacity will require environmental clearance, but we are confident we can find safety improvements which can help today without needing to wait for the new study to be complete. While these improvements will not alleviate congestion in this corridor, they may help to make travel in the corridor safer until meaningful improvements can be made through the addition of new capacity. In making any improvements the Alamo RMA is committed to doing so without violating federal and state laws to protect the sensitive environment which is important to our community.

This unfortunate delay is further evidence of the need for local leadership and local control over Bexar County's transportation projects. We will continue to work closely with our transportation partners – looking at all options for the community including light rail and other modes of transportation.

As we make progress, direct, two-way communication is important to ensure a productive dialogue. If you have any questions, please feel free to call the Alamo RMA Community Relations staff at (210) 495-5256 or info@AlamoRMA.org.

Sincerely,



Dr. William E. Thornton
Chairman