

An aerial photograph showing a wide landscape with a prominent multi-lane highway corridor running diagonally from the upper left towards the lower right. The surrounding area includes a mix of green fields, brown agricultural plots, and clusters of residential buildings. The sky is clear and bright.

FM 969 / EAST MLK, JR. BLVD. CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

FEBRUARY 2014

 AUSTIN MOBILITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.0 PROGRAM GOALS

The FM 969 / East MLK, Jr. Boulevard Corridor is one of several priority corridors identified in the 2010 City of Austin transportation bond package. This corridor is located in East Austin and extends east through Travis County to Bastrop County. *Imagine Austin*, the city’s newly adopted comprehensive plan, has identified the area served by FM 969 / East MLK Jr. Boulevard as a desired growth area. The goal of the FM 969 / East MLK Jr Blvd Corridor Development Program is to develop a set of recommendations to improve safety, mobility and quality of life along FM 969 between US 183 and Webberville.

2.0 PROJECT PURPOSE AND PROCESS

The purpose of the FM 969 Corridor Development Program is to identify short-and long-term projects to address anticipated needs through 2025.

A comprehensive process was used to analyze the existing conditions and needs within the FM 969 Corridor. **Figure 1** provides a graphic representation of the analysis process.

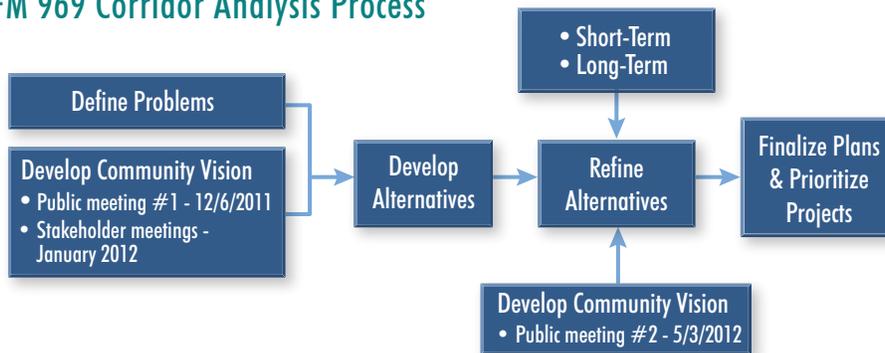
3.0 EXISTING CORRIDOR CHARACTERISTICS AND CONSTRAINTS

For analysis, the 10.9-mile corridor was separated into three character districts:

- Character District 1, Exurban Highway (US 183 to SH 130)
- Character District 2, Rural Village Roadway (SH 130 to Dunlap Road)
- Character District 3, Country Road (Dunlap Road to Webberville)

Character District 1 has small pockets of auto-oriented commercial development, small- and large-lot residential, and civic and institutional uses, along with a significant amount of vacant and undeveloped land. Many new residential developments are planned in this area. The roadway lacks curbs, gutters, sidewalks and bicycle lanes and is lined with drainage ditches and overhead power lines.

FIGURE 1 – FM 969 Corridor Analysis Process



Character District 2 has agricultural and large-lot residential uses. A small section of the corridor is like a village, with small-scale retail, office and civic uses fronting the street. The roadway here also lacks sidewalks and bicycle lanes. Large residential developments are also planned for this area.

Character District 3 is mainly farmland, ranches, large-lot single-family homes, and the City of Austin's new solar energy farm. There are also gravel mining operations present, and they generate significant truck traffic. This area is expected to remain agricultural.

4.0 PROJECT GOALS AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The project goals are to identify a range of projects, policies, and/or services to:

- Improve safety
- Increase mobility and accessibility for drivers, pedestrians, bicycles, and transit users
- Improve quality of life for the roadway users and neighbors of the FM 969 corridor
- Accommodate future growth

Design Considerations

To determine the design considerations for this project, the existing conditions of the corridor were studied. Although the character of the 10.9-mile corridor varies significantly, it retains common characteristics throughout, including a lack of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, relatively high truck volumes, and a significant amount of undeveloped and agricultural land adjacent to the roadway. Existing conditions were categorized:

- **Land use:** Land use patterns along the FM 969 corridor change dramatically from rural area on the east side to urban area to the west side. There

are still much potential for future development on both sides of the corridor.

- **Traffic Conditions:** The corridor in general suffers from less congestion than other corridors in the Austin area, however, a few hot spots are identified with excessive vehicle delays including the segments at US 183 and at Decker Lane.
- **Multimodal Conditions:** Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Capital Metro) and Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS) provide a low amount of service to the corridor.
- **Drainage:** Within the corridor study influence area, FM 969 is crossed approximately 12 times by Walnut Creek, Elm Creek, Decker Creek, Gilleland Creek, and their tributaries. Sections of the FM 969 corridor are also within the 100-year floodplain, and flooding is a problem in several areas.
- **Safety:** A total of 251 crashes were reported between 2008 and 2010 in the corridor. The section that exceeded the statewide average most frequently was that between Decker Lane and FM 973. Traffic patterns indicate a strong commuting pattern. Traffic is heavier westbound in the morning and heavier eastbound in the evening. Traffic congestion in the peak period is rated as unsatisfactory at most of the signalized intersections.

The design considerations to improve the existing conditions are:

- Land use:
 - Break down the corridor into three characteristic districts with different design considerations based on their land use patterns
- Traffic conditions:
 - Evaluate alternative improvements to reduce vehicle delays in certain roadway segments and at hot spot locations

- Multimodal Conditions:
 - Propose improvements that target bicycle and pedestrian access
 - Propose revising the service area for the Capital Metro
- Drainage:
 - Propose curb and gutter on the roadway
 - Improve existing structures
- Safety:
 - Propose improving the safety in the corridor through:
 - Traffic control devices
 - Realignment of skewed intersections
 - Improving sight distances at intersections and along roadway
 - Adding turn lanes
 - Adding metal beam guard fence

5.0 FUTURE CORRIDOR CHARACTERISTICS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The FM 969 corridor is projected to experience significant growth over the next 25 years. Several large residential and mixed-use developments are planned, as well as some commercial sites. Character District 1 has approximately 1,100 undeveloped single-family lots within existing subdivisions and the potential for another 14,000 residents and 19,000 employees in future developments. Character District 2 has more than 8,000 acres of land with the

potential for 40,000 new residents and 18,000 new employees. Additionally, approximately 4,700 acres of undeveloped and un-zoned land are potentially available for future development within the district. Character District 3 has over 14,000 acres of undeveloped and un-zoned land with potential for future development, representing more than 60% of the undeveloped land within the study influence area.

Utilities are also planning to extend lines to the study influence area, including water, wastewater, and a new power substation on Taylor Lane through Austin Energy.

Traffic is expected to increase in the next 15 years between Decker Lane and Webberville, and to decrease slightly between Decker Lane and US 183 due to planned improvements on parallel routes and US 183 that are projected to shift traffic demand to these other routes. An example of ultimate design for FM 969 between US 183 and Decker Lane (FM 3177) is shown in **Figure 2**. The roadway will expand to a 6-lane roadway with a raised median and curb and gutter.

Recommendations were categorized as short-term and long-term improvements. **Table 1** provides a summary of the recommendations.

FIGURE 2 – US 183 to Decker Lane (FM 3177) – Ultimate Typical Section



TABLE 1 – Recommended Short-Term and Long-Term Improvements

Target Year	Roadway	Limits	Description	Funding Sponsor
SHORT-TERM IMPROVEMENTS				
2013	FM 969	At Gilbert Road	Widen westbound shoulder to provide a right-turn lane. Signal retiming	County / TxDOT TxDOT
2013	FM 969	At SH 130 Ramps	Install traffic signals (completed)	TxDOT
2014	FM 969	At FM 973	Install safety lighting on existing signal poles	TxDOT
2014	Johnny Morris Road	Loyola Lane to FM 969	Construct shared use path	City
2014	FM 969	Walnut Creek Trail to Johnny Morris Road	Construct sidewalk	City / TxDOT
2014	FM 969	Gilbert Road to Hound Dog Trail	Construct sidewalks	County / TxDOT
2015	FM 969	Regency Drive to Craigwood Drive	Construct pedestrian-activated signal at Regency Drive, sidewalk, modify signal at Craigwood	City
2016	FM 969	US 183 to Decker Lane (FM 3177)	Re-striping for bicycle lane with TxDOT mill and inlay project	TxDOT – paving City – bicycle lane striping
LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENTS				
2020	Taylor Lane	Braker Extension to FM 969	Widen to 4 lanes with bicycle/ped amenities	County
2020	FM 973 Bypass	FM 973 S. of Manor to US 290 E. of Manor	New location, 4 lanes with bicycle/ped amenities	TxDOT / Manor / County
2020	FM 973	SH 130 to Wildhorse Connector	Widen to 4 lanes with bicycle/ped amenities, improve drainage	TxDOT / County
2030	Decker Lake Road	Decker Lane (FM 3177) to FM 973	Widen to 4 lanes with bicycle/ped amenities	Travis County
2023	Burleson Manor Extension	FM 969 to SH 71 via Caldwell Lane	New location, 2 lanes with bicycle/ped amenities	Travis County
2025	FM 969	US 183 to Decker Lane (FM 3177)	Widen to 6 lanes (Superstreet) with bicycle/ped amenities	TxDOT / City
2035	FM 969	Decker Lane (FM 3177) to SH 130	Convert to Superstreet design	TxDOT / County / City
2035	FM 969	Hunters Bend to Webberville	Widen to 4 lanes with two-way left-turn lane with shared use path	TxDOT / County
2035	FM 973	Colorado River to SH 130	Widen to 4 lanes with bicycle/ped amenities	TxDOT

Source: TxDOT, Travis County

6.0 BENEFITS AND RESULTS

An overview of improvement benefits is provided by project type. The projects are categorized as roadway, bicycle and pedestrian, transit, and safety.

- Roadway Improvement Benefits:
 - Two-way left-turn lane: Reduces the risk of rear-end collisions.
 - Additional lanes: Reduce congestion in the peak periods.
 - Superstreet (non-traditional intersection): Improves traffic operations on congested arterials.
- Bicycle and Pedestrian
 - Sidewalks and shared use Paths: Improves safety for pedestrians.
 - Pedestrian-Actuated Traffic Signal: If warranted, improves the safety of pedestrians crossing a major intersection.
 - Cycle Tracks: Provides a physical barrier from vehicular traffic.

- Transit
 - Improving transit service would ultimately reduce traffic congestion. A service transition plan is in development in coordination with TxDOT, FTA, Capital Metro, and CARTS.
- Safety
 - Traffic Signals: Provide a safe gap in the traffic flow on FM 969 during peak periods.
 - Rumble Strips: Alerts drivers on ramps.
 - Flashing Lights: Improves visibility at stop signs.
 - Safety Lighting: Improves visibility at night.

7.0 IMPROVEMENT IMPLEMENTATION COSTS AND STRATEGIES

Conceptual level cost estimates were prepared for the various short- and long-term improvements. Unit prices were derived from TxDOT Austin District average bid prices (as of December 2011) with adjustments made for the relative size of each improvement. **Table 2** provides the summary costs for each of the conceptual improvements. Those

TABLE 2 – FM 969 Preliminary Roadway Project Cost Projection

Project Cost Summary:				
Section:	Limits:	Short Term	Long Term	Ultimate Cost
District 1	US 183 to SH 130	\$5,593,000	\$63,056,000	\$68,649,000
District 2	SH 130 to Dunlap	\$2,161,000	\$15,139,250	\$17,300,250
District 3	Dunlap to SH 130	\$-	\$25,260,750	\$25,260,750
Project Cost TOTAL:		\$7,754,000	\$103,456,000	\$111,210,000

NOTE: Unit prices were derived from TxDOT Austin District average bid prices in 2011\$. The Engineer has no control over the cost of labor, materials, equipment, or over the contractors methods of determining prices or over competitive bidding or market conditions. Opinions of probable costs provided herein are based on the information known to Engineer at this time and represent only the Engineer's judgment as a design professional familiar with the construction industry. The Engineer cannot and does not guarantee that proposals, bids, or actual construction costs will not vary from its opinion of probable costs.

improvements recommended for implementation are shown in bold text. Conceptual layouts for the long-term improvements are provided in **Appendix I**. Supporting cost information is provided in **Appendix J**.

In today's funding realities it will take several government funding sources to implement the recommendations for the FM 969 Corridor. Traditional federal, State, and local funding sources are among the most attractive alternatives for financing a variety of transportation projects. The traditional funding sources described below include the pertinent sources available from the U.S. Department of Transportation, State and local sources. A more thorough listing of funding sources is provided in **Appendix I**.

- U.S. Department of Transportation Funding Sources
- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- Local Funding Sources
- Innovative Financing

8.0 NEXT STEPS

The adoption of the FM 969 Corridor Development Plan by the City of Austin represents the first step to fulfilling the goals of the study. It is also imperative that Travis County and TxDOT begin the coordination process for the FM 969 County Pass-Through Financing. The next steps toward implementation of the FM 969 Corridor Development Plan include:

- Identify and prioritize short-term projects
 - Identify the funding sources
 - Consider them in the city bond fund during the next bond cycle
- Development of a Neighborhood plan for the FM 969 corridor that merges previous planning efforts
- Priority long-term projects
 - Identify funding sources
- Continue with the ongoing public involvement process
- Continue the study of future transit options and opportunities
- Development of a long-term vision beyond the city limits through interagency coordination