



COTTON BELT

Cotton Belt Corridor Regional Rail

Public Involvement and Agency Coordination

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Prepared by URS Corporation



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) initiated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the Cotton Belt Corridor Regional Rail Project (Cotton Belt Project) in July 2010 with the publication of Notice of Intent in the Federal Register. Uncertainty associated with funding and implementation schedule eventually prompted suspension of the NEPA process. This memorandum documents the process that was utilized to engage the public and appropriate agencies.

Appendix C details the extensive program to include the public and relevant agencies in the decision making process, which was consistent with NEPA process. Should the construction of this future regional rail project involve the use of future federal funds or require project approval by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) or other federal agencies the NEPA process would be reinitiated.

When a locally preferred alternative (LPA) is selected and the Cotton Belt Project is reinitiated, a robust public involvement and agency coordination process will be implemented to ensure appropriate public and agency input is used in the decision-making process.

In compliance with the principles of Environmental Justice, DART will ensure full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision making process.

2.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES

Different strategies were developed and employed in an effort to achieve a high level of public and stakeholder involvement along the Cotton Belt Corridor. These techniques communicated information about the project and focused on garnering public support.

Scoping Meetings

DART held two scoping meetings early in the project development process. One scoping meeting was held for the general public at the Addison Conference Center and one interagency scoping meeting was held at DART headquarters. The intent of the scoping meetings was to solicit early input from the public and agencies regarding purpose and need for the project, alternatives to be studied and environmental effects to be analyzed. A *Scoping Summary Report*, in **Appendix C**, was prepared that documents the process and input received from the general public and agencies. This input provides the framework for the environmental review process.

Area Focus Group Meetings

Area Focus Groups were established to provide input, assist with resolving issues, and develop support for the project. To better address specific issues with the affected communities, the groups were broken down into four segments – Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (DFW Airport)/IH-35, Addison/Carrollton, North Dallas and Plano/Richardson. Each group consisted of residents and community leaders. The project team hosted an initial kick-off meeting in July 2011 with all four groups to present an overview of the project and begin the discussion of needs and concerns. Four additional meetings, one for each group, were held the following November and December to address specific concerns. **Table 2-1** reflects the area focus group meetings and attendees previously discussed.

Zone	Meeting Date	Attendees
Kick-Off Meeting	July 19, 2011	43
Addison/Carrollton	November 16, 2011	7
DFW Airport/IH-35E	November 17, 2011	21
Richardson/Plano	December 5, 2011	31
North Dallas	December 7, 2011	24

Public Meetings

One public meeting was held on August 10, 2011 and was hosted at the Addison Conference Center with 184 meeting attendees present. The public meeting included an open house prior to a presentation from John Hoppie, the DART Project Manager. The open house portion of the meeting provided attendees an opportunity to discuss the Cotton Belt Project one-on-one with project team members.

The presentation included a project overview, issues, needs, and concerns heard at the area focus group kick-off meeting, a video simulating possible alignment options, station locations, and roadway crossings, and other details regarding:

- The four concurrent efforts taking place around the project (The T's TEX Rail Project, North Central Texas Council of Government (NCTCOG)'s Innovative Finance Initiative, DART's Cotton Belt Project and the discussions regarding a new technology vehicle)
- Possible station locations
- An overview of the NEPA process
- An overview of the public involvement process
- Key issues and concerns for each corridor area

Newsletters

One newsletter was created and distributed for the Cotton Belt Project in July 2011 featuring information on the project, an advertisement for the public meeting held in August in Addison, an explanation of the planning phase of this project, area focus group information, a schedule of public involvement activities, and contacts for more information on the project.

Fact Sheets

Five fact sheets were produced and handed out at the area focus group meetings in November and December addressed the following issues related to the Cotton Belt Project:

- Noise
- Traffic and Safety
- Vehicles
- Vibration
- Trenches

Public Comment Database

Public comments received during the project were tracked in a database. The database was updated regularly to reflect comments received at public meetings, area focus groups and through comment forms.

Mailing List

A mailing list was developed by the project team and included federal and state agencies, local officials, regional transportation planning entities, citizen groups, community groups, civic and professional organizations, affected property owners, and people who live and work in the project corridor or who had expressed interest in the project.

Public Involvement Schedule as of June 2013

- July 2010: Public and Agency Scoping Meetings
- July 2011: Newsletter #1 and Area Focus Group Kick-off Meeting
- August 2011: Public Meeting #1
- November 2011: Area Focus Groups
 - Addison/Carrollton Meeting #1
 - DFW Airport/IH 35E Meeting #1
- December 2011 Area Focus Groups
 - Richardson/Plano Meeting #1
 - North Dallas Meeting #1

3.0 AGENCY COORDINATION

3.1 Interagency Coordination During Scoping

As part of scoping, DART held an Interagency Scoping Meeting. Federal, state, tribal, regional and local agencies were invited to provide input during the scoping process. The meeting was held on:

Wednesday, July 28, 2010, 10:00 AM

DART Headquarters - Board Room

1401 Pacific Avenue

Dallas, Texas 75266-7232

There were a total of 21 attendees and the following agencies were represented:

- City of Coppell
- City of Dallas
- City of Irving
- City of Farmers Branch
- City of Plano
- Town of Addison
- DFW Airport
- Office of Senator Hutchinson
- Federal Railroad Administration
- The T
- NCTCOG

The interagency scoping meeting included a formal presentation from DART staff. Presentation boards excerpted from the slide show were displayed around the room and DART staff was on hand to answer questions regarding the project. In addition, a full color aerial Cotton Belt Corridor map was presented that indicated the Cotton Belt Project proposed alignment, potential station location areas and the existing roadway and transit network. During the formal presentation, DART provided a detailed overview of the project history, purpose and need, goals and objectives, NEPA process, proposed alternatives, areas of concern, key issues and scoping process.

The presentation was followed by a comment session. The agencies were invited to provide their comments orally at the meeting. Comment cards were also collected at the meeting. DART indicated that comments would be accepted at the meeting, online, by mail, fax or email. DART staff was on hand at the conclusion of the meeting to address additional questions. Comments from the meeting are summarized below.

The following summarizes the comments received during the interagency scoping meeting:

- Is there a preferred alternative for the Cotton Belt?
- Will there be quarterly update meetings with local governments?
- Coordinate opportunities for the Cotton Belt Project environmental and financial studies to present the project updates together to the public and agencies.

- Ridership will be affected by the efficiency of the system operation.
- DART needs to create a marketing plan that educates the public on the importance of implementing rail for the region.

Written comments were received from two federal agencies and one state agency as listed below. Their letters are included in Appendix C.

- National Park Service: comment indicated that no parks within their jurisdiction will be affected.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: comment letter identified regulatory project manager for the project and assigned a Corps project number for future correspondence.
- Texas Parks and Wildlife: comment letter provided recommendations for consideration in the EIS process in the matter of station locations and route alternatives at the eastern terminus, stream crossings and riparian habitat, rare resources, landscaping and water conservation, and parks and recreation areas.

3.2 Tribal Coordination During Scoping

FTA sent coordination/scoping invitation letters to Native American tribes that may have an interest in the Cotton Belt Project. The letters requested that tribes identify any concerns regarding Traditional Cultural Properties or sacred sites as part of the project. Letters were sent to the following tribes:

- Caddo Nation
- Comanche Nation of Oklahoma
- Tonkawa Tribe of Oklahoma
- Wichita and Affiliated Tribes

A copy of each of these letters can be found in **Appendix C**. None of the tribes attended the interagency scoping meeting.

3.3 Jurisdictional Agency Coordination

Throughout the study, meetings were held with corridor cities to discuss the various alternatives and option under consideration along with issues and concerns specific to each city.

- City of Coppell
- City of Carrollton
- City of Dallas
- Town of Addison
- City of Plano
- City of Richardson
- Texas Department of Transportation



Alliance Transportation Group
Arredondo, Zepeda & Brunz
Bowman Engineering
Connetics Transportation Group
Cox|McLain Environmental Consulting
CP&Y
Criado & Associates
Dunbar Transportation Consulting
HMMH
KAI Texas
K Strategies Group
Legacy Resource Group
Mas-Tek Engineering & Associates
Nathan D. Maier Consulting Engineers
Pacheco Koch Consulting Engineers
Parsons
Schrader & Cline
Spartan Solutions
Stantec Consulting Services Inc.



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