



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

Texas Division

September 8, 2009

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EP-692
DFW

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In Reply Refer To:
HA-TX

Ms. Victoria Rutson
Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW, Room 1106
Washington, DC 20423

Dear Ms. Rutson:

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), is preparing an Environmental Assessment for the Tower 55 project in Tarrant County, Texas. Tower 55 is located at the junction of Union Pacific Railroad and BNSF Railway main lines in the southwest quadrant of the interchange of IH 35W and IH 30 near Downtown Fort Worth and is shown on the attached figure. Because your agency has jurisdiction over railroad service issues and could have a specific interest in Tower 55, we invite you to be a Cooperating Agency under the National Environmental Policy Act, as amended.

The impetus to develop a Tower 55 solution materialized with the TxDOT project to redesign the IH 30/IH 35W interchange in early 1990's. The IH 30 design shifted the roadway and interchange approximately 300 feet to the south along IH 35W, placing it closer to Tower 55. At that time, both the public and private sectors foresaw benefits in a design which addressed both highway and rail issues. Recommendations were made that allowed TxDOT to proceed with the redesign of the IH 30/IH 35W interchange while trying to accommodate future improvements at Tower 55. From July 2006 to May 2007, the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) conducted a feasibility study for improvements to Tower 55. In April 2007, the FHWA accepted the role as lead Federal agency and in September 2007 determined an Environmental Assessment could be prepared for the project. Since that time, the viable alternatives from the feasibility study have been developed to a greater level of detail and public involvement and agency coordination has been conducted.



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Tower 55 is an at-grade intersection of several major railroads and each day 100 to 120 freight trains pass through this location. The Texas NAFTA Study Update states that Tower 55 is single busiest at-grade railroad crossing in the Texas and according to the Union Pacific Railroad, it is the busiest at-grade intersection in the nation. The purpose of the Tower 55 project is to address regional transportation needs by increasing capacity and reducing congestion and wait times for trains and motor vehicles, strengthen economic development opportunities and intermodal connections, and increase safety, in the corridor and the surrounding area.

Although being a Cooperating Agency is a commitment to the project development process, we are not requesting you to prepare portions of any environmental document. Your role as a Cooperating Agency would include the review of the project to identify any other issues your agency may have and address your project related concerns. In addition, we would also provide a copy of the Preliminary Environmental Assessment for your review and comment prior to review. We would also like to extend an offer to meet with you and discuss the project. Please let us know and we will coordinate this meeting for all the cooperating agencies simultaneously.

We would appreciate your early response to this invitation. For further information, please contact Wesley Kaisershot, P.E at (512) 536-5957. He can also be reached by email at wesley.kaisershot@dot.gov.

We look forward to having you as a Cooperating Agency.

Sincerely,



Salvador Deocampo
District Engineer

Attachment

Study Area

The Tower 55 is located at the junction of Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and BNSF Railway (BNSF) main lines in the southwest quadrant of the interchange of IH 35W and IH 30 near Downtown Fort Worth.



Purpose

The purpose of the project is to improve the movement of trains, within and around the current rail infrastructure, that converge on Tower 55.

Background

Tower 55 is an at-grade intersection of several major railroads. Each day 100 to 120 freight trains pass through this location. An additional 70 passenger trains per weekday pass by on the adjacent Trinity Railway Express (TRE). Due to the volume of trains, each train must come to a complete stop prior to crossing. The average wait time is 60 minutes, with 90-minute delays during peak period. Long freight trains with lengthy wait times at Tower 55 are responsible for several negative impacts to the region. These negative impacts include:

- Reduced efficiency of local freight rail
- Crowding out of local freight movements by national contract movements

- Increasing national freight rail congestion
- Increasing freight rail dwell times throughout the region
- Increasing congestion and freight rail crowding at local freight rail yards
- Increasing freight rail idling, capital expenses, labor costs, energy consumption, and air pollutant emissions
- Increasing automobile wait times at railroad/roadway crossing points
- Increasing risk of pedestrian conflict with trains in "stop and start" mode
- Preventing commuter rail access

Previous Studies

- Tower 55 Replacement Study conducted for Tower 55 Task Force, Sept 1992
- Economic Analysis of Grade Separating Tracks at Tower 55, May 1993
- Tower 55 Sketch Plan, May 2007

The following table lists the conceptual alternatives that were recommended for further analysis by the Tower 55 Sketch Plan report. From May 2007 to January 2009, these alternatives have been refined and evaluated in terms of engineering, operations, social, economic, and environmental effects to determine a recommended alternative.

Alternative	Construction Costs (in 2007 \$)	Description	Comments
At-Grade Capacity and Operational Improvements ✓	\$200 Million	• Adding track to maximize concurrent use • Joint operation of some tracks • Re-route Amtrak movements through Fort Worth from the UPRR Mainline to the Trinity Railway Express	The BNSF and UPRR are proceeding with some at-grade improvements. They anticipate beginning construction in 2010.
North/South Trench	\$500 to \$600 Million	• Construct a tunnel directly under the Tower 55 interchange • Design of IH 30/IH 35W interchange was designed to accommodate the trench • Multiple roadway conflicts including Lancaster Avenue	
East/West Flyover	\$550 Million	• Bridge over Fort Worth medical district, BNSF Railway, and IH 35W • Would leave north/south capacity and turning capacity unharmed or improved at-grade	
Fort Worth & Western Railroad Bypass ✓	\$150 to \$200 Million	• A number of upgrades to the current track, structures, and capacity would be necessary to feasibly employ the current track as a bypass for mainline operations • This alternative would require additional right-of-way and would re-instate the Biddison connection between the FW&WRR and BNSF Railway lines.	

Public Involvement

- Two public meetings were held November 28, 2006. Approximately 70 people attended. The meeting was held to educate, inform, and seek comments from the public on proposed solutions to Tower 55. Comments were related to public and school safety, the Tower 55 study, air quality, rail congestion, and potential solutions.
- Two public meetings were held on November 13, 2007, at the Downtown Fort Worth Public Library. The meeting was held to present the early set of alternatives developed to address the goals and objectives of the Tower 55 Rail Reliever Study.
- Two public meetings are scheduled for February 18, 2009, at the Fort Worth Intermodal Transportation Center conference room. At these meetings, the evaluation of the alternatives will be presented along with the recommended locally preferred alternative.

Public Agencies/Stakeholder Involvement

- The development of a solution for Tower 55 is strongly supported by the public agencies and private partners.
- NCTCOG formed a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) comprised of representatives from the Cities of Arlington and Fort Worth, Tarrant County, BNSF Railway, Union Pacific Railroad, Fort Worth and Western Railroad, Fort Worth Transportation Authority, Texas Department of Transportation, and NCTCOG. Non-voting members of the group include the Cities of Haltom City and Saginaw; Amtrak; Dallas, Garland, and Northeastern Railroad; Kansas City Southern Railroad; Federal Highway Administration; Federal Railroad Administration; and Federal Transit Administration.
- The TAG Project Steering Committee has met nine times since June 2007 upon formal initiation of the Tower 55 Rail Reliever Study.