

Chapter 2 – Outreach Process

2.1 – Introduction

The Texas Rail Plan (TRP) is a public policy document that establishes a state vision and objectives for freight and passenger rail service in the state. The TRP includes details about the current state of passenger and freight rail and establishes a short- and long-range investment plan and financing tools that guide future improvements and expansion of the state rail transportation system. This plan updates and replaces the 2005 Texas Rail System Plan.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA) requires state rail plans to include “identification of rail infrastructure issues within the state that reflects consultation with all relevant stakeholders.” In response to this legislation, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) coordinated a consultation process with a diverse group of stakeholders and the public at large. Involvement of these groups provided valuable input and helped guide decisions made during the planning process.

2.2 – Relationship to Other Plans

TxDOT considered findings from other important statewide planning documents to describe issues affecting rail transportation across the state, develop consistent goals and strategies in the plan, and revise future versions of this plan. These findings primarily originate from the TxDOT Strategic Plan and the Texas Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan (SLRTP). The latest version of the Strategic Plan for 2011 to 2015 serves as a report to the governor, legislature, business partners, and most importantly, Texas citizens. In this plan, TxDOT outlines a strategic vision for the state’s transportation system and the goals, objectives, and performance measures to achieve that vision.

The second influential document is the SLRTP. Approval of this document is expected in the November 2010 meeting of the Texas Transportation Commission (TTC) and represents TxDOT’s long-term goals of “maintenance of the existing system, reduction of congestion throughout the state, enhancement of safety, and promotion of economic development” with a horizon year of 2035. The SLRTP prepares an inventory of facilities across all modes and addresses the need for improvements to those modes, including freight and passenger rail.

2.3 – Public Outreach Process

Visioning Workshops

As a part of the public outreach process in developing the state rail plan (in accordance with enacted policy at both state and federal levels), a team comprised of representatives from TxDOT, Cambridge Systematics, and the Center for Transportation Research (CTR) at the University of Texas-Austin engaged stakeholders in a series of visioning workshops. These meetings took place in May 2010 at seven locations across the state: Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, Longview, and Lubbock. The team identified and invited stakeholders based on a variety of criteria, but included representatives from local municipal governments, transit agencies, federal agencies, advocacy groups, rail labor, rail customers, ports, economic development corporations, planning organizations, rail districts, freight railroads, Amtrak, and other TxDOT entities. Although workshops varied in size, they generally involved 20 to 60 participants. Workshops in larger metropolitan areas generally exhibited higher attendance, although Dallas and Longview were the exceptions to this trend. Workshop attendance was as follows in Table 2-1:

Table 2-1: Visioning Workshop Locations and Attendance

| City/Day/Date | Facility | Number of Attendees |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| El Paso, Thursday, May 6, 2010 | La Placita Conference Center, El Paso International Airport | 24 |
| Corpus Christi, Friday, May 7, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Training Center | 21 |
| Dallas, Monday, May 10, 2010 | DalTrans IT Center Conference Room (Mesquite) | 30 |
| Lubbock, Thursday, May 13, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Training Center | 23 |
| Houston, Monday, May 17, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Auditorium | 59 |
| Longview, Thursday, May 20, 2010 | Maude Cobb Conference Center | 56 |
| Austin, Friday, May 21, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Training Center | 51 |
| Total | | 264 |

The purpose of these workshops was multi-faceted, but intended to develop a vision for an effectively-functioning Texas passenger rail and freight rail system for the future. Workshops commenced with an introduction from recently-named Rail Division (RRD) Director William Glavin, who turned the presentation over to Allan Rutter of Cambridge Systematics to provide a general overview of rail planning and the workshop agenda. Participants then broke into divided discussions based on if they were passenger rail stakeholders or freight rail stakeholders. CTR and Cambridge Systematics moderated sessions from this point.

The first session focused on the short- and long-term vision for each particular type of rail. Specifically for passenger rail, participants contributed ideas in response to the following questions:

- What would a highly-functional Texas passenger rail system look like in the next 5 to 10 years? In the next 10 to 20 years?
- What Texas corridors have the highest potential for Intercity Passenger Rail/High Speed Rail (IPR/HSR)?
- What are the major transit/multimodal hubs in your region that IPR/HSR should serve?
- What are the most important benefits of public investment in IPR/HSR?

Similarly, freight rail stakeholders answered questions related to the improvement of the freight rail system in the region and state:

- What would an effectively-functioning Texas freight rail system look like in 5 to 10 years? In 10 to 20 years?
- What public policy issues would be raised by the changes in the freight rail system resulting from this vision?
- What are the major freight connections/intermodal hubs in your region that should be connected to the freight rail system?
- What are the most important benefits of public investment in the freight rail system?

The next sessions in the visioning workshop solicited feedback from both passenger and freight stakeholders in mixed groups regarding the implementation of improvements to both passenger and freight rail, including compatibility constraints and funding issues.

First, discussion addressed issues related to passenger and freight rail compatibility:

- In your region, what is the balance of priority/importance between passenger rail and freight rail improvements?
- What issues are raised when passenger rail service operates on freight rail lines?
- How could these issues be mitigated or managed?
- What are the major public safety issues that need to be considered for passenger and freight rail in the future?

Following a break, the discussion addressed funding issues facing the improvement of rail in Texas. Discussion from these sessions focused on answers related to the following:

- What are some possible ideas for sources of funding for rail improvements?
- Are there public incentives that can encourage private investments that further state rail plan objectives?
- What are realistic expectations of federal, state, and local entities in delivering plan projects?
- What type of public policy would need to be implemented to advance rail improvements?
- What standards would you use to prioritize passenger rail projects? To prioritize freight rail projects?

From these discussions, participants identified a number of regional priorities for freight and passenger rail, as well as issues facing compatibility and potential funding sources and guidance. The state's different regions had diverse ideas and needs related to these topics, which were voiced during workshops. The following is a summary of some of the key points made in each region:

Austin

- Rail relocation is a major issue that would allow smoother freight operations and additional capacity for passenger rail, as well as increased rail safety.
- Potential addition of passenger rail along interstate highway medians or on new tracks in existing freight rail right-of-way is needed.

- The primary corridor of interest is San Antonio to Austin to Dallas, although a connection to Houston via College Station is also needed.
- Major stations of interest include downtown Austin, San Antonio, San Marcos, Round Rock, and Georgetown; other centers include Round Rock medical/university center and a new intermodal freight center in west San Antonio and former Kelly Air Force Base.
- Dedicated funding is very important; new funding should be flexibly applied and not limited to specific modes.
- Lift state caps on sales tax funding so regions can use sales taxes for transportation projects.
- Implement utility fees for use of state highway right-of-way.
- Short line railroad development is important for economic development.
- Institute tax credits for private rail investors.

Corpus Christi

- Freight rail movements outnumber current or possible passenger rail train movements in this region, therefore freight service is more important.
- San Antonio is a primary destination for high-speed intercity passenger rail (HSIPR) connecting to Texas Triangle-based HSIPR service.
- Relocating freight rail service away from urban areas is viewed as a cost-prohibitive proposition; funds should go to other rail-related improvements.
- Additional flexibility is requested for possible new state transportation funding sources, allowing regions to choose to allocate funds to freight or passenger rail improvements.
- Freight service is vital to South Texas, as this is a conduit from the Texas-Mexico border to the rest of the U.S.
- Freight rail lines into South Texas need more capacity (e.g., better signals, longer sidings) to offer more rail service for bulk terminals at Port of Corpus Christi.
- The completion of the Robstown to Victoria KCS line will expand competitive rail options for South Texas.

- Robstown is identified as major intermodal center for freight and passenger in the Corpus Christi area.
- Border cities need connections for passenger rail, including substantial motorbus service originating and terminating in Mexico.

Dallas

- Most attendees were interested in passenger rail (approximately two-thirds of attendance).
- Major corridors of interest are Dallas/Ft. Worth to Austin to San Antonio and Dallas/Ft. Worth to Houston, with minimal discussion of East Texas and Oklahoma.
- HSIPR in this corridor should provide passengers with two different options: An express service with fewer stops and higher average speed; and a regular route with more stops and slower average speed. Downtown intermodal centers are natural hubs for HSIPR (Dallas Union Station and Ft. Worth Jones Intermodal Transportation Center); DFW Airport was also included (most likely as a service to the Centrepoint Station) but not prioritized as highly compared to other transit services.
- Increased interest in passenger rail development is viewed as a means of building support for freight rail network improvements.
- It was suggested that freight rail corridors be used for HSIPR, but not necessarily the existing tracks.
- Calls were heard for new, dedicated funding for rail projects and for increased modal flexibility for new funding streams.

El Paso

- Freight rail movements outnumber current or possible passenger rail train movements in these regions, therefore freight service is more essential.
- San Antonio is a primary destination for HSIPR connecting to the Texas Triangle-based HSIPR service.
- Relocating freight rail service away from urban areas is viewed as a cost-prohibitive proposition; funds should be applied to other rail-related improvements.

- Additional flexibility was requested regarding possible new state transportation funding sources, allowing regions to choose to allocate funds to freight or passenger rail improvements.
- Other passenger rail corridors of interest include El Paso to Las Cruces and El Paso to Albuquerque commuter rails.
- Better Texas and New Mexico road access and a new border crossing/Juarez bypass are needed to enable the Santa Teresa, New Mexico freight rail facilities to replace downtown El Paso rail yards, opening up property for redevelopment.
- More attention is needed for cross-border rail movements (e.g., crew changes, train inspections).
- The primary intermodal passenger facility in El Paso would be Union Depot.
- Grade separations and grade crossing improvements are needed as train movements increase.
- If public money is invested in rail, allow funding flexibility within different regions for different purposes; don't allocate all funding to costly HSIPR in Texas Triangle cities.
- If public funds are used for rail improvements—whether derived from taxes on freight shipments or general taxes collected expressly for HSIPR capital funding—rail users ultimately pay for the improvements (freight charges are passed along to rail customers, and HSIPR operating costs are minimized through passenger revenues).

Houston

- Give increased attention to commuter rail possibilities on lower volume freight lines, with further discussion of separate passenger and freight lines due to capacity limitations to handle freight volumes in the future.
- There is no real consensus on major passenger rail terminal locations (US 290/IH 610, downtown, airports, multiple urban centers); service along the IH 45 and IH 35 corridors is most essential.
- Rail yards are difficult to access or expand; rail line consolidations (through mergers) result in connectivity issues.
- Grade crossing improvements and grade separations are needed for both freight and passenger service improvements.

- Should the Harris County Toll Road Authority (HCTRA) seek authority to use surplus toll revenues to support rail project development in the same manner as Regional Mobility Authorities (RMAs)?
- Shipper benefits from capacity expansion will lead to private sector funding for projects.
- The Texas Legislature should consider local option funding and freight railroad liability protection for new passenger service.

Longview

- This region is highly interested in passenger rail service connecting from Dallas/Ft. Worth to East Texas to Little Rock, AR or Memphis, TN and Shreveport, LA or Meridian, MS.
- More rail infrastructure is needed to accommodate a variety of needed passenger rail services within existing freight lines.
- As support for incremental passenger rail grows, operational modeling and simulation are needed to determine the capacity needed on freight lines for modest increases in frequency and speed.
- Most cities planning for intermodal connections desire downtown locations, most of which are located in old rail depots.
- The state should consider preserving rail right-of-way and abandoned rail corridors for possible conversion to passenger rail use.
- Closing grade crossings is important.
- Consider a variety of state funding options for rail purposes—perhaps taxes on oil and gas generation and/or transportation

Lubbock

- Give more attention to freight issues, given the lack of passenger rail service.
- Short line rail services support economic development.
- West Texas needs more access to rail intermodal service to support manufacturing and agricultural industries.
- Passenger rail service is viewed as a potential tourism benefit to the Panhandle.

- If new state funding for rail were available for freight improvements and for passenger rail services, freight projects in West Texas should benefit from that funding rather than simply allocating all public money to passenger rail in the Texas Triangle.
- The City of Lubbock implemented a supplemental franchise fee on utilities (e.g., phone, electric, cable, gas) used in part to fund transportation projects. These moneys have been used to leverage state/federal dollars for new highway projects and avoid toll roads. A franchisee fee for utility use of public right-of-way on state and local roads could provide a revenue stream for rail projects.

Rail Steering Committee

At the conclusion of the visioning workshops, individuals with a demonstrated interest in the success of the TRP were identified. These individuals represent various entities and regions that have an interest in and play a critical role in furthering planning and implementation of rail projects in the state. Representatives include the following:

Railroads: Joe Adams, Union Pacific Railroad (UP); Aaron Hegeman and Dean Wise, BNSF Railway Company (BNSF); Kevin McIntosh, Kansas City Southern Railway Company (KCS); Steve George, Ft. Worth and Western Railroad (FWWR); and Bruce Carswell, West Texas and Lubbock Railway (WTLC).

Advocates: Travis Kelly, Texas High Speed Rail Transportation Corporation; Tim Vaughn, East Texas Corridor Council; and Peter LeCody, Texas Rail Advocates.

Regional representatives: Audrey Trotti, Transit Oriented Development (Houston); Fred Babin, Port of Corpus Christi; Bob Thompson, Alamo RMA (San Antonio); Maureen Crocker, Gulf Coast Rail District (Houston); Karen Owen, Longview Metropolitan Planning Organization; and E'Lisa Smetana, San Angelo Metropolitan Planning Organization.

The committee was appointed to represent a wide spectrum of views and experiences, but the number of committee members was limited to enhance the effective operation and interaction of the committee. Other stakeholder groups not represented in the committee were invited to participate in public meetings and many different groups and individuals offered written comments on the TRP.

Public Meetings

Based on feedback from the initial visioning workshops held throughout the state, TxDOT developed a draft version of the TRP and opened the plan to public comment during public meetings. In August 2010, TxDOT representatives, as well as Cambridge Systematics and CTR employees, returned to six of the original seven cities (Austin,

Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, and Lubbock), as well as Pharr, San Antonio, and Tyler. The dates, locations and attendance at these public meetings are summarized in Table 2-2. These meetings sought public review and comment on the first draft version of the TRP, providing TxDOT with valuable feedback to make substantive changes to the TRP through subsequent revisions.

Table 2-2: Public Meeting Locations and Attendance

| City/Day/Date | Facility | Number of Attendees |
|---|---|---------------------|
| Houston, Monday, August 2, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Auditorium | 134 |
| Corpus Christi, Tuesday, August 3, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Training Center | 38 |
| Dallas, Wednesday, August 4, 2010 | DalTrans IT Center Conference Room (Mesquite) | 76 |
| San Antonio, Thursday, August 5, 2010 | VIA Transit Board Room | 68 |
| Pharr, Monday, August 9, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Training Center | 40 |
| Austin, Tuesday, August 10, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Training Center | 78 |
| El Paso, Monday, August 16, 2010 | La Placita Conference Center, El Paso International Airport | 18 |
| Fort Worth, Tuesday, August 17, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Training Center | 46 |
| Lubbock, Wednesday, August 18, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Training Center | 25 |
| Tyler, Thursday, August 19, 2010 | TxDOT District Office Auditorium | 43 |
| Total | | 523 |

Meetings were conducted with a common format:

- Five maps from the TRP were displayed in each meeting room (a Texas Rail System map, a map of Existing Passenger Rail Services in Texas, a Freight Density map, a map illustrating TxDOT districts in which regional freight studies had been or were being conducted, and a map of potential intercity passenger rail corridors), allowing members of the public to review information and ask questions of TxDOT staff and consultants.

- TxDOT RRD staff offered a thorough summary of major issues covered in all chapters of the TRP.
- Questions and comments were taken from those attending the meetings and responses given. All questions were recorded in meeting notes.
- Meetings were scheduled from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.; all meetings ended on time.

Members of the public were invited to complete Rail Plan Questionnaires and/or comment sheets. They were also invited to submit comments to the TRP page on the TxDOT website. A summary of issues discussed at the public meetings. Comments submitted at each meeting are summarized below:

Houston

- High interest in passenger rail issues was exhibited. Support for HSR over 150 mph to Triangle cities (Dallas/Ft. Worth, Houston, Austin, and San Antonio) is preferred over expanding existing Amtrak services.
- Interconnectivity between HSR and local transit services is a requisite for HSR services to function optimally. Broad support for commuter rail and light rail to link HSR to local job activity centers in region was expressed.
- There is public support for locating passenger rail and HSR along existing highway and freight rail rights-of-way.
- Questions were fielded about the security of HSR passengers and of freight rail cargoes.

Corpus Christi

- Concern was expressed about the rail infrastructure in Mexico; Texas facilities should accommodate new developments.
- New container traffic after the Panama Canal is widened should be a boon for Texas ports, including Corpus Christi. More rail connections to Port of Corpus Christi will be needed.
- Connect Corpus Christi to San Antonio and Houston via passenger rail service. Current Amtrak services in Texas should run daily.

Dallas

- Expand both passenger and freight rail capacity, including transit connectivity. Tower 55 improvements were supported, as the project has positive impacts on freight and passenger services.
- To remain viable, short line railroads need state financial support for capacity improvements.
- Some commenters believe freight rail should pay for its own improvements. Others stressed the need for sustainable state funding for rail improvements, as well as local funding sources for commuter rail.
- The general public needs to be educated in rail issues to generate support for long-term funding.

San Antonio

- Relocating rail away from urban areas is needed to re-route hazardous materials and free up capacity for passenger rail. The state rail relocation fund needs to be fully funded.
- Support for Lone Star Rail service from San Antonio to Austin to Georgetown was expressed.
- HSR services should connect to San Antonio. Passenger rail services should provide bicycle storage, particularly between college towns.
- Texas should lead the nation with respect to passenger rail issues rather than follow.

Pharr

- HSR services in the Texas Triangle cities should connect to the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), given the expected population growth in next 30 years.
- HSR services to this area should provide connections to extensive motor coach services in major RGV cities.
- Support was expressed for rail relocation projects in Brownsville.

Austin

- Rail relocation is needed to move freight out of Central Austin and free up capacity for Lone Star Rail District passenger rail service to San Antonio.
- Support was expressed for sustainable funding to improve freight and passenger rail facilities.
- Captive rail shippers believe that any public funding for freight rail capacity should be predicated on rail rate relief.

El Paso

- Engage tourism agencies in passenger rail planning to ensure that the intercity travel patterns of tourists are captured and served.
- Expand existing Amtrak service so passenger trains run daily; re-establish Amtrak service from El Paso to Dallas/Ft. Worth along the UP line.
- Repair the Presidio connection at the Texas-Mexico border to expand freight traffic along the South Orient rail line (SORR).
- Rail funding is supported, as is HSR service in the Triangle cities. HSR is given preference over expanding existing Amtrak services.
- Concern was expressed about the practical and political effects of right-of-way acquisition for new passenger rail service.
- Creation of the RRD was welcomed as part of TxDOT's long-term commitment to multimodal transportation.

Lubbock

- Passenger rail connection to Dallas/Ft. Worth is welcomed, particularly conventional speeds (not HSR).
- Support was expressed for sustained rail funding at the state level, so that Texas is more self-sufficient and not reliant on undependable federal funding.
- Grade crossing improvements are needed to accommodate expanded freight and passenger rail service.

Tyler

- More rail access (short lines and industrial leads) is needed for economic development benefits.
- Keep more existing rail facilities operational rather than allowing rail lines to be abandoned. The state should support short line rail service maintenance.
- Support was expressed for passenger rail service, both conventional and HSR, into East Texas, with connections to Louisiana and Arkansas. Texas should cooperate more with adjacent states with respect to passenger rail planning.

Other Public Meeting Input

TxDOT provided TRP questionnaires at all public meeting sites; 180 questionnaires were completed and turned in, most frequently at the meetings themselves. The public meeting held in Dallas-Ft. Worth generated the most responses (37), followed by Houston (33), Austin (24), and San Antonio (19). The questionnaire requested input on rail improvements, travel patterns, and information on meeting attendees.

Table 2-3 lists the questionnaire results and levels of support for various rail improvements, with the highest response percentage highlighted. Tables 2-4, 2-5, and 2-6 list cross-tabulations by meeting location.

Table 2-3: Rail Plan Questionnaire Responses (percentages of responses)

| | Not Important | Neutral | Very Important | Highest Priority |
|--|---------------|---------|----------------|------------------|
| Passenger Questions | | | | |
| Increasing speed of current Amtrak service on existing routes | 8 | 39 | 34 | 19 |
| Improving frequency, reliability of current Amtrak service on existing routes | 5.5 | 25 | 38.5 | 31 |
| Expanding Amtrak service to new cities | 7.5 | 30 | 38 | 25 |
| Coordinating rail passenger service with existing transit service | 1.5 | 13.5 | 44.5 | 40.5 |
| Implementing high-speed rail service | 7 | 16 | 36 | 42 |
| Freight Questions | | | | |
| Double tracking existing freight routes to increase capacity | 3 | 24 | 45 | 28 |
| Focus on relieving bottlenecks and congestion points on the freight network | 0.5 | 8 | 41.5 | 50 |
| Adding capacity to transfer intermodal containers from rail to highway in other urban areas in Texas | 4 | 29 | 47 | 20 |
| Adding capacity to mode shift from highway to rail | 0 | 11.5 | 47.5 | 41 |
| Improving capacity and functionality of rail crossings on Texas-Mexico border | 5 | 34 | 41 | 19 |
| Safety Questions | | | | |
| Reducing the number of highway-rail grade crossings | 2.5 | 22 | 43.5 | 32 |
| Installing or improving warning signs at highway-rail grade crossings on private roads | 6 | 29 | 42 | 23 |
| Providing grade separations in high rail traffic corridors to reduce blocked crossings | 0.5 | 11.5 | 42 | 46 |
| Constructing new freight-rail lines around major cities to move hazardous material rail traffic out of urban areas | 3 | 19 | 41.5 | 36 |

Table 2-4: Rail Plan Questionnaire Responses–Passenger Rail Questions by Location (percentages of responses)

| Meeting Location | Increase speed on existing Amtrak routes | | | | Increase reliability, frequency of existing Amtrak routes | | | | Expand Amtrak to new cities | | | | Coordinating with existing transit service | | | | Implementing high-speed rail service | | | |
|------------------|--|------|------|------|---|------|------|------|-----------------------------|------|------|------|--|------|------|------|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP |
| Austin | 13.0 | 30.4 | 39.1 | 17.4 | 8.7 | 34.8 | 30.4 | 26.1 | 9.1 | 50.0 | 31.8 | 9.1 | 9.1 | 18.2 | 45.5 | 27.3 | 13.0 | 13.0 | 43.5 | 30.4 |
| Corpus Christi | 18.2 | 36.4 | 36.4 | 9.1 | 9.1 | 27.3 | 45.5 | 18.2 | 9.1 | 27.3 | 45.5 | 18.2 | - | 40.0 | 30.0 | 30.0 | 9.1 | 9.1 | 63.6 | 18.2 |
| DFW | 11.4 | 40.0 | 28.6 | 20.0 | 11.8 | 14.7 | 41.2 | 32.4 | 11.8 | 41.2 | 29.4 | 17.6 | - | - | 51.4 | 48.6 | - | 14.7 | 35.3 | 50.0 |
| El Paso | - | 28.6 | 42.9 | 28.6 | - | 14.3 | 42.9 | 42.9 | - | - | 57.1 | 42.9 | - | 14.3 | 42.9 | 42.9 | 14.3 | 14.3 | 57.1 | 14.3 |
| Houston | 13.3 | 43.3 | 30.0 | 13.3 | 3.3 | 36.7 | 40.0 | 20.0 | 6.7 | 33.3 | 43.3 | 16.7 | - | 10.0 | 40.0 | 50.0 | 3.2 | 9.7 | 19.4 | 67.7 |
| Lubbock | 16.7 | 66.7 | 16.7 | - | 16.7 | 66.7 | 16.7 | - | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 50.0 | - | 16.7 | 50.0 | 33.3 | - |
| Pharr | - | 55.6 | 33.3 | 11.1 | - | 38.9 | 33.3 | 27.8 | - | 16.7 | 33.3 | 50.0 | - | 15.8 | 47.4 | 36.8 | 5.6 | 22.2 | 44.4 | 27.8 |
| San Antonio | 4.8 | 42.9 | 23.8 | 28.6 | 4.8 | 14.3 | 42.9 | 38.1 | 4.8 | 14.3 | 33.3 | 47.6 | - | 10.0 | 45.0 | 45.0 | - | 19.0 | 28.6 | 52.4 |
| Tyler | - | 25.0 | 31.3 | 43.8 | - | 18.8 | 31.3 | 50.0 | 6.7 | 26.7 | 46.7 | 20.0 | - | 13.3 | 53.3 | 33.3 | 14.3 | 21.4 | 21.4 | 42.9 |
| Other | 5.9 | 35.5 | 47.1 | 11.8 | 5.9 | 17.6 | 47.1 | 29.4 | 12.5 | 18.8 | 43.8 | 25.0 | - | 23.5 | 29.4 | 47.1 | 11.8 | 5.9 | 41.2 | 41.2 |
| Online | - | 25.0 | 58.3 | 16.7 | - | 8.3 | 41.6 | 50.0 | - | 33.3 | 50.0 | 16.7 | - | 9.1 | 50.0 | 45.4 | 8.3 | 25.0 | 33.3 | 33.3 |

NI=Not Important, NEU=Neutral, VI=Very Important, HP=Highest Priority
 Note: Cells with more than 40% responses are highlighted in green to indicate higher support.

Table 2-5: Rail Plan Questionnaire Responses–Freight Rail Questions by Location(*percentages of responses*)

| Meeting Location | Double tracking existing freight routes | | | | Focus on bottlenecks and congestion points | | | | Adding intermodal transfer capacity in other urban areas | | | | Adding capacity to mode shift from highway to rail | | | | Improving border rail crossings | | | |
|------------------|---|------|------|------|--|------|------|------|--|------|------|------|--|------|------|------|---------------------------------|------|------|------|
| | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP |
| Austin | 4.8 | 4.8 | 52.4 | 38.1 | - | 9.1 | 45.5 | 45.5 | 4.5 | 31.8 | 45.5 | 18.2 | - | 8.7 | 52.2 | 39.1 | - | 42.9 | 42.9 | 14.3 |
| Corpus Christi | - | 30.0 | 70.0 | - | - | 10.0 | 20.0 | 70.0 | - | 30.0 | 50.0 | 20.0 | - | 20.0 | 70.0 | 10.0 | - | 40.0 | 40.0 | 20.0 |
| DFW | - | 12.9 | 61.3 | 25.8 | - | 8.8 | 26.5 | 64.7 | - | 26.7 | 53.3 | 20.0 | - | 9.7 | 45.2 | 45.2 | 6.5 | 41.9 | 38.7 | 12.9 |
| El Paso | 16.7 | - | 33.3 | 50.0 | - | - | 50.0 | 50.0 | - | 16.7 | 50.0 | 33.3 | - | 16.7 | 66.7 | 16.7 | 14.3 | - | 42.9 | 42.9 |
| Houston | 6.9 | 51.7 | 27.6 | 13.8 | 3.2 | 6.5 | 48.4 | 41.9 | 10.0 | 36.7 | 43.3 | 10.0 | - | 16.7 | 46.7 | 36.7 | 10.0 | 43.3 | 33.3 | 13.3 |
| Lubbock | - | - | 83.3 | 16.7 | - | - | 20.0 | 80.0 | - | 16.7 | 16.7 | 66.7 | - | - | 16.7 | 83.3 | - | 33.3 | 33.3 | 33.3 |
| Pharr | 5.6 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 27.8 | - | 11.1 | 44.4 | 44.4 | - | 18.8 | 62.5 | 18.8 | - | 5.6 | 61.1 | 33.3 | - | 11.1 | 27.8 | 61.1 |
| San Antonio | 4.8 | 23.8 | 42.9 | 28.6 | - | 9.5 | 47.6 | 42.9 | 14.3 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 19.0 | - | 9.5 | 38.1 | 52.4 | - | 10.0 | 75.0 | 15.0 |
| Tyler | - | - | 53.3 | 46.7 | - | 13.3 | 40.0 | 46.7 | - | 40.0 | 40.0 | 20.0 | - | 13.3 | 53.3 | 33.3 | 13.3 | 53.3 | 26.7 | 6.7 |
| Other | - | 17.6 | 29.4 | 52.9 | - | - | 47.1 | 52.9 | - | 5.9 | 70.6 | 23.5 | - | 11.8 | 35.3 | 52.9 | - | 43.8 | 50.0 | 6.3 |
| Online | - | 58.3 | 33.3 | 8.3 | - | 8.3 | 58.3 | 33.3 | - | 45.4 | 39.6 | 18.2 | - | 16.6 | 41.6 | 41.6 | 8.3 | 33.3 | 41.6 | 16.7 |

NI=Not Important, NEU=Neutral, VI=Very Important, HP=Highest Priority

Note: Cells with more than 40% responses are highlighted in green to indicate higher support.

Table 2.6: Rail Plan Questionnaire Responses–Rail Safety Questions by Location (percentages of responses)

| Meeting Location | Reducing the number of highway-rail grade crossings | | | | Warning signs at grade crossings on private roads | | | | Grade separations in high rail traffic corridors | | | | New rail lines around major cities to move hazmat rail traffic | | | |
|------------------|---|------|------|------|---|------|------|------|--|------|------|------|--|------|------|------|
| | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP | NI | NEU | VI | HP |
| Austin | | 13.6 | 54.5 | 31.8 | 9.1 | 13.6 | 54.5 | 22.7 | | 9.1 | 50.0 | 40.9 | | 8.7 | 39.1 | 52.2 |
| Corpus Christi | | 20.0 | 70.0 | 10.0 | | 20.0 | 60.0 | 20.0 | | 10.0 | 60.0 | 30.0 | | 50.0 | 50.0 | |
| DFW | | 15.2 | 54.5 | 30.3 | 6.5 | 29.0 | 45.2 | 19.4 | | 3.1 | 34.4 | 62.5 | | 15.2 | 48.5 | 36.4 |
| El Paso | | 28.6 | 28.6 | 42.9 | | 28.6 | 42.9 | 28.6 | | | 71.4 | 28.6 | 14.3 | 14.3 | 14.3 | 57.1 |
| Houston | | 19.4 | 35.5 | 45.2 | 3.2 | 41.9 | 45.2 | 9.7 | | 12.9 | 38.7 | 48.4 | 3.2 | 19.4 | 51.6 | 25.8 |
| Lubbock | | 50.0 | 50.0 | | | 16.7 | 83.3 | | | 16.7 | 83.3 | | 16.7 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 33.3 |
| Pharr | 5.9 | 5.9 | 47.1 | 41.2 | 5.9 | 17.6 | 29.4 | 47.1 | | 11.8 | 41.2 | 47.1 | | 11.1 | 27.8 | 64.7 |
| San Antonio | 4.8 | 33.3 | 38.1 | 23.8 | 4.8 | 42.9 | 28.6 | 23.8 | | 9.5 | 38.1 | 52.4 | 9.5 | 9.5 | 23.8 | 57.1 |
| Tyler | | 31.3 | 37.5 | 31.3 | 12.5 | 25.0 | 37.5 | 25.0 | 6.3 | 18.8 | 18.8 | 56.3 | 6.3 | 25.0 | 56.3 | 12.5 |
| Other | 14.3 | 28.6 | 35.7 | 35.7 | 6.7 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 33.3 | - | 17.6 | 41.2 | 41.2 | - | 37.5 | 25.0 | 37.5 |
| Online | 8.3 | 33.3 | 25.0 | 33.3 | 8.3 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 25.0 | - | 25.0 | 41.6 | 33.3 | - | 0.3 | 66.7 | 8.3 |

NI=Not Important, NEU=Neutral, VI=Very Important, HP=Highest Priority
 Note: Cells with more than 40% responses are highlighted in green to indicate higher support.

When considering passenger rail improvements, respondents indicated the greatest support for coordinating passenger rail with transit services and implementing HSR service. This data was borne out of comments and questions, written and oral, at almost all public meetings and among most respondents. Tyler and El Paso respondents favored expansion of existing Amtrak services. Lubbock and El Paso respondents were less favorable of new HSR service.

When looking at freight rail improvements, more respondents prioritized relieving bottlenecks and congestion points, while also favoring adding freight rail capacity to shift freight from highways to rail. Lubbock respondents were more supportive of expanding intermodal access and Pharr and El Paso respondents supported expansion of capacity and functionality of rail crossings with Mexico.

The safety improvement that garnered the most support was the provision of grade separations in high rail traffic corridors to reduce blocked crossings. This improvement elicited statewide support, except for respondents in Lubbock,¹ where no one marked this as a critical need. Rail relocation to remove hazardous materials from the proximity of other traffic was a common theme in many public meetings. More than 50% of respondents in El Paso, Austin, San Antonio, and Pharr marked this as a critical need.

Respondents were asked to weigh the need for passenger or freight rail improvements with a percentage allocation. Slightly more respondents (around 53%) supported passenger rail more than freight rail across the state. Respondents in San Antonio and Houston were most supportive of passenger rail, with 70% of respondents in Lubbock supporting freight.

Most respondents (58%) found out about the TRP public meetings from the Internet, either through TxDOT announcements or from other sources. A small number (18%) learned of the meetings from friends or colleagues.

Respondents were asked how often they traveled to the cities hosting TRP public meetings—never, rarely (1-2 trips per year), infrequently (3-11 trips per year), weekly, or monthly. Cities outside the Texas Triangle were least visited—El Paso, Tyler, Corpus Christi, Lubbock, and Pharr. Large regions like Dallas/Ft. Worth and Houston had frequent intra-regional visitors. Travel between Austin, San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas/Ft. Worth was consistently frequent (weekly or monthly) among all four cities. Pharr to San Antonio travel was common, and Austin attracted travel not only from Triangle cities but Tyler and Pharr.

Public Hearing (Austin)

A final draft of the TRP was published on TxDOT’s Rail Plan website on September 17, 2010, incorporating many of the comments and feedback from the public meetings. The final comment period started with a public hearing in Austin on October 6, 2010, and concluded on November 5, 2010. 59 people signed up in attendance at the public hearing, including nine individuals who offered oral comments.

At the public hearing, a letter from Karen Rae, Deputy Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration was read into the record. The major elements of that letter are:

- “In the last several months, the Federal Railroad Administration has worked very closely with the Texas Department of Transportation to guide the development of the Texas Rail Plan.”
- “This has been a collaborative effort, involving not only our two agencies but also the many stakeholders within the state who contributed their time and labor to develop this comprehensive and thorough rail plan addressing both freight and passenger rail needs in Texas.”
- “TxDOT’s vision for the development of freight and passenger rail within the State of Texas is consistent with national vision as laid out in both the High-Speed Rail Strategic Plan and the recently released National Rail Plan progress Report.”
- “The vision to develop passenger rail, not as independent projects between discrete city pairs but as corridors that not only connect those cities but reach beyond with a vision of integrating into a national network, is forward thinking and holds great promise.”
- “We look forward to our continued work with the Texas Department of Transportation on this important initiative.”

A summary of all comments can be reviewed below.

Table 2-7: TRP Comments by Subject Matter

| | Pre Hearing | Post Hearing | Total |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Passenger | 195 | 154 | 349 |
| Freight | 49 | 21 | 70 |
| General | 37 | 107 | 144 |
| Total | 281 | 282 | 563 |

Comments received during the public meeting phase of the development of the TRP were incorporated or considered during the preparation of the Draft TRP published on TxDOT's Rail Plan web page in September 2010. Comments received during the formal comment period were carefully considered during the final production of the 2010 TRP, including 107 comments suggesting specific changes to the draft TRP. These post-hearing comments can be described by three general categories:

- 60 comments from 12 individuals which were included in or amended the 2010 TRP. These comments corrected errors in the draft TRP, added details to sections, clarified points, or strengthened or reworded statements.
- 67 comments from 42 individuals which anticipate results of future studies. These included requests for particular passenger rail city pairs or routes, which will be part of future studies to identify passenger rail priorities. Other comments requested additional research or data for future revisions of the TRP.
- 155 comments from 131 individuals were generally supportive of the TRP, were advocates for a particular project or initiative, or raised issues which could not be independently verified for inclusion in the TRP.

Comments were received from 162 different individuals, some of whom made multiple comments or comments included in one or more of the above categories. Comments were received from Rail Steering Committee members, from those who attended public meetings, and those who were encouraged to submit comments to the TxDOT RRD web page. Tables 2-8 through 2-10 show comments received from written comment forms and on questionnaires during the public meeting phase, and comments received during the formal comment period on the final draft TRP, by specific subjects. The comments tabulated for the public meetings also include comments submitted by email prior to the public hearing in October.

Table 2-8: Passenger Rail Comments on TRP (numbers of responses)

| No. | Summary description | Number of comments per category | | | |
|-----|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| | | Public Mtg Comment Forms | Public Mtg Questionnaires | Post Hearing Comments | Total Number |
| 1 | Support for passenger rail in general | 36 | 19 | 24 | 79 |
| 2 | Comments on passenger rail route or city pairs | 18 | 11 | 9 | 38 |
| 3 | High-speed rail more important than incremental intercity passenger rail | 15 | 9 | 6 | 30 |
| 4 | Support for passenger rail funding | 6 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| 5 | Supports expansion of Amtrak service, both existing and to new cities | 6 | 2 | 3 | 11 |
| 6 | Comments on local passenger rail issues | 18 | 3 | 2 | 23 |
| 7 | Comment on transit connectivity issues with passenger rail | 9 | 5 | 3 | 17 |
| 8 | Support for the Lone Star Rail proposal | 15 | 0 | 91 | 106 |
| 9 | Opposition to passenger rail on any grounds | 5 | 1 | 3 | 9 |
| 10 | Specific comment on the plan | 5 | 2 | 0 | 7 |
| 11 | Support for passenger rail connections to airports | 7 | 2 | | 9 |
| 12 | Support for passenger rail to Laredo | 0 | 0 | 13 | 13 |
| | Subtotal, Passenger Comments | 140 | 55 | 154 | 349 |

Table 2-9: Freight Rail Comments on TRP (numbers of responses)

| No. | Summary description | Number of comments per category | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| | | Public Mtg Comment Forms | Public Mtg Questionnaires | Post Hearing Comments | Total Number |
| 1 | General support for freight rail | 13 | 5 | 11 | 29 |
| 2 | Support for shortline railroads | 3 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| 3 | Support for freight rail bypasses around urban areas | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 4 | Specific comment on the plan | 6 | 1 | 8 | 15 |
| 5 | Opposition to public funding of freight rail improvements | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 6 | Support public funding of freight rail improvements | 7 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| 7 | Comments on rail service to specific points | 5 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| Subtotal, Freight Comments | | 39 | 10 | 21 | 70 |

**Table 2-10: General Comments on TRP with Totals for All Subjects
(numbers of responses)**

| No. | Summary description | Number of comments per category | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| | | Public Mtg Comment Forms | Public Mtg Questionnaires | Post Hearing Comments | Total Number |
| 1 | Support for Texas Rail Plan | 9 | 12 | | 21 |
| 2 | Generic support for rail, passenger and freight | 1 | 9 | | 10 |
| 3 | Environmental issues | 2 | 0 | | 2 |
| 4 | Minor complaints about the meetings | 4 | 0 | | 4 |
| 5 | Specific comment on the plan | 0 | 0 | 107 | 107 |
| Subtotal, General Comments | | 16 | 21 | 107 | 144 |
| Total Number of Comments | | 195 | 86 | 282 | 563 |

Conclusion

The TxDOT RRD staff were gratified that the TRP attracted so much public interest, expressed in attendance in meetings or comments submitted on the TRP. RRD staff learned many different perspectives and priorities from the hundreds of Texans who participated in TRP outreach meetings and those contributions enhanced this final version of the 2010 TRP.

¹ As a part of the construction of the Marsha Sharp freeway, the West Texas and Lubbock railroad was relocated at a total cost of approximately \$35 to \$40 million. This eliminated nine grade crossings in the city limits, and provided approximately 35% of the needed right-of-way for the new freeway. The newly relocated line created new grade crossings in the lesser developed portions of Lubbock County.