

# The Herald-Zeitung

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## Officials Meet to Begin Work on Loop Plans

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State and local officials who were asked to help hammer out specifics for the creation of an outer loop around the city gathered Wednesday at a six-hour, invitation only conference at the New Braunfels Civic Center.

The second in a series of meetings for the New Braunfels Outer Loop Study was designed to give RJ Rivera Associates, Inc., the consulting firm hired by the Texas Department of Transportation, insight from state and local entities about the feasibility of a proposed route for the creation of a loop. The exact location and route of the loop won't be determined for about two more years, TXDOT officials said.

"It was mainly to pick folks brains," said Greg Malatek, TXDOT area engineer for New Braunfels and Seguin. "The final study will show a route that is submitted to both Comal and Guadalupe counties."

About 50 state and local officials were broken into groups of seven and given tasks to complete throughout the day. Officials examined a variety of questions and potential constraints — environmental or other — with the current band of area that RJ Rivera Associates, Inc. has designated for the loop.

Preliminary plans for the loop include a 40-mile stretch of road that possibly would intersect along Interstate 35 and Kohlenberg and Conrad roads. The loop also is expected to intersect with Farm-to-Market 1101, FM 1102, FM 1863 and Texas 46 and will provide two crossings spanning the Guadalupe River, giving motorists greater mobility through congested roads in the area.

Officials also were tasked with identifying and prioritizing segments of roads set to intersect with loop.

Other specifics — the number of lanes and what type of road the loop would be — also were discussed. Officials were presented with choosing between a controlled access style road — like Interstate-35 that allows for greater control of traffic — and a direct access road, such as Loop 337, which allows motorists to connect to the street directly from their home or business.

"That'll be an interesting issue for us to sort through," said Frank Robbins New Braunfels director of planning and community development. "There's no consensus on the type of road we should have."

Officials with the Edwards Aquifer Authority and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department helped to identify potential environmental constraints at the meeting. Robbins said the loop would most likely be built in segments and that one of the segments —from I 35 into Hill Country— already has some identified environmental constraints.

“It’s more environmentally sensitive than anywhere else the loop is going through,” Robbins said. “Those issues will have to be addressed before the road can be built.”

The first meeting for the New Braunfels Outer Loop Study was held April 4 and consisted of mainly technical work groups. As part of the kick-off the New Braunfels Outer Loop Study and public involvement campaign, TXDOT officials and local leaders will hold a press conference at 10 a.m. Wednesday to announce the first round of public meetings. TXDOT’s public involvement campaign, which will provide a general overview of the study process so area residents know what to expect, will last 12 months.

“The whole process is to get as much local involvement a possible,” Malatek said. “This is the first step.”