

## **The Gazette-Enterprise**

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### **Officials discuss New Braunfels outer loop**

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The Gazette-Enterprise

Published May 31, 2007

**NEW BRAUNFELS —** Assuming that the Texas Department of Transportation in the future builds an outer loop around New Braunfels, Comal County Judge Danny Scheel said it is likely to be a toll road.

Scheel made that prediction Wednesday based on how the current Texas Legislature chooses to fund construction of new roadways in the state.

“Right now that’s all I have to work with. They provide the funds to TxDOT. The outer loop probably would be a toll road,” Scheel said after TxDOT officials unveiled a plan to conduct a yearlong study with public input for a 40-mile-long outer loop around New Braunfels that would include portions of Comal and Guadalupe counties.

TxDOT will host two public meetings in June to discuss the proposed outer loop. The first will occur from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Monday, June 25, at Canyon High School, located at 1510 IH-35 East in New Braunfels. The next public meeting convenes from

6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 27, at Hoffmann Lane Elementary School, 4600 FM 306 in New Braunfels.

Scheel has consistently over the years been opposed to converting existing roadways to toll roads, but any new highways would likely have to be tolled because the state legislature has chosen that route to fund them.

He also said the Comal County commissioners court began discussions about the outer loop with TxDOT as early as 1995.

**“We need to set aside the route now,” Scheel said. “A couple of segments of the loop need to be started a lot sooner.”**

**According to information released by TxDOT, the state’s eight metropolitan planning organizations have identified nearly \$68 billion in unfunded (transportation) needs in their areas. Urban and rural transportation needs were assessed at \$18 billion, which puts the statewide funding gap at \$86 billion.**

**The loop, which officials say could be built about 15 years from now, would cross the Guadalupe River twice and would link to IH-35 south and north of New Braunfels. The loop would cross through the Santa Clara area north of Marion and would also pass somewhere midway between Lake Dunlap and Lake McQueeney. It would then begin to curve northwest, crossing State Highway 46, FM 758 and FM 1101 near the Hays County line to connect with IH-35.**

**Greg Malatek, the TxDOT engineer for the New Braunfels area, said it is possible that the outer loop would be a tolled highway, but at this stage he is only looking at where to place the roadway.**

**“We’re just trying to figure out where the road needs to go. Local governments have to be OK with it if we do a toll road. There is no intention at this time,” Malatek said.**

**Malatek said is important to plan the New Braunfels outer loop now before new houses, business or schools are built in its pathway.**

**“We’ve seen enormous growth in and around New Braunfels,” Malatek said. He also pointed out that transportation corridors that were identified in the 1980s and 1990s have since closed up because of development.**

**Guadalupe County Judge Mike Wiggins also endorsed the plan to solicit public input for the loop. He estimated that Guadalupe County’s current population of about 105,000 would double to about 210,000 by the year 2027.**

**“TxDOT has always tried to estimate the need for a roadway, but most of their projections on growth and development have been exceeded far more**

quickly than what they've planned for the roadways," Wiggins said. "The outer loop will benefit Guadalupe County with better access to, through and around New Braunfels."

Wiggins said the loop should provide a link to State Highway 130, which is an 89-mile toll road that will connect IH-35 north of Georgetown to IH-10 east of Seguin.

"We've got to plan and build to accommodate development that is going to come. If we don't, we will have a quagmire of vehicles that can't move from Point A to Point B. We need to be aggressive with what's coming down the road — if not we're going to get caught short," Wiggins told the Seguin Gazette-Enterprise.

The New Braunfels outer loop's generalized route map was carefully scrutinized Wednesday by Jeff Kraft and his father, Marvin.

They own and operate the Kraft Polled Herefords ranch in New Braunfels, and they also farm land in the Geronimo area.

Jeff Kraft said many of the family's farm and ranch properties would be affected by the proposed loop around New Braunfels.

"We need more information. It's real vague at this time," Kraft said.

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