

Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition

The following is a Jan. 29, 2016 news release from the Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition:

BRYAN, TEXAS -- The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) will continue to initiate planning efforts that will lead to future development of the various components of the Gulf Coast Strategic Highway System which connects U.S. Army facilities to strategic military ports at Corpus Christi and Beaumont.

That system includes the Central Texas Corridor, a federal high priority highway corridor recently designated by Congress and identified as future Interstate 14. That corridor generally follows the route of US 190 across the state running from I-10 in West Texas to Fort Hood at Killeen and east through Belton, Bryan/College Station, Huntsville, Livingston, Woodville and Jasper before terminating at the Sabine River near Fort Polk.

Marc Williams, TxDOT interim deputy executive director, addressing the annual meeting of the Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition in January, noted that TxDOT completed a high-level feasibility study of possible US 190 improvements in 2012. He said planning efforts need to continue and that TxDOT will continue to engage with local communities as the process moves forward.

He pointed to the success TxDOT has had working with local communities in a grassroots process to achieve more consensus and collaboration on development of I-69 projects. TxDOT will follow that model as the department works on projects within the Central Texas Corridor, he said.

"This is the first step in a long process. It is just the start. As with I-69 (authorized in 1991) it is a marathon, not a sprint. And it is an ongoing process," Williams said.

He anticipates that transportation improvements on Interstate 14 and connecting strategic feeders will be developed in a "needs based" process that will be multi-generational and will likely stretch over several decades.

Jeff Moseley, one of the five members of the Texas Transportation Commission, said there are very strong long-term forces driving increased demand for highway capacity in Texas. These include population growth, increased freight movements connected to expansion of the Panama Canal, the energy sector revolution and robust economic growth in Mexico.

"What a great way to start the new year – county, city and state leadership coming together to talk about a new interstate, I-14, a critical corridor that will take our \$1.6 trillion economy forward," Commissioner Moseley said.

Congressman Brian Babin, who sponsored the I-14 legislation in Congress and participated in the coalition meeting by phone, said the "forts-to-ports" concept supported by the Strategic Highway Coalition is exactly what President Dwight Eisenhower had in mind when he pioneered the nation's system of interstate and defense highways in the 1950s.

"This authorization from Congress is just the first step in turning this interstate from words on paper into an actual, real project that is going to benefit our citizens, our businesses and our military," Babin said. He promised to work with the coalition, TxDOT and federal highway officials "to push this important project forward."

John Thompson, former county judge of Polk County and chairman of the GCSH Coalition, stressed that TxDOT has been a great partner to the coalition during the years spent supporting the strategic highway concept and leading to the congressional designation.

Major Gen. Kendall Cox, U.S. Army (ret), executive director of the Heart of Texas Defense Alliance supporting Fort Hood, said he sees I-14 and various north-south port connector-feeder highways as a strategic highway corridor that will provide invaluable redundant capability to move military equipment from Fort Hood, Fort Bliss and Fort Polk to the strategic ports. He said that kind of mobility improvements create military value that is essential to the continued viability of the state's military installations.

Malcolm Morris, chairman of the Vernon Parish Chamber's transportation committee and a member of Fort Polk Progress, reported that approximately 70 percent the LA 28 and US 84 highway route that he anticipates will eventually become Interstate 14 across Louisiana is now at four-lane divided standard.

Fort Polk supporters are now focusing their attention on improving the two-lane section of LA 8 between Leesville and the Sabine River where Texas and Louisiana are working on building a new river bridge.

Jarl Pedersen, chief commercial officer for the Port of Corpus Christi, and Chris Fisher, executive director of the Port of Beaumont, provided updates on military cargoes, infrastructure projects and industrial growth at their Texas deepwater ports.

The coalition annual meeting was attended by dozens of elected officials, state and federal transportation officials, metropolitan planning organization and councils of government representatives, community development groups, landowners and others from across the state.

About the Coalition

The Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition is made up of cities, counties, local authorities and economic development organizations in Texas and Louisiana. The organization has been working for more than a decade in support of highway upgrades that will improve access between major U.S. Army installations at Fort Bliss, Fort Hood and Fort Polk and the Texas strategic deployment seaports that support them – the Port of Corpus Christi and the Port of Beaumont.

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