I-49 LAFAYETTE CONNECTOR - HISTORICAL SUMMARY

LafayetteConnector
Acadiana's Path Forward
A DOTD CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

State Project No. H.004273.5
Federal Aid Project No. H004273
I-49 Lafayette Connector
(Lafayette Regional Airport to I-10/I-49/U.S. 167 Interchange)

Project Historical Summary Handout

In this document, you will find a brief summary of some of the critical moments and highlights of the I-49 Connector project History. This historical summary covers events that occurred from 1987 through today.

Why is project history important to understand?

The I-49 Connector project has evolved over time. The real value in being aware of the history of the project is being able to understand how we got to where we are in this process today so that we can all move forward together with the same level of understanding in project background.

Where can you find more information?

For members of the community who would like a more detailed understanding of the evolution of the project, we have made available the documents listed below for download.

Project Historical Resources on Website:

- TPC Public Meeting Action Summary-9-22-93
- Tax Increment Financing District Committee Report (ETRT Report)
- LCG Resolution No. 014-2001
- I-49 Project Historical Summary 12-3-15
- Corridor Preservation and Management Plan
- I-49 Lafayette Connector Blue Book
- Lafayette North South Corridor Study-Path to Progress
- I-49 Memorandum Ruling and Judgment
- MOA - Pages 403-411 from I-49 Connector Vol. 2
- Flexibility in Highway Design

Project Historical Summary

1987 - Congressional authorization and funding.

1990 - The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD), working with the City of Lafayette and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), began studying the environmental impact on several possible corridors through the initiation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

1992 - The Draft EIS was circulated and a Public Hearing held that considered the costs, benefits, and impacts of the project. Four alternative alignments for consideration (EA1, RR3, RR4, and RR5) were identified within the Thruway corridor.

1993 - The Lafayette Areawide Planning Commission (the Metropolitan Planning Organization at that time), working through its Transportation Policy Committee and Transportation Technical Committee and in concert with the Infrastructure Committee and Arterial Task Force Committee of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, published the "Lafayette North/South Corridor Study: Path to Progress".

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Excerpts from the "Path to Progress" study:

"An evaluation of four (4) alternative freeway corridors, a fifth (5th) or "no build" alternative and four (4) alternative grade/structure alignments running north to south through Lafayette Parish, Louisiana (was conducted). Criteria used to evaluate the alternatives were: traditional highway cost benefit; public safety; environmental; and quality of life. One freeway alternative was selected for implementation by the Transportation Policy Committee."

Corridor Alignments

- Alternative No. 1: Western Bypass, 26.8 Miles
  A corridor from I-49 North of Carencro, to U.S. 90 South of Broussard via I-10 near Scott.
- Alternative No. 2: Eastern Alignment, 10.35 Miles
  A corridor from I-49 South of Butcher Switch Road, to U.S. 90 South of the Lafayette Regional Airport via I-10 near Louisiana Avenue.
- Alternative No. 3: Evangeline Thruway, 4.5 Miles
  A corridor from I-49 South of Butcher Switch Road, through the center of the Lafayette Evangeline Thruway.
- Alternative No. 4: Eastern Bypass, 16.5 Miles
  A corridor from North of Carencro, to U.S. 90 in Broussard via I-10 near Breaux Bridge.
- No-Build
  No actions taken.

Grade/Structure Alignments

- At-Grade
  This highway structure consists of ground level construction. In order to limit access to this type of roadway, all crossing roads must either be recessed under the freeway or elevated to cross over the freeway.
- Elevated
  This highway structure consists of raised freeway sections. These raised sections form a continuous bridge over cross streets.
- Depressed
  This highway structure consists of partially buried or tunneled sections of roadway. This type of highway structure requires cross streets to pass over the segment.
- Cut and Cover
  *This highway structure consists of a completely buried roadway. The top of the "buried roadway" remains usable for other development. The Evangeline Thruway Alternative contains about a half mile long section of cut and cover construction**

**The current Evangeline Thruway selected alignment no longer contains sections of cut and cover highway.*

"The Evangeline Thruway corridor would be the only alternative that has a positive impact on the travel time costs, vehicle operating cost, network/volume capacity ratios and benefit costs. The other alternative corridors would have no positive impacts on cost to benefit."

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"The improvements offered by the Evangeline Thruway corridor would have little or no adverse impact on the environment. Due to their structure, the Western Bypass, Eastern Bypass and Eastern Alignment present a host of negative impacts, including the intrusion of a roadway through sensitive wetlands, intrusion of noise into primary residential areas and displacement of delicate habitats."

On September 22, at a Public Hearing, the Transportation Policy Committee of the MPO adopted the Evangeline Thruway Corridor as the selected corridor for the I-49 project in the Lafayette area.

1994 - Elevated freeway concept was adopted.

1997 - FHWA and DOTD restarted the EIS process based on the Evangeline Thruway corridor and elevated freeway option.

1999 - ULL "Blue Book" issued by School of Architecture Community Design Workshop.

As part of the Environmental Impact Statement process, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's Community Design Workshop ran a series of public planning exercises that ultimately culminated in what is commonly referred to as the "Blue Book." The purpose was to propose new approaches that would mitigate the effect of the I-49 Connector on existing neighborhoods. Generally, the Blue Book proposed preservation of urban connectivity, linear green space, public art, public plazas, neighborhood redevelopment, and special design features on the Interstate structure itself to improve lighting in the corridor and abate traffic noise.

The Blue Book and the long public process it entailed, was a direct result of the apprehension some members of the community felt about the construction of an Interstate through the urban core of the city. The importance of the Blue Book document is that it started the conversation with the community and state/federal sponsors that the I-49 Connector would be a context sensitive project that would serve both transportation needs and also help revitalize the urban community.

2000 - Draft EIS Public Hearing.

2001 - In January and February, the Citizen Advisory Committee, the Transportation Technical Committee, and the Transportation Policy Committee of the Lafayette MPO held meetings to recommend a Locally Preferred Alternative Alignment. Subsequently in February, the Lafayette City-Parish Planning Commission reviewed the recommendations of these committees and adopted Resolution No. 001-01 recommending a Locally Preferred Alternative Alignment.

Later that month, the Lafayette City-Parish Council, in its capacity as the Lafayette MPO, adopted Resolution No. 014-2001 to approve and identify the Locally Preferred Alternative Alignment as Alternative RR-4 with Sub-alternative F (MPO Subalternative), predicated on Jefferson and Simcoe Streets remaining open and continuous, and with Sub-alternative H north of Willow Street. The Resolution also recommended a Joint Cooperative Agreement between LCG, DOTD, and FHWA to coordinate and implement the concepts identified in the Blue Book as a basis for the concepts to be included in the final implementation plan in addition to the Corridor Preservation and Management Plan created by Ordinance No. 043-2001.

This plan constitutes an agreement between the DOTD and Lafayette Consolidated Government, and was developed at the request of the FHWA in connection with work done as part of the Environmental Impact Statement process. The Corridor Preservation Plan describes three planning areas (detailed in the "Blue Book"):

Level I – The right-of-way footprint of the I-49 Connector, including interchanges.

Level II – The next 500 feet outside of the right-of-way.

Level III – Those neighborhoods and areas outside of Level II that would be impacted.

Among other things, the Corridor Preservation Plan outlined general responsibilities of the local, state, and federal agencies to attain the context sensitive commitments in the EIS, and also stipulated that right-of-way funding and acquisition by DOTD would commence in the Corridor in the period from issuance of the Record of Decision until construction of the project.

2002 - Final Environmental Impact Statement completed.

2003 - Federal Highway Administration issued the Record of Decision (ROD), including Measures to Minimize Harm, which includes 21 commitments intended to mitigate unavoidable effects during the design and construction process.

2004 - The ROD was challenged by a lawsuit heard in federal court and was upheld.

2006 - Detailed functional plan/CSS process begins. This phase of the project included:

- Translation of the planning level EIS document to an engineering level of detail and accuracy to establish the detailed right-of-way footprint, so as to begin right-of-way acquisition as required by the Corridor Preservation Plan.
- Initiation of the detailed CSS process, including Community, Technical and Executive work groups, to shape the CSS design details, joint use agreements and funding commitments.
- Updated detailed hazardous waste study. The hazardous waste study identified design treatments to remove and replace or otherwise mitigate existing contaminated areas, including safeguarding the Chicot Aquifer.
- Updated detailed traffic analysis throughout the corridor.

2008 - Evangeline Thruway Redevelopment Team (ETRT) advisory committee was created by LCG to serve as the public body to lead the development of the Economic Redevelopment Plan called for in the Corridor Preservation Plan. Initial CSS process work paused in 2008.

2010 - ETRT adopted the Tax Increment Financing District Committee Report (ETRT Report), which suggested the formation of a special taxing district to help fund, in concert with the DOTD, the CSS and revitalization components of the I-49 Connector. It serves as a "jumping off point" for the I-49 Corridor plan. Its recommendations are general and generic in nature, but represent strong community support for proactive measures.

2012 - LCG embarked on a community-wide comprehensive planning process, which called for reinvigorated efforts toward implementation of the enhancement and mitigation techniques first discussed in the Blue Book. These plans resulted in Plan Lafayette.

2015 - Functional Plan/CSS process re-started under an 18-month timeline:

- Re-start the CSS process including Community, Technical, and Executive Committees; end result will be a CSS Guidelines Manual and a Joint Use Development Plan with responsibilities for implementation specified amongst the agencies.
- Develop the roadway/bridge geometric design details in concert with the CSS process.
- Environmental re-evaluation due to elapsed time since the Final EIS. The re-evaluation will reflect changed environmental conditions, if any, or changes to project design features.
- Updated traffic-engineering studies.
- Extensive Communications and Outreach process to keep stakeholders informed and involved.
- Implementation of strategic planning to identify construction delivery methods, funding plan, and timeline.

Next Step after Functional Plan and CSS: Final design and specifications in preparation for construction.