

Legislation Text

File #: 21-179, **Version:** 1

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SUBJECT:

Discuss and consider a recommendation to City Council regarding the removal of a segment of the Minor Collector identified in the City of New Braunfels Regional Transportation Plan that is the future extension of Fredericksburg Road south of Landa Street.

BACKGROUND / RATIONALE:

The City of New Braunfels received an Application for Regional Transportation Plan Amendment requesting removal of a segment of the Minor Collector in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) that is the future extension of Fredericksburg Road south of Landa Street in the Town Creek development. The application included the most recent approved traffic impact analysis (TIA) report for Town Creek, dated 2017, and is associated with the Zone Change Application for the Town Creek Planned Development District.

The Fredericksburg Road Minor Collector thoroughfare runs east of and parallel to Walnut Avenue from Academy Avenue north to Ohio Avenue. Existing segments include Fredericksburg Road from the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) tracks south of the intersection with Landa Street north to Ohio Avenue. A Minor Collector requires 60 feet of right-of-way and 40 feet of pavement and the developer is required to construct the collector within the subdivision per Sec. 118-46 (t) of the New Braunfels Code of Ordinances.

The RTP is the City's adopted plan for guiding thoroughfare system improvements, including the existing and planned extension of city streets and highways. The thoroughfare system is comprised of existing and planned interstates, expressways, parkways, arterials, and collectors which require wider or new rights-of-way. The primary objective of the RTP is to ensure the dedication of adequate right-of-way on appropriate alignments and of enough width to serve existing and future transportation needs. The Texas Local Government Code allows the City to require development plans and subdivision plats to conform to the general plan for current and future roadways.

Town Creek is a 66-acre mixed use, walkable development surrounded by Walnut Avenue, Dry Comal Creek, and the UPRR tracks. The only existing connection to the city's thoroughfare system is at the intersection of Academy Avenue and Walnut Avenue. A bridge over the Dry Comal Creek is currently under construction to connect to Guenther Avenue.

The Fredericksburg Road Minor Collector thoroughfare was added to the RTP in March 2012. The thoroughfare connects local streets, neighborhoods, Seele Elementary School, and Landa Park to Landa Street and Ohio Avenue with local street access to Walnut Avenue and New Braunfels High School. Existing Fredericksburg Road is considered an "established thoroughfare" meaning no

additional right-of-way dedication or street construction is required with new development. Sidewalk improvements may be required with new development depending on code requirements. The City of New Braunfels recently constructed pedestrian improvements in the area including on Fredericksburg Road from Landa Street to Bell Street including enhanced pedestrian crossings to Landa Park and a 10-foot shared-use path along the east side of the road from Landa Street to Playground Drive.

The Fredericksburg Road connection to Landa Street that is currently in the RTP requires crossing UPRR tracks. Per the applicant, this RTP amendment request is primarily due to the inability to come to an agreement with UPRR to allow for a Fredericksburg Road at-grade railroad crossing south of the intersection of Fredericksburg Road and Landa Street. Additionally, the applicant stated that the configuration of driveways serving the Frost Bank and M&M Storage businesses north of the railroad do not allow for anything but an at-grade crossing.

Union Pacific provides guidelines for grade separation projects. These guidelines include clearance requirements for the construction of a vehicle overpass or underpass at their railroad tracks. Using the city's maximum grade of eight percent for a minor collector, the minimum distance required for an underpass is 270 feet and an overpass is 293 feet. The nearest driveway to the railroad crossing is 135 feet from the UPRR right-of-way and the next closest driveways are 324 feet from the right-of-way. A grade separated crossing appears to be feasible with the removal of the one Frost Bank driveway nearest to the UPRR tracks. City staff has not received any preliminary engineering information from the applicant regarding the feasibility of a grade separated crossing.

Both pedestrian and vehicular mobility of the Town Creek development will be affected by the removal of the Fredericksburg Road connection to Landa Street. The proposed connection provides an alternate route to the northwest side of New Braunfels. The intersection of Academy Avenue and Walnut Avenue is located between two at-grade UPRR crossings with frequent train traffic resulting in congestion and delays on Walnut Avenue between San Antonio Street and Landa Street. The future Guenther Avenue bridge over the Dry Comal Creek will be constructed above the 25-year storm event and will be constrained by the UPRR crossing at New Braunfels Smokehouse. There is a possibility for both UPRR crossings to be blocked during a storm event that closes the Guenther Avenue bridge, leaving the residents in Town Creek without any means of ingress or egress.

The most recent approved TIA report for Town Creek from 2017 does not include the connection from Town Creek to Landa Street via Fredericksburg Road. The report does require the installation of a traffic signal at the intersection of Academy Avenue and Walnut Avenue prior to the construction of Phase 4 of Town Creek to meet the mitigation requirements in Sec. 118-46 (y)(5). The signal warrant analysis is based on traffic counts collected in 2017. The Engineering Division has recently received requests from residents of Town Creek for this traffic signal to be installed now due to concerns about safety related to speeding, sight distance, and the growth of traffic in the area. There is also congestion at the intersection during and after train crossings at the railroad crossings. The traffic signal evaluation, design and construction are the developer's responsibility.

City staff, including input from various departments, reviewed the request based on the thoroughfare connection and transportation mobility and safety needs. City staff is opposed to the removal of the Fredericksburg Road thoroughfare connection as it is crucial for area mobility, Town Creek traffic circulation and access, and multimodal connectivity to the Landa Street, Das Rec, and Landa Park area. The opposition is based on the following factors:

1. The City's Comprehensive Plan Action Item 7.56 specifically mentions the Town Creek neighborhood connections to Downtown and Landa Street. Further, connections like this are important for transportation connectivity and economic development of the area.
2. The connection will significantly improve public and emergency access to Town Creek and the adjacent area. Access may be severely limited during railroad blockages and major storm events and the additional access will improve emergency response.
3. The connection will improve existing and future traffic mobility needs in the area including delays on Walnut Avenue, at the railroad grade crossings, and at the intersections of Landa Street and Academy Avenue.
4. The connection will provide a "walkable" connection to major destinations including Das Rec, Landa Park, and businesses, neighborhoods, and pedestrian facilities on Landa Street and Fredericksburg Road.
5. The removal of this and previous connections signifies a departure from the intent of the Town Creek Development as a mixed-use neighborhood that promotes walkability, links major surrounding destinations, promotes a lively downtown, and expands market opportunities. Increased connections are important for the further development of Town Creek as a mixed-use neighborhood and to accommodate the additional demands of redevelopment along Landa Street between Downtown and City Hall.
6. Information provided does not justify why the removal of the connection is necessary nor does it provide additional information regarding the feasibility of a grade separated crossing.
7. The connection is a capital improvement project in the Roadway Impact Fee Program and identified to support development needs in the service area.

City staff understands the challenges and complexity of a new railroad underpass project; however, details of an overall project have not been evaluated to determine scope, design requirements, and design alternatives. The development, design, and construction of a project will require coordination between the City, developer, UPRR, and adjacent property owners. Design alternatives, such as reduced pavement width and access adjustments, have not been thoroughly evaluated to justify removal.

ADDRESSES A NEED/ISSUE IN A CITY PLAN OR COUNCIL PRIORITY:

Envision New Braunfels Comprehensive Plan	ACTION 7.50 [POLICY]	Ensure the thoroughfare plan includes and ordinances require adequate dedication and reservation of right-of-way for future roadways.
Envision New Braunfels Comprehensive Plan	ACTION 7.56 [PROJECT]	Identify missing linkages across town that create barriers to efficient mobility (e.g. the Town Creek neighborhood connections to Downtown and Landa Street, Guadalupe River crossings southwest of Cypress Bend Park and another on the east side of IH-35, parallel routes to Hwy 46 South, etc); implement a plan to construct.
Envision New Braunfels Comprehensive Plan	ACTION 7.61 [PLAN INITIATIVE]	Explore collaboration opportunities as a stakeholder on railroad traffic, with particular consideration of interference with vehicular traffic demands.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The fiscal impact is unknown.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

N/A

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff does not recommend the removal of the future extension of Fredericksburg Road south of Landa Street from the City of New Braunfels Regional Transportation Plan. Staff recommends further evaluation of the design requirements and constraints of the future extension.