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Residents speak out about loop

By [David Saleh Rauf](#)

The Herald-Zeitung

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The first of two public meetings on the New Braunfels Outer Loop Study drew mixed — and at times emotional — reactions from nearly 300 Comal and Guadalupe county residents Monday night.

The Texas Department of Transportation and a San Antonio-based consulting firm are sponsoring two identical meetings to gather information for the necessary planning and analysis needed to identify a corridor for the possible development of a New Braunfels Outer Loop.

The outer loop study area is approximately a 40-mile band around the city of New Braunfels that encompasses portions of Comal and Guadalupe counties.

The loop would require at least two new crossings over the Guadalupe River and could connect to Interstate 35 on the north side of New Braunfels and to I 35 on the south side of the city.

The project currently is unfunded and no estimates of how much the loop would cost have been offered. TXDOT officials say construction of the loop could take up to 30 years.

Monday's meeting was the first chance for land owners and concerned residents to weigh in since TxDOT announced the formation of an outer loop study in April.

Residents were shown maps and displays describing the study area and were given the chance to openly voice grievances to officials.

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Melva Koehler, 76, found out two weeks ago that her property, just three miles south of Interstate 35, is in the proposed study loop area.

"Its my home," Koehler said, who has lived on the six-acre property for 27 years. "Progress is inevitable, but I don't want to live under a bridge either."

Although most who spoke out at the meeting voiced concern that their land would be swallowed up by the project, some land owners were a bit more optimistic that the loop would not traverse their property.

"One place is as good as another," said Richard Hanz, who owns six acres of land in between Conrads Road and Watson Lane.

Hanz's property falls in the proposed outer loop study area and is about mile away from nearly 1,900 acres of land along I 35 owned by real estate investors from the General Land Office. The state has given the indication to city and county officials that they would donate the land as a proposed right of way to connect Farm-to-market 1102 to FM 1101.

The project is being called the "starter kit" and could be the first portion of the loop to be built, developers say. That segment alone could cost up to \$50 million to build.

If the loop runs through the state-owned land, Hanz's property would no longer be in its path.

"I would think they're going to go through the state property," Hanz said.

Judy Friesenhahn, a TXDOT transportation and planning official from San Antoni, said the outer loop study area is "intended to represent a concept," and whether the loop will be built over homes in that area is something that "remains to be seen."

"There are no reasons to be alarmed," she said.

TXDOT officials still are prioritizing segments of loop. At least 13 different segment have been identified so far.

"We're listening, taking opinions and writing down notes," said TXDOT public information officer Maggie Rios.

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