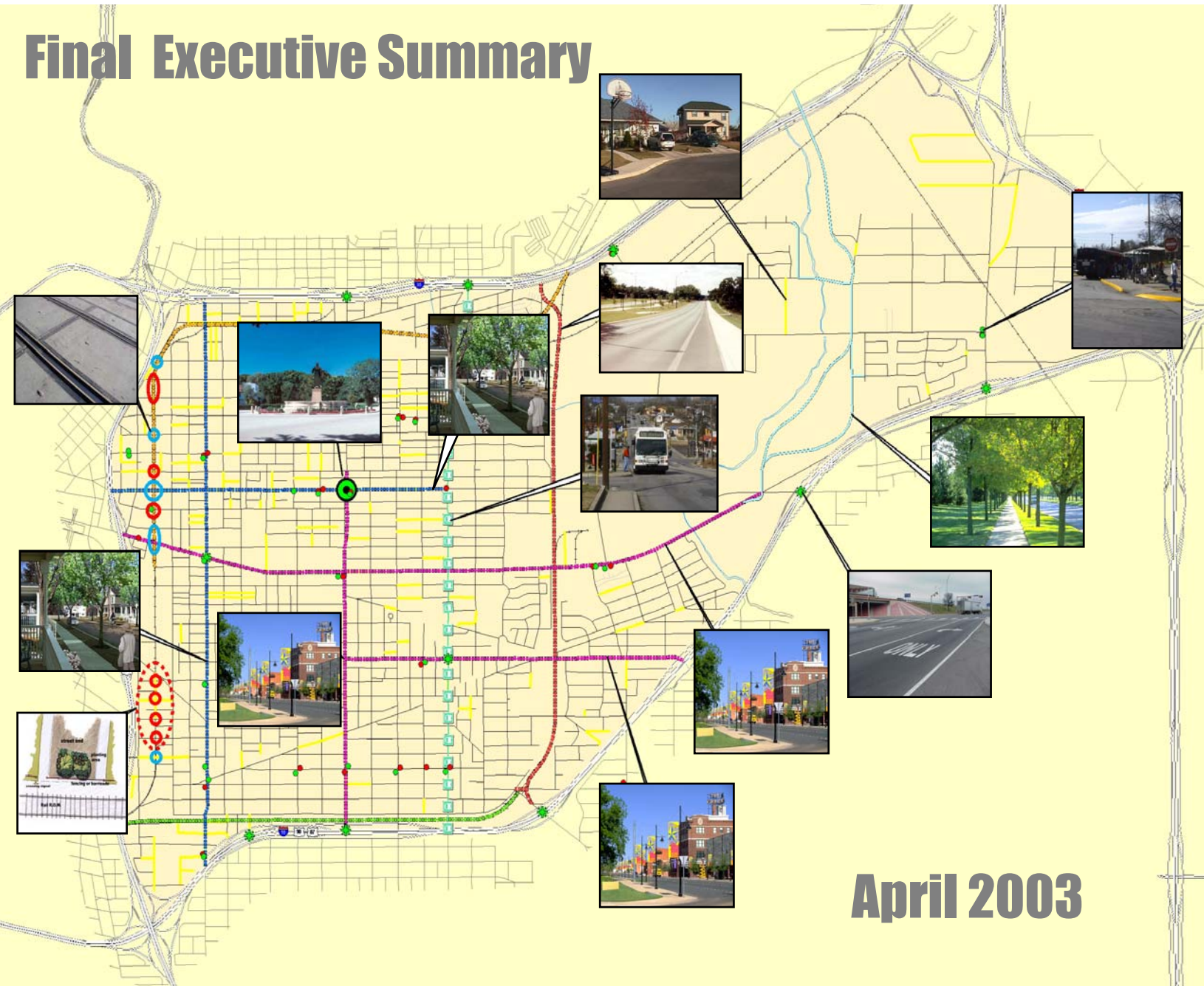
East Corridor Multi-Modal Alternatives Plan

Final Executive Summary



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The East Corridor Multi-Modal Alternatives Plan was initiated in 2002 in conjunction with a separate Arena District Community Redevelopment planning study at the request of the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, the San Antonio Spurs and the Community Economic Revitalization Agency (CERA) to seek long-term land use and transportation improvement opportunities within the east side of San Antonio. The primary purpose of both plans was to create a future development plan and revitalization strategy for the neighborhoods surrounding the SBC Center and stretching from downtown to IH 410.

The San Antonio-Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) sponsored the transportation element of these studies. This element consisted of a detailed conceptual evaluation of various transportation alternatives that would support the long-term land use changes proposed within the study area and that can result in positive physical improvements to major roadways within the area. Although the nature of many of the improvements evaluated is long-term and creates specific economic benefits to the community (as opposed strictly to improved traffic operations), several transportation options desired by the community to improve immediate infrastructure and transit service needs were also evaluated by this transportation study.

Establishment of Project Goals

The Consultant Team and the Oversight Committee initiated this study effort by defining the goals and objectives of the project. These goals and objectives were refined during several Committee meetings and at the first public meeting. The subsequent determination of a long list of transportation alternatives and how they addressed these goals and objectives was a critical aspect of this study.

Goal 1 - Encourage Economic Revitalization Through Transportation: *Develop all transportation plan components with the idea that economic revitalization of east San Antonio can benefit from proper implementation of new urbanism concepts.*

Goal 2 - Enhance Downtown – SBC Center Connectivity: *Improve corridor mobility, especially between the SBC Center/Freeman Coliseum and downtown San Antonio.*

Goal 3 - Protect the Natural Environment: *Provide a transportation system that has minimal impact on the natural environment.*

Goal 4 - Emphasize Positive Social and Economic Effects: *Provide a transportation system that has a positive impact on the social and economic environment.*

Goal 5 - Enhance Rail/Truck interfaces within the Study Area: *Provide a transportation system that accommodates trucks and their interface with the many existing railroad tracks within the study area.*

Goal 6 - Provide a Balanced and Coordinated Transportation System: *Provide a transportation system that is balanced and coordinated with regional and local needs.*

Goal 7 - Develop Non-Motorized Transportation Solutions: *Support and expand upon existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities within the study area.*

Goal 8 - Ensure Public Support for all Improvements Recommended: *Involve the public as an active participant in all aspects of the study.*

Goal 9 - Maintain Communications with the Study Oversight Committee: *Meet frequently with the Study Oversight Committee to keep all members informed as to project progress and data needs.*

Goal 10 - Develop Adequate Visitor Access to SBC Center/Freeman Coliseum: *Ensure that visitors to sporting and other events at the two venues arrive and depart with relative ease.*

Transportation Alternatives Evaluation

The East Corridor Multi-Modal Alternatives Plan considered several transportation infrastructure alternatives in support of the new proposed land use redevelopment plan for east San Antonio. Together, the transportation consultant team and the Arena Redevelopment project team worked on defining those roadway/transit elements that can be utilized to not only improve the movement of people within the study area, but also to make transportation facilities themselves stimuli for economic redevelopment.

A list of potential transportation options was presented to the public during the second public meeting held in November 2002. Shortly thereafter, this long list was refined by comments received from the public and input provided by the Oversight Committee. The final list of transportation options included 16 items, consisting of roadway, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle components.

Evaluation criteria and measures were then developed to objectively analyze these options for the East Corridor Multi-Modal Alternatives Plan study area. Based on the previously identified study goals and objectives, evaluation criteria reflective of the critical aspects of each study goal were developed. The evaluation measures provided a systematic means of categorizing and applying the criteria to the alternatives. One important evaluation measure was purposely omitted in the initial evaluation methodology. This was the measure of cost. The Oversight Committee considered this measure as unfairly "outweighing" other factors during the initial screening process. Cost was calculated for each transportation option at a later stage in this study.

This first assessment (or ranking) of the 16 transportation options was then analyzed for their probable construction and right-of-way costs prior to a presentation of these options with their costs at the final public meeting in February 2003. Some consolidation of similar or complementary transportation options was undertaken to reduce the original list of alternatives. Utilizing a simulated budget exercise, the study area residents were asked to prioritize these remaining transportation options at the third public meeting. The outcome of this final ranking became the recommended set of transportation improvements that can meet the desired needs of the East Corridor study area community, as well as meeting the goals and objectives set forth at the beginning of this project.

Recommended Transportation Options

Since the proposed land use plan advocates significant connectivity between the many neighborhoods in this community, and the green space opportunities offered by Salado Creek, the transportation plan which supports these future long term land uses is presented as a cohesive element within the overall structure of the study area. At the same time, community residents expressed their desire for short term implementation of projects to correct immediate needs within their neighborhoods. The culmination of the recommended transportation plan tries to accommodate both the immediate needs as well as the long term potential in a meaningful and achievable way.

Since no funding is currently available for any of the evaluated transportation alternatives, a two-tiered set of transportation improvements is recommended. The first tier of improvements will solve some immediate infrastructure needs of the community while establishing a basis for the long term improvements for the study area. The second tier of improvements can be more long term in its

implementation, but creates a well-balanced transportation infrastructure system for the study area. Together, the Tier 1 and Tier 2 transportation plan components form a comprehensive set of transit, pedestrian and vehicular improvements which ultimately will help the study area achieve economic growth and improve the quality of life for the many citizens that live in east San Antonio. The two figures at the end of this Executive Summary display these recommended transportation plan components.

The funding options that are presented following each recommended transportation improvement are meant to offer potential sources of funding and are by no means exclusive for the particular project described. As most readers are well aware, funding for transportation projects is typically a dynamic process that is influenced significantly by political decisions, and any effort to prioritize the transportation options as recommended in this summary must involve this political process.

Tier 1 Recommended Transportation Options

1. **Resurface 167 street blocks in the study area which have poor roadway pavements. Add new sidewalks along some of these street blocks where needed.**

   Since many of the roadway segments needing resurfacing/sidewalk improvements are scattered through the entire study area, the City can best address this transportation option by scheduling resurfacing projects one neighborhood at a time, taking into consideration other street/sidewalk maintenance needs not considered as part of this transportation option. Those neighborhoods which have the greatest amount of immediate resurfacing/sidewalk needs should be improved first. Although this recommendation meets the strongly desired short-term needs of the community residents, the limited available funding for these improvements may result in this project taking ten years or possibly longer to fully complete.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$6.2 million	0 to 10 years	City of San Antonio Street Maintenance Program; City bond package; Community Development Block Grants; Neighborhood Accessibility Mobility Program

2. **Install weather protection shelters at the busiest bus stops in the study area. New sidewalks will also be added to/from these bus stops as needed.**

   Busy bus stops are defined as having at least 35 boardings or alightings per day from all bus routes serving that particular stop. Continuous sidewalks/crosswalks are recommended from these bus stops for at least one block in all directions, depending upon the land uses served by that bus stop. Furthermore, those stops which have high numbers of boardings should also have weather protection bus shelters provided as part of this transportation option.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$400,000	0 to 5 years	VIA Section 5307 funds; STP Metro Mobility funds; private development; City of San Antonio Neighborhood Accessibility Mobility Program (for sidewalks); FTA Enhancement Program (for sidewalks)

3. **Convert the signalized intersection of New Braunfels Avenue and Houston Street into a traffic roundabout.**

   As part of the desire of establishing a focal point for the revitalization of the study area, it was proposed that the existing intersection of New Braunfels Avenue and Houston Street be converted into a feature traffic roundabout. Most of the right-of-way needs for this roundabout can be met by

removing part of the existing wide medians on the north and south legs of this intersection. Some of the existing statues and monuments that are presently in this median will have to be removed and can be placed in the newly created roundabout center if desired.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$935,000	0 to 5 years	City of San Antonio; Community Economic Revitalization Agency; Bexar County

4. Implement low cost safety improvements at the top ten crash intersections within the study area.

The following intersections had the highest number of automobile crashes reported to the San Antonio Police Department, during the period 1999 through 2001, within the study area. The cost numbers in parentheses would cover the implementation of safety improvements at these intersections. The focus of each transportation improvement is to make the intersection more visible to the drivers by installing new pavement markings, signs and improving traffic signal visibility.

IH 35 @ Walters Street ($18,635)
IH 35 @ New Braunfels Avenue ($47,399)
IH 10 @ Roland Avenue ($17,850)
IH 10 @ W.W. White Road ($44,170)
SBC Center Parkway @ IH 35 ($13,550)
IH 10 @ New Braunfels Avenue ($19,350)
IH 10 @ Pine Street ($3,110)
Martin Luther King @ Walters St. ($25,400)
Commerce St. @ Hackberry Street ($1,800)
Houston Street @ IH 10 ($13,000)

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$205,000	0 to 5 years	City of San Antonio Public Works; Texas Department of Transportation Maintenance Funds and Safety Funds

5. Reconstruct several major streets within the study area into "feature" streets, incorporating street trees, on-street parking and wider sidewalks.

This transportation option arose directly from the land use planning process, facilitated from the planning notion to create strong "green" linkages which can tie the various neighborhoods together with Salado Creek. Since the western portion of the study area is primarily a grid network, the feature streets would be the key roadways within this grid network and would serve as desirable commercial and residential corridors for the betterment of the community.

Based upon a detailed travel forecasting modeling analysis of six major roadways (Commerce Street, New Braunfels Avenue, Houston Street, Martin Luther King Drive, Hackberry Street, Walters Street) for the year 2025, it is possible to reconstruct some portions of these roadways to have wider sidewalks, evenly spaced street trees, and on-street parking. In some situations, the number of travel lanes can be reduced. In others, the number of travel lanes can be increased. Each roadway can be designed to uniquely represent the neighborhoods it traverses.

Although six streets were initially evaluated as a single transportation option, this option was subsequently divided into six individual feature street options when presented to the public. The reason behind this is that the total cost of modifying all six streets is very prohibitive and could not be justified as a reasonable cost element. By breaking them apart, it was apparent that the public had specific desires as to which roadways they consider to be the most applicable for converting into feature streets. The result of both the engineering review and the public rankings is to recommend seeking funds for the conversion of three streets within the first tier of projects and two streets within the second tier of projects. The first tier feature street projects are listed on the following page.

(Walters Street from IH 35 to IH 10 was the only street on the initial list to not be recommended as a feature street. This facility has limited right-of-way throughout the study area and high traffic volumes. Therefore, four travel lanes would remain much as they are currently, with only some limited possibilities of expanding sidewalks and planting street trees.)

- Commerce Street from IH 37 to Houston Street: This feature street would continue to serve as the major east/west corridor through the study area. Four travel lanes can be reconstructed within the existing right-of-way, even between the constrictive cemetery properties. On-street parking would be prohibited along this entire stretch of roadway. It may be necessary to maintain six travel lanes through the short portion of Commerce Street west of Cherry Street during peak hours. This is within the St. Paul Square historic district and pedestrian amenities would have to be maintained or enhanced. Street trees can be planted continuously east of Cherry Street.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$16.7 million	15 to 25 years	City of San Antonio; Bexar County; city/county bond packages; private investment; tax increment financing district

- Martin Luther King Drive from New Braunfels Avenue to IH 10: This roadway can be converted from four travel lanes into two travel lanes with a parking lane provided as necessary. This roadway is a culturally important roadway within the community. Furthermore, it offers an opportunity to showcase St. Philip's College as an integral component of the east side of San Antonio.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$7.4 million	15 to 25 years	City of San Antonio; Bexar County; city/county bond packages; private investment; tax increment financing district

- New Braunfels Avenue from Martin Luther King Drive to IH 10: This portion of New Braunfels Avenue has lower traffic volumes and the opportunity arises to create a feature street with two travel lanes and a parking lane in this corridor.

- New Braunfels Avenue from IH 35 to Martin Luther King Drive: Because of the higher traffic volumes, four travel lanes would generally need to be retained within this corridor. The right-of-way is fairly restrictive north of Dawson Street, so no feature elements are recommended in that section. However, south of Dawson Street, wider sidewalks and street trees can be implemented, while leaving the existing median and travel lanes intact.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$3.8 million	15 to 25 years	City of San Antonio; Bexar County; city/county bond packages; private investment; tax increment financing district

Tier 2 Recommended Transportation Options

6. Reconstruct Houston Street from IH 37 to Walters Street as a feature street.

Two travel lanes can handle the typical daily traffic requirements for this primarily residential roadway. A parking lane can be restored to certain portions of this roadway. It is important to note that an on-going City of San Antonio project has already started to convert Houston Street into a three-lane cross-section with a reversible middle lane to assist in the peak traffic flows to and from the SBC Center and Freeman Coliseum. The feature street desired for Houston Street by the community should be implemented to the degree possible complementing the traffic management improvements that the City already has underway.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$7.6 million	15 to 25 years	City of San Antonio; Bexar County; city/county bond packages; private investment; tax increment financing district

7. Resurface six roadways at railroad crossings and replace wooden/asphalt railroad ties with concrete ties.

Each of the listed streets below crosses the Union Pacific railroad tracks near IH 37. In locations where tracks are utilizing wooden or asphalt crossings, they should be replaced with concrete beds which are significantly more durable and offer smoother crossings for vehicular tires.

- Commerce Street
- Florida Street
- Center Street
- Houston Street
- Burnet Street
- Sherman Street

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$702,000	5 to 10 years	City of San Antonio; Union Pacific; Federal At-Grade Railroad Crossing Safety Improvement funds; bond package

8. Close eight at-grade railroad crossings in the study area. Add street trees in planters to block vehicle access across the railroad tracks.

Each of the street crossings proposed to be closed at the railroad tracks has less than 500 cars crossing per day, and all businesses/residents have alternate access routes. Each street would be closed on either side of the tracks, using aesthetically pleasing concrete planters, and the crossing gate arms would be removed. A mountable wide sidewalk would be provided on one side to allow fire trucks to cross the railroad tracks and not have to turn around on these small streets. A small paved area would be provided for automobiles to turn around prior to reaching the railroad tracks. Closing these smaller streets allows the freight trains to operate with 50% fewer conflict points in the study area.

- Burleson Street
- Lamar Street
- Dawson Street
- Crockett Street
- Iowa Street
- Indiana Street
- Virginia Boulevard
- Delaware Street

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$423,000	10 to 15 years	City of San Antonio bond package; Community Development Block Grant; Union Pacific; Federal Railroad At-Grade Railroad Crossing Safety Improvement funds

9. Remove the Union Pacific railroad tracks between Roland Avenue and IH 35 that are adjacent to the Coliseum grounds. Maintain as a future transportation corridor.

This improvement would be a significant physical change for the East Corridor study area. The conversion of the Union Pacific right-of-way into a new two-lane to four-lane roadway offers significant future development opportunities along both sides of this rail line, by providing new access and interconnecting neighborhoods that previously had dead-end streets at the railroad. This option also provides for additional traffic capacity to handle SBC Center and Freeman Coliseum events from IH 35 and IH 10, and possibly relieve other local streets from this event traffic.

A major consideration for this transportation option is to replace the active 12 trains per day to the parallel train corridor which runs along IH 37. A new rail connection between the north/south and east/west rail lines near IH 35 plus other freight rail track improvements are needed as part of this transportation improvement. Union Pacific owns all of the track right-of-way in the study area, but other freight carriers such as Burlington Northern Southern Pacific also have trackage rights and will need to be involved in this process. Initial meetings with senior representatives of Union Pacific indicate their willingness to work with the City and the County to discuss how best to achieve this long term corridor exchange.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$33 million	20 to 25 years	City of San Antonio; Bexar County; Union Pacific; private development

10. Restore north/south cross town VIA bus service along Walters Street.

This transportation option would restore Route 508 along the length of Walters Street within the study area. The cost for this restoration of service is calculated on an annual operational basis and is not a one time capital expense. Operating costs include daily expenses such as labor, fringe benefits, fuel, tiers, utilities, casualty and liabilities, and other miscellaneous expenses.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$570,000	5 to 10 years	VIA operating funds using passenger fares and local sales tax

11. Reconstruct Hackberry Street from Duval Street to IH 10 as a feature street.

The existing four travel lanes can be reduced to two travel lanes. On-street parking can be provided along certain blocks, depending upon the desirable adjacent land uses.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$10.5 million	15 to 25 years	City of San Antonio; Bexar County; city/county bond packages; private investment; tax increment financing district

12. Develop a new roadway beginning at the Commerce/Houston Street intersection and continuing north to Seguin Street, roughly parallel to Salado Creek along the east bank.

All of the other improvements recommended for this transportation plan are concentrated on the western portion of the study area. This transportation option is the only recommended improvement that is located in the eastern portion of the study area and will focus attention on this area, which the proposed land use plan projects to have the most significant changes over the next 25 years.

The purpose of this new roadway is to accomplish several objectives. One objective is to relieve traffic volumes on W.W. White Road between IH 10 and IH 35. Secondly, this facility is envisioned to be a connector roadway that can bring together the Willow Wood and Skyline Park residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are isolated from other residential uses by large industrial/warehouse land uses. Finally, this roadway is conceptually designed as a scenic route following the east bank of Salado Creek, complementing the planned Salado Creek hike/bike trail along the west bank of the creek.

This roadway would require a significant amount of right-of-way from a few large private landowners between Houston Street and Gembler Road, and short portions of the road may have to be slightly elevated to avoid flood prone areas. The new roadway alignment begins west (or south) of Houston

Street with a short realignment of Commerce Street so as to create a perpendicular intersection with Houston Street. After crossing Houston Street, this new roadway would become a two-lane roadway.

In addition to the new roadway along Salado Creek, Belgium Street would be connected with Director Drive by the construction of a new bridge over Salado Creek. Bexar County is currently in the process of designing a new access roadway to Pletz Park following the west bank of Salado Creek. This new access roadway would tie in with an eastern extension of Belgium Street. It is recommended that this same new county roadway also be continued to the north to link up with the current terminus of Willowood Street in order to provide a direct connection for those residents living on that street. Finally, King Krest Street can also be extended westward from the Skyline Park neighborhood to connect to the new roadway.

Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Possible Funding Sources
$14.7 million	20 to 25 years	City of San Antonio; Bexar County; city/county bond packages; private investment; tax increment financing district

Conclusion

The East Corridor Multi-Modal Alternatives study shows that with an overall investment of approximately $103 million, 12 evaluated transportation options can be constructed within the study area. The First Tier (5 improvements costing $36 million) and the Second Tier (7 improvements costing $67 million) would provide significant roadway, sidewalk, and transit improvements, as well as develop an enhanced "sense of place" for the community through the feature streets projects and the roundabout project. The latter elements are key components to making the proposed future long-term land use plan successful for this study area. The proposed addition of two new roadways and removal of a railroad barrier help define the long term economic opportunities and recreational opportunities for the study area.

This study process developed these recommended transportation improvements from their inception as possible solutions to transportation issues brought forward by the community at the first public meeting, to their evaluation and conceptual design, followed by cost calculations and final ranking by the community at the third public meeting. The completion of the study culminates a truly community-involved process by which the resulting transportation network will significantly meet the needs and desires of the public who live and work in the study area.

It is recommended that the MPO, City of San Antonio, Bexar County, VIA, and the Texas Department of Transportation use the results of this study and its associated conceptual design plans as the basis on which to move toward funding initiatives, final design and engineering and finally, the implementation of these transportation projects. Although this study is clearly a long-range (25 year) plan, immediate action can be taken to achieve some of the recommended transportation improvements.

The residents of the study area who have been such a strong component in helping articulate their needs and desires, should continue to have a firm voice regarding the implementation of these recommended plans. The community has requested, and should be obliged, to continue receiving updates on what happens following the completion of this planning document and submission to the Metropolitan Planning Organization. A strong unified voice from the community will help define priorities citywide from among the many possible uses of limited transportation funding and can lead to innovative financing ideas for some of these improvements.