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# Naked City

## Paved With Good Intentions

BY ROB D'AMICO, OCTOBER 29, 1999, NEWS

More than 500 Hays County residents turned out at four public meetings over the past couple of months to voice their opposition to a plan for new roads -- including an extension of MoPac south to San Marcos -- that they say will spur unwanted development.

Some of the most vocal critics surfaced at a Wimberley meeting on Oct. 6, where about 300 people, many of them shouting down county officials, demanded that the MoPac segment and other new roads be deleted from the plan. "This isn't rocket science. ... You build the roads and the people will come," says Sally Caldwell, a Wimberley resident who attended the meeting. Patrick Cox, another vocal Wimberley opponent of the plan, says Hays County "still has vast areas that are untouched," and that new roads are the first step toward spoiling the environment. "We're in favor of plans that entail not just looking at highways, but at natural resources," he says.

Hays County commissioners were set to vote on the 2025 **Multi-Corridor Transportation Plan** at a Sept. 14 meeting, but held off after 22 residents claimed that the document and the planning process had not been well publicized. Commissioner **Bill Burnett**, whose precinct covers Wimberley, says the plan is designed to alleviate inevitable congestion as the county's population doubles to a projected 175,000-plus in the next 25 years, and that it isn't designed to provide roads for specific developers. "To say the plan was crafted for any specific development is ludicrous," he says.

However, Burnett says he has heard the will of the people and will object to the inclusion of the MoPac extension from Hilliard Road (just northwest of San Marcos) to County Road 150, which connects Dripping Springs to Driftwood near FM 1826. "It is my belief that we don't need it," he says.

The turnout and lively discussion at the meetings demonstrate clearly that growth and road issues are a key concern with all Hays County residents, not just the vocal ranks of the **Hays County Water Planning Partnership** (HCWPP). The HCWPP is fighting large-scale development in northern sections of the county by questioning the need for new roads and a **Lower Colorado River Authority** (LCRA) pipeline that would bring surface water to existing and new developments. HCWPP opposition targets the MoPac extension and new four-lane feeder roads that could connect MoPac with tracts ripe for development, such as the 6,000-acre Rutherford tract near FMs 1826 and 967.

County Judge **Jim Powers** did not return several phone calls to his office asking for comment on the plan, which outlines about \$200 million in improvements and new roads through 2025. The document will be used as official input for the **Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization**, which develops its own regional 25-year plan and designates transportation funding.

Consultants hired for road feasibility studies -- Prime Strategies Inc. and Concept Development & Planning -- will put together a report on public comments from the meetings. Many residents continue to blast the county's choice of consultants, though,

saying at least one of them -- **Pix Howell** -- was involved in negotiations with the Newhall Land and Farming Company's plans to put at least 14,000 homes on the Rutherford tract. Newhall withdrew from the project in September.

At least one county official -- Pct. 2 Commissioner **Susie Carter** -- also has questioned the propriety of the consultants' dual work. But Burnett says it's common for transportation consultants to do work for a wide variety of clients, and that the consultants are mainly putting past recommendations into a format needed by transportation officials.

Howell says that most of the plan -- including a north-south arterial from MoPac to San Marcos -- was included in 1990 and 1998 planning efforts, well before he did utility studies for the Newhall Company. He calls the current flak over the plan "painful" but "healthy," since it gets the proposal before more people and educates them on the issues. A Hays County resident and former LCRA board member, he says he would also like to see more strategic planning to look at where larger-scale development nodes should go before planning for roads and utilities.

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