

**Lockhart Area Transportation and Community Preservation**

**GRG 374 – Andrew Aboudaoud**

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As the spectacular growth of Central Texas continues on in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Lockhart finds itself in a most auspicious position. Located on a major highway a short drive away from an exploding metropolitan area, Lockhart has been given many opportunities to better itself in the coming decades. It is imperative for Lockhart to develop a comprehensive plan of action now, in order to retain its positive small-town qualities and diversity, and yet still become a successful, growing satellite city. Transportation and community preservation should be at the top of the list of issues to address in planning for the future.

The city of Lockhart is poised to become a center of growth over the next decade. Lockhart's physical location is one of its most advantageous traits in this aspect. Highway 183 already links Lockhart with the Austin metropolitan area to the North, as well as Interstate 10 to the South. A short drive to the East is Interstate 35. Both I-35 and I-10 lead to the even larger San Antonio metropolitan area. Furthermore, with the State Highway 130 already being built to the North in Travis and Williamson counties, and proposed to run South through Caldwell County to Interstate 10, Lockhart sits at the center of what could soon be a booming economic area. This growth is inevitable and should be planned for and embraced. It is the steps taken today that will allow successful growth of the city and surrounding area, yet prevent Lockhart from losing its rural small town charm.

## State Highway 130 and the Lockhart Loop

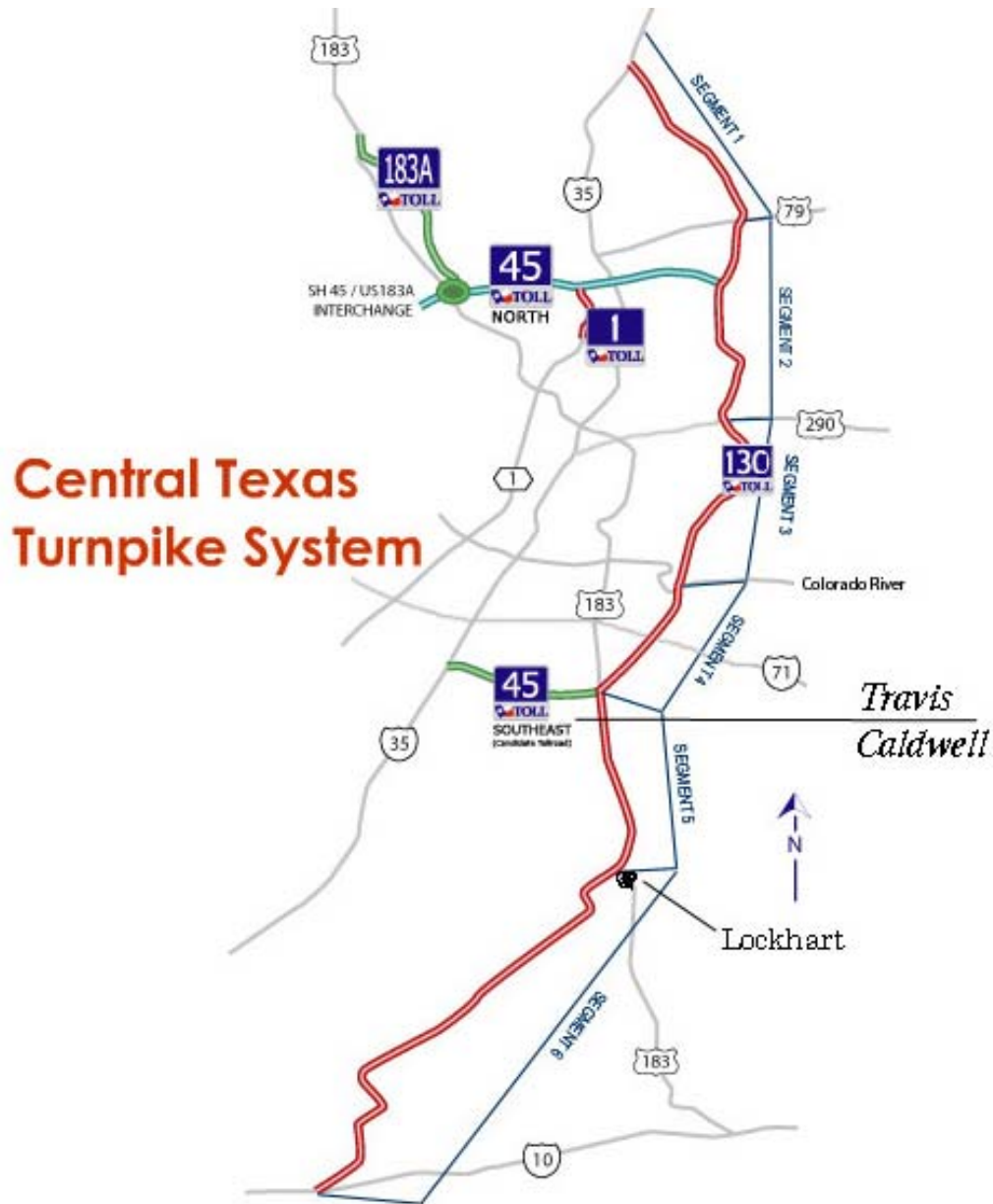


Figure 1 - The Central Texas Turnpike Project and SH 130 (shown in red)

### Expected SH 130 Segment Completion Dates

Segment 1 (I-35 to U.S. 79): September 2007

Segment 2 (U.S. 79 to U.S. 290): September 2007

Segment 3 (U.S. 290 to SH 71): September 2007

Segment 4 (SH 71 to U.S. 183): December 2007

**Segments 5-6 (U.S. 183 to I-10): To be determined. Project funding not in place**

State Highway 130, a major element of the Central Texas Turnpike Project (CTTP), is intended to relieve traffic in Central Texas by creating a commuter and NAFTA corridor alternative to Interstate 35. Highway 130, which began construction in Williamson County in October of 2003, is slated to extend from north of Georgetown, east of metropolitan Austin, through Caldwell County, to I-10 near Seguin. With the addition of 65 miles of new toll roads, this project will improve mobility and safety in the region. State Highway 130 is the state's first highway to be developed under a Comprehensive Development Agreement, allowing the work of property acquisition, design and construction to be undertaken simultaneously. The first phase of the CTTP, for which funding has already been appropriated and which is expected to be completed by December 2007, includes the northern 49 miles of State Highway 130: the first 4 segments out of 6 that are in Travis and Williamson counties. Funding has yet to be allocated for segments 5 and 6 in Caldwell County.

What does this mean for Lockhart? Significant growth: physically and economically. However, for this to occur, segments 5 and 6 of SH 130 will need to be funded in Caldwell County. Additionally, land will need to be secured for the physical right-of-way. How can completion of SH 130 become a reality?

Funding can come from several sources, but primarily through tolls collected on the new highway. Since Texans don't want massive gas-tax increases, the only other way to pay for major highway improvements is with tolls. In the fall of 2003, voters in Texas approved constitutional amendments to enable new toll-friendly policies by a 61% majority. The 2003 law, House Bill 3588, gave the Texas Turnpike Authority Division of TxDOT new powers in toll revenue bonding, land acquisition, and enforcement of toll payment by motorists. One controversial provision, not yet used, permits TxDOT to take

over certain sections of currently non-tolled state highways and incorporate them into toll projects. It is possible that this is one method that may be placed into effect along segment 5 of proposed SH 130, where it is slated to utilize a section of Highway 183.

In 1998, Texas Congressmen earmarked nearly \$20 million of Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) funds to be designated for the development of SH 130, yet only \$750,000 of the total grant was given towards development in Caldwell County. Even then, this portion of funds was to be shared with Williamson County.

Additional federal funds and bonds will be needed and likely granted to complete segments 5 and 6 of SH130, as Caldwell County is relatively low in population and does not have the resources to pay for the road. Indeed SH 130 will benefit Caldwell County and Lockhart greatly, but the highway will most significantly benefit other, richer counties who can afford to pay more towards SH 130. Hence it is only logical that Caldwell County should receive more assistance from federal and state sources to help complete SH 130. Currently, TxDOT is financing the construction of the first phase of the CTPP, which includes Loop 1, SH 45 North and the northern 49-miles of SH 130 (segments 1-4).

The completion of State Highway 130 near Lockhart will bring significant traffic through the area. However, steps can be taken to ensure this traffic does not adversely affect the everyday life of those living in Lockhart. Zoning ordinances can be put into place to prevent growth around the new roadway (SH 130, routed on the Western edge of Lockhart) that would detract from the current city setup. Zoning of a “green belt” between SH130 and Lockhart should be planned for today, before any growth in that area takes place.

Construction of a loop is recommended around the Eastern edge of Lockhart. This will divert heavy and non-stop traffic that ordinarily passes through the center of town on Highway 183 which normally causes congestion and pollution within Lockhart. Again, carefully zoning both roadways around Lockhart can prevent movement of commerce and residents out of the city. Outside the loop should be zoned industrial to take advantage of SH130 and the Lockhart Loop. Inside the loop should be a greenbelt buffer, then the rest of the available space should be open for residential use. The city center should be kept commercial, with possible expansion on the main streets, but restrained to a central business district. This will ensure Lockhart remains a tight community where its residents get to come together to interact in their daily activities.

Kilgore, Texas implemented a loop with zoning plans similar to what has been proposed here, with great success.

### **Community Preservation and a Lockhart Greenbelt**

Historically, the initial draw to Caldwell County, and Lockhart itself, was the natural springs in the surrounding area. With careful planning and steps taken to retain Lockhart's rural small town characteristics, it will thrive in the future and not become another example of "the death of a small town".

Lockhart should continue to strongly encourage in-fill development. Planning should enforce clear city limits and entry/exits, as well as a greenbelt to buffer the city from industrial zones and outside traffic. Natural open space, a greenbelt, is truly appealing to people, a fact that is underlined by statistics showing that proximity to green space rates as the single greatest factor in a home's value. Allowing residential develop up to a certain point, then zoning that point into a greenbelt and developing it as such, has

the potential to greatly improve the value and quality associated with Lockhart.

Furthermore, because lower-income city residents have less access to parkland than suburbanites do, they are emerging as strong greenbelt advocates.

Inside Lockhart, chain businesses such as common restaurants like McDonalds, should be encouraged to retrofit existing buildings into their stores, to keep the feel of a historic older town. Signage and colors should be kept low and quiet to blend in yet still be visible. Support for local businesses should have priority over chain businesses, unless they are community friendly themselves. Trees could be planted in the downtown area also to create a natural, blending environment in public areas. A survey of residents of Lockhart revealed their want to keep the businesses downtown. Residents reported a liking to the concept of a greenbelt also.

As the march of progress continues on in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Lockhart finds itself in a most auspicious position. However, it is the decisions and plans made today that will determine whether Lockhart becomes a leader in Caldwell County, or just another small town overrun by the needs of other growing metropolitan areas.

**Sources / People / Offices Contacted:**

John Hurt (TxDOT – 832-7060)

Patrick Rose (Caldwell County – Texas House of Representatives – 463-0647)

Donald Nyland (Lone Star Infrastructure – 681-6000)

Dan Gibson (City of Lockhart – City Planner)

Central Texas Turnpike Project Office – (512) 225-1300

<http://www.kilgore-edc.com/>

<http://www.lockhart-tx.org/index.html>

<http://www.sh130.com>

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