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16. Abstract
Highway relief routes may have a variety of impacts on small- and medium-size communities, both positive and negative. On the positive side, communities benefit from a reduction in traffic through the heart of the community and the negative impacts such traffic brings, including noise, emissions, and safety concerns. However, the reduction in through traffic may also have negative impacts on businesses in the community, particularly highway-oriented businesses located along the old route that are dependent on pass-by traffic. The negative impacts on local businesses may be partly offset by new development occurring along the highway relief route. How these impacts play out in a particular community depends on the characteristics of the community and the new relief route, as well as larger economic and industry trends. The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the various factors that influence the economic impacts of highway relief routes on small- and medium-size communities. This report presents case studies of ten small- and medium-size communities in Texas and analyzes the extent and nature of the impacts of the relief routes and the key factors determining those impacts.

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ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF HIGHWAY RELIEF ROUTES ON SMALL- AND MEDIUM-SIZE COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDIES

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"Economic Effects of Highway Relief Routes on Small- and Medium-Size Communities"

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Highway relief routes may have a variety of impacts on small- and medium-size communities, both positive and negative. On the positive side, communities benefit from a reduction in traffic through the heart of the community and the negative impacts such traffic brings, including noise, emissions, and safety concerns. However, the reduction in through traffic may also have negative impacts on businesses in the community, particularly highway-oriented businesses located along the old route that are dependent on pass-by traffic. The negative impacts on local businesses may be partly offset by new development occurring along the highway relief route. How these impacts play out in a particular community depends on the characteristics of the community and the new relief route, as well as larger economic and industry trends. The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the various factors that influence the economic impacts of highway relief routes on small- and medium-size communities.

Two previous reports lay the foundation for the case study research summarized in this report. Report 1843-1 described the kinds of issues and concerns raised by communities for which highway relief routes are proposed, and reviewed previous studies from the U.S. and elsewhere on the economic impacts of relief routes. This report identified three major categories of potential impacts to explore in the case study research: improvement to quality of life in the existing community resulting from a decline in traffic through town; declines in existing businesses in the town center resulting from a decline in traffic through town or from increased competition from new businesses along the relief route; and overall changes in economic activity in the community resulting from new development generated by the relief route.

Report 1843-2 summarized an effort to quantitatively assess the economic impacts of highway relief routes and the relative importance of a variety of factors in explaining those impacts. Using a pooled panel data set for small- and medium-size communities in Texas with relief routes, plus a sample of control cities without relief routes, this research used econometric modeling techniques to estimate the impacts of the relief route on sales and establishments for the city as a whole. Four industrial sectors were considered: all retail businesses, gasoline service stations, eating and drinking

places, and service industries. The results showed that relief routes have both positive and negative impacts on these sectors of the economy. For small cities, the impacts are mostly negative, but for medium cities, the results are more mixed. The models also show the marginal impact of different characteristics on the relief route. Most notably, a shift in traffic to the relief route leads to a decline in several indicators, particularly those for total retail. Total sales for eating and drinking paces increases, however, as the traffic split increases. Other characteristics of the relief route are less often significant. The models also captured the marginal effects of factors other than the relief routes, including per capita income, the fraction of elderly persons, and unemployment rates. The nearby presence of a large city had a positive impact on some indicators.

The goal of the case studies summarized in this report was to explore in more depth the impacts of the relief routes within the communities and the factors contributing to those impacts. The case studies allowed for a qualitative analysis of changes to the local economy, including the demise of businesses along the old route, the relocation of existing businesses from the old route to the relief route, and the development of new businesses along the relief route. In addition, the case studies allowed for an assessment of the overall impact on quality of life for the community, taking into account not only economic changes but also the more intangible benefits of a reduction in traffic through the community. The factors contributing to those impacts were identified and analyzed for each community. Out of the ten case studies completed, several important patterns emerged that suggest the conditions under which relief routes will have greater impacts and the actions that TxDOT and local communities can take to manage those impacts.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

The first step in the case study methodology was the selection of ten case studies from the list of twenty-three communities with relief routes analyzed in Report 1843-2. Data collection for these ten case studies included compilation of information available through chambers of commerce and other sources, phone and on-site interviews with selected members of the community, and on-site observations of the community. This chapter describes the criteria used to select the case studies, the approach used to identify appropriate community members for interviews, the process used to conduct the interviews, and the techniques used to analyze the information collected.

2.1 CASE STUDY SELECTION

A variety of criteria were used to select the ten case studies from the entire set of cities with relief routes. The most basic criterion to be satisfied was an even geographic coverage. The geographic diversity of Texas is apparent not only in physical and climatic features but also in cultural identity, economic conditions, and population distribution. All of these factors may help to shape the impact of the relief route on the local community. We defined several regions within the state and selected at least one community to represent each region. The regions defined were West, East, South, Central, and North Texas (Figure 2-1).

Communities were also selected based on several other geographic characteristics, including size of the community, ex-urban versus rural status, and geographic isolation. Communities were selected to provide a range of sizes up to 50,000 residents, with most communities from 5,000 to 10,000 residents (Table 2-1); as it turns out, few cities with relief routes in Texas fall into the 10,000 to 40,000 population range. The distinction between ex-urban and rural communities was thought to have a potentially significant influence on the impacts of the relief route and so was also included as a criterion. Geographic isolation adds another potentially important dimensions beyond the size of the community.

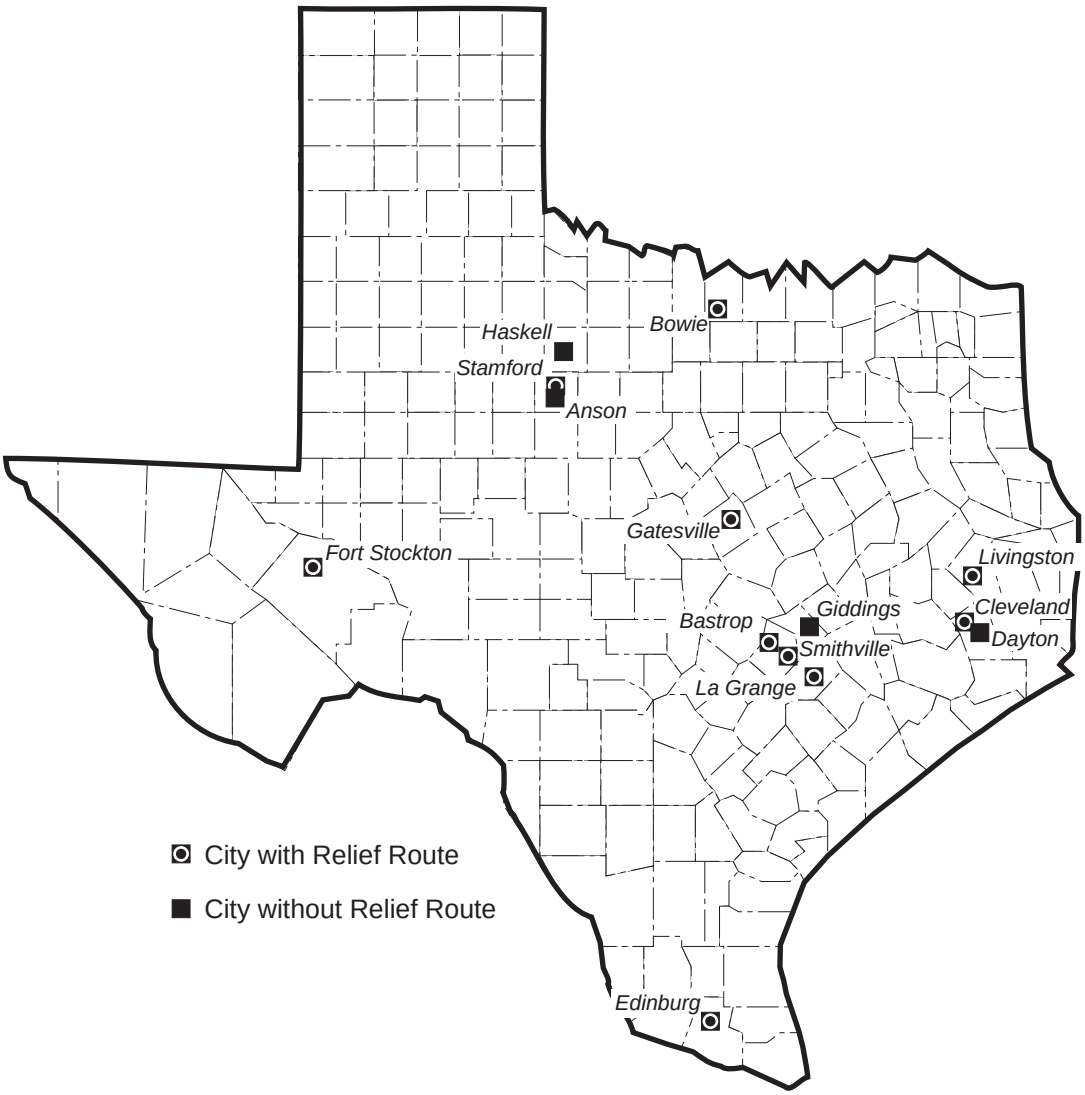

Figure 2-1. Location of Case Study Communities

The age of the relief route played a critical role in case study selection. It was important to find relief routes old enough for impacts to have occurred, but not so old that impacts could not be studied. In addition, the newer relief routes were almost always built as limited-access facilities. Because most of the additional relief routes the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) now proposes for Texas communities will be built as limited-access facilities, these newer examples were deemed to be more appropriate as case studies. In general, the relief routes in the selected case studies were built after 1980, but various considerations lead to the selection of two older relief routes. Bastrop, where the relief route was constructed in 1960, was selected due to its location

along the same highway as two other relief route communities, as noted below. Edinburg, where the relief route was constructed in 1977, was selected because no other large case study cities could be identified and because of the lack of other possible case studies in South Texas.

Table 2-1. Case Study Communities

Case Study	Highway	Year of Relief Route	Type of Access	2000 Population*	Wal-Mart Opening**
Bastrop	SH 71	1960	uncontrolled	5,340	1987/1995
Bowie	US 287	1978	controlled	5,219	1979
Cleveland	US 59	1988	controlled	7,605	1980/2000
Edinburg	US 281	1977	controlled	48,465	1992
Fort Stockton	IH 10	1983	controlled	7,846	1986
Gatesville	SH 36	1986	uncontrolled	15,591	1983
La Grange	SH 71	1990	controlled	4,478	1985
Livingston	US 59	1981	controlled	5,433	1983
Smithville	SH 71	1984	controlled	3,901	n/a
Stamford	US 277	1987	controlled	3,636	1989
Anson	US 277	n/a	n/a	2,556	n/a
Dayton	US 90	n/a	n/a	5,709	n/a
Giddings	US 290	n/a	n/a	5,105	n/a
Haskell	US 277	n/a	n/a	3,106	n/a

* Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
** Source: Phone calls to individual Wal-Mart stores

The US 59 corridor north of Houston and the SH 71 corridor west of Austin were identified as offering an opportunity to examine impacts in communities sharing the same traffic stream. Bastrop, Smithville, and La Grange are located on SH 71 and share the Austin-to-Houston traffic. Cleveland and Livingston are on the US 59 corridor and share

traffic heading from Houston to points north and southbound traffic destined for Houston. The study of communities sharing traffic streams controls for one potentially important variable and allows for inferences about the possible impacts of geographic and political characteristics in the case study communities.

After these ten case studies were completed, four additional case studies of communities without relief routes were completed to provide a baseline for the analysis of the case studies of communities with relief routes. The four non-relief route communities were selected based on their proximity to relief route communities and on their similarities to the relief route communities so that the major difference between the communities would be the relief route itself. We selected two communities that neighbor Stamford: Haskell and Anson. These case studies enable a comparison of Stamford, with a relief route, to two nearby communities without a relief route, Haskell and Anson. They also enable an analysis of the range of experiences of two communities without relief routes that are affected by similar regional trends. Giddings, located on US 290 east of Austin, was selected as a comparison for Bastrop, Smithville, and La Grange; these communities area all affected by an increase in traffic between Austin and Houston, and to varying degrees by spillover growth from Austin. Dayton, located on US 90 southwest of Houston, was selected as a comparison for Cleveland and Livingston. Although Dayton is located on a different highway than Cleveland and Livingston, all of these communities have been affected by the growth of Houston and its suburbs.

2.2 SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES

The selection of interviewees comprised two processes, identification of appropriate interviewees and contact strategies. First, we identified three groups affected by relief routes: business owners, residents, and city officials. We expected business owners, particularly owners of highway-oriented businesses, to be most directly affected by the relief route and thus to provide the greatest insight into the economic impacts of the route. The second group of interviewees was composed of residents and civic leaders who might be able to speak to the views of the residents. We expected these interviewees to provide the most open assessment of quality of life improvements attributable to the relief route, in contrast to business owners and government officials whose views on

possible quality of life improvements may be biased by reductions in sales or tax rolls. Finally, we interviewed government officials to obtain their perspective on public involvement in the planning and design of the relief route, as well as the larger impacts of the relief route for the community. We expected that government officials would have a better understanding of the political issues surrounding a major infrastructure project than residents or business owners. The list of individuals interviewed in each community is included in Appendix A.

Contact strategies were developed to set up on-site interviews with interested parties. Four methods of contact were devised. First, we contacted the TxDOT area engineer. Typically, the TxDOT engineers had a limited knowledge of the relief routes, often because the current area engineers were not working in the district at the time of construction or were only familiar with one portion of the project. In several cases, the TxDOT engineer was completely unfamiliar with the project and offered only basic insights. Most of the TxDOT officials were able to suggest businesspersons, city officials, or civic leaders familiar with the project and community. Second, we contacted city managers. City managers are both familiar with projects underway in their community and have substantial contact with businesspersons and civic leaders. In small Texas towns, the city manager is typically a native of the community and is therefore familiar with the history of the community. City managers were able to identify highway-related businesses that were or were not impacted by the relief routes. Third, we contacted the local chambers of commerce. Chamber officials offered the most contacts and potential interviewees among civic, governmental, and business leaders within the community. The final strategy was the walk-up interview. We spent part of each site visit exploring the town and meeting residents, including walking into stores and interviewing business owners. Walk-up interviews proved effective but were difficult to initiate.

Several critical issues developed during the interview process. Contacting residents or disproportionately impacted groups was extremely difficult. It was not possible to contact displaced residents independently; officials and businesspersons did not know displaced persons or they were reticent to divulge them. In several communities minority groups were directly affected or alternative alignments would have

impacted the minority community. In these instances, officials and businesspersons were unable or unwilling to divulge contact information. Contacting and interviewing hotel owners also proved difficult for an interesting reason. The majority of motels in the case study communities are economy class, and the economy class motel market is now dominated by Indian immigrants. As of 1996, Indian immigrants owned 50 percent of all economy class accommodations in the U.S., and were projected to own 75 percent of all economy class motel rooms by 2000 (Kurland 1996). Several factors made interviewing Indian motel owners difficult. For whatever reason, city officials and chamber of commerce representatives were reluctant or unable to recommend or set up interviews with Indian-owned motels. In addition, Indian motel owners are predominantly recent immigrants, and they did not live in their respective communities prior to construction of the relief route.

Most of our initial contacts were with individuals with a vested interest in acting as boosters for their communities. TxDOT engineers have a vested interest in discussing only the positive impacts of a relief route, and chamber officials have a vested interest in portraying their community in a positive light. In many of the case study communities, the interviewees were familiar with one another and their respective opinions. These initial contacts could easily influence or bias the perceptions and opinions we observed in the community. However, most TxDOT and chamber officials provided contacts with differing opinions and we are confident the full range of opinions was expressed during interviews.

2.3 INTERVIEWS

The case study interviews were conducted in two formats: site interviews and phone interviews. We conducted phone interviews prior to site visits. Residents unavailable for site interviews were interviewed, and short interviews were conducted with site interviewees. The phone interviews were generally informal and provided an opportunity to familiarize us with the community. The conversations were not recorded and brief notes were taken.

Site interviews were more formal. We spoke to interviewees in individual meetings or in groups of two to three. The site interviews followed a formal framework

of eighteen questions (Appendix B). The interviews were designed to elicit information about residents' perceptions of the relief route and their reaction to the relief route when it was proposed. In addition, interviewees were questioned about the impacts of the relief route on the town as a whole and the downtown specifically. Interviewees were questioned about new development on the relief route and business relocation to the relief route. We were interested in determining the amount, timing, and type of development along the relief route. Interviewees were also asked about their level of involvement with public meetings and input and about any advice they could offer other communities. The site interviews were taped with permission from the interviewees. We felt that the advantages of taping the interviews for later analysis outweighed any possible disadvantage of less candid interviews. Several interviewees expressed more controversial opinions following the interview and after the tape recorder was turned off, but given the limited number of such occurrences, we remain confident that the tape recorder only minimally impacted interviewee response.

2.4 ANALYSIS

The case study write-ups are a synthesis of interview analysis, background data, and observations made during the site visit. Background data was derived from a variety of sources. Local chambers of commerce and the *Handbook of Texas* provided information and narratives on local history and historical economies. Chambers of commerce also provided information about the local economic base and major employers. Data on local sales and establishments came from the U.S. Census of Retail Trade, and population data came from the U.S. Census of Population and Housing.

Interviews were examined using a common framework across case studies. First, residents' initial concerns and opinions, the gut reaction townspeople had to the relief route when it was proposed and designed, were examined. A second section examined the anticipated impacts of the relief route prior to its construction. Next, the realized impacts of the relief route as perceived by the interviewees were analyzed. This analysis was made challenging by the fact that interviewees frequently provided conflicting information or cited conflicting causes for the current condition of their communities,

depending on their perspectives and perceptions. Fourth, using information gleaned from site interviews as well as observations made during the site visits, we documented what new development had occurred following the construction of the relief route and explored what factors explained that development. Finally, interviewees provided insight into the communities' current feelings about the relief route.

This analysis of the interviews together with other data available about the community provided the basis for our objective account of the current conditions in the community and the factors leading to those conditions. In addition to the analysis completed for each case study, a comprehensive analysis was conducted to identify patterns across case studies. The comprehensive analysis examined trends not related to relief routes that may mask the impacts of a relief route and identified several geographic factors, characteristics of the relief route, and local actions that determine and influence the impacts of a relief route.

CHAPTER 3. RELIEF ROUTE CASE STUDIES

This chapter presents reports on each of the ten case study communities with relief routes. The reports are necessarily lengthy, as the story in each community is explored and presented in depth, precisely the advantage of using the case study methodology. Although each story is in many ways unique, several interesting and important patterns emerge from this set of case studies, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. The case study reports, presented in alphabetical order, are organized as follows: Background, Preconceptions, Impacts, and Analysis. Impacts on downtown businesses, development along the relief route, highway-oriented businesses in general, and traffic conditions in each community area are examined.

3.1 BASTROP

3.1.1 Background

Bastrop was founded in 1825 where the El Camino Real crossed the Colorado River. The early economy relied on farming, lumbering, and coal mining. In the 1920s, small but productive oil fields were discovered in the county and cattle production rose in prominence. Transportation has always played an important role in Bastrop. It is located at the junction of SH 21, SH 95, and SH 71. The converging highways give Bastrop residents direct access to San Antonio, Houston, and Austin. Bastrop is 20 miles from Austin-Bergstrom International Airport and 30 miles southeast of downtown Austin. This proximity to the Austin metropolitan area largely explains the recent population growth, as commuters move to Bastrop in search of affordable housing and a more rural setting (Figure 3-1). The city and county are currently seeking greater industrial and service diversification.

State Highway 71 is a major corridor running from Brady in west central Texas, through Austin, connecting with IH 10 in Columbus, and continuing to Houston and the Gulf of Mexico. A relief route was built around Bastrop in 1960 to alleviate congestion in downtown (Figure 3-2). A very narrow bridge crossed the Colorado River and brought SH 71 through downtown. The Bastrop facility is different from newer relief routes in that it was built relatively close to downtown and has unlimited access, a design choice

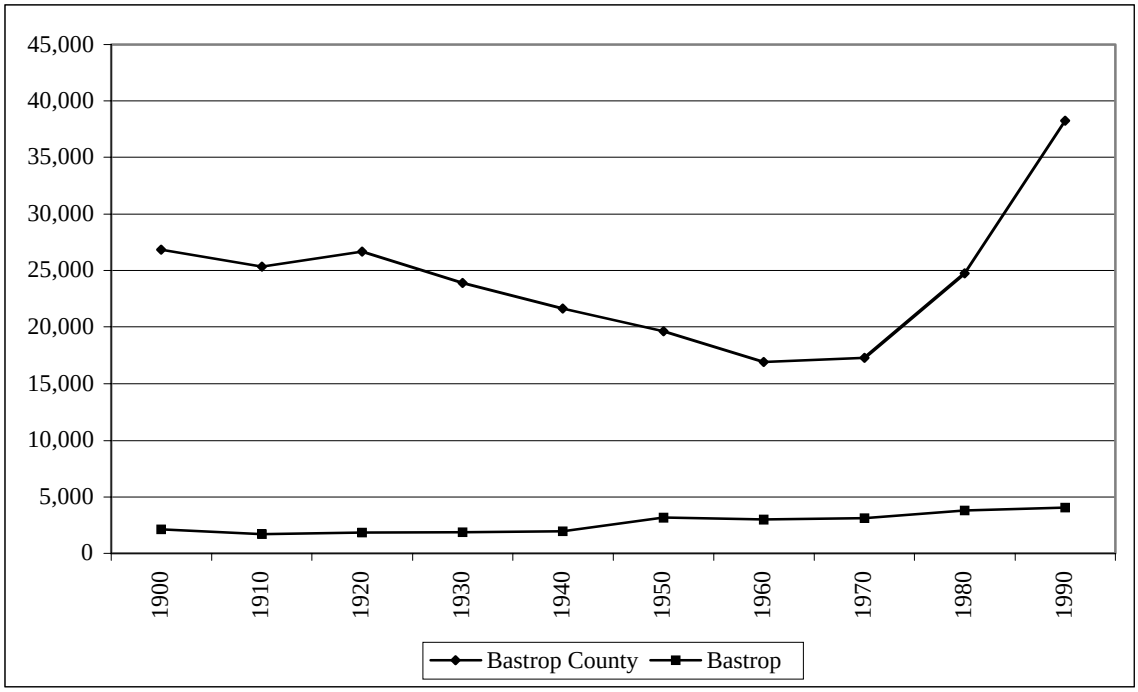

Figure 3-1. Population of Bastrop and Bastrop County, 1900-1990

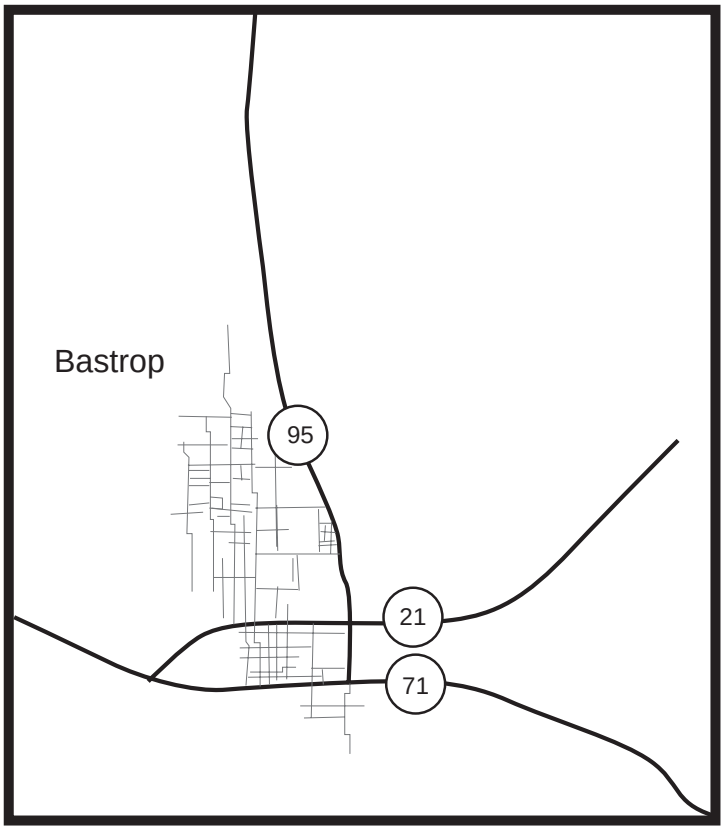

Figure 3-2. Map of Bastrop Highways

between Austin and Houston. Development has occurred along the length of the route, and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is contemplating improvements to the current roadway, such as an upgrade to a limited access facility, or the construction of a second relief route.

3.1.2 Preconceptions

Given the age of the SH 71 relief route in Bastrop, gathering information about citizens' initial impressions of the proposed relief route was difficult. Longtime resident and former council member Neal Gurwitz doesn't recall anybody in favor of the relief route and recalls that citizens were very concerned about the original relief route. Current residents of Bastrop view the relief route as a necessity. The case study interviews may be the first time any of the interviewees considered the relief route's impact on Bastrop. Most individuals viewed the relief route area as much a part of Bastrop as downtown is. The possible highway improvements to SH 71 through Bastrop that TxDOT is considering have generated substantial controversy. Citizens without a direct stake in the relief route area are generally in favor of the improvements, while business owners along the existing relief route are opposed to any changes. Bastrop probably faced a similar political environment in the 1950s when the first relief route was under construction.

The anticipated impacts in Bastrop were varied. Residents expected both negative and positive impacts. Many businesses expected a change in visibility and traffic. Fewer cars would be traveling past their front door and fewer travelers would be aware of their presence. Conversely, residents expected better access to downtown and better access to a variety of services. Some farsighted citizens expected a net increase in traffic through Bastrop.

3.1.3 Impacts

It is clear that time has dulled the emotions of Bastrop residents toward the SH 71 relief route. "Change is inevitable and we just have to make the best of it," said Reed Sharp, president of the local bank. "There wasn't really an option to not have a bypass," said Kay Wesson, a local realtor. The relief route has integrated itself into the city. It no

longer skirts the town; it has become as much a part of Bastrop as the downtown. Mr. Sharp grew up "thinking that's the way it always was." The downside of the integration of SH 71 into Bastrop is "most people who travel SH 71 through Bastrop don't know there's more to it." Said David Lock, owner of a prominent pharmacy, "You'd be surprised by the number of people in Bastrop County who don't know there's a downtown Bastrop."

Few Bastrop residents remember the town before the relief route, but they have witnessed major changes since the 1960s. They attribute some of that change to the relief route and the "kind of domino effect" it created. Initial movement to the relief route was slow, but as time went on business relocation became more prevalent. Ms. Wesson noted that the relief route created two business districts, each of which serves a distinct function. Day-to-day retail trade is conducted on the relief route, and downtown serves courthouse-related businesses, title companies, attorneys, etc., and tourists. "We have two towns in Bastrop," said Mr. Sharp, and the two business districts may have different goals. Many interviewees felt that the net effect of the relief route was to stimulate the local economy and expand the sales tax base.

The relief route clearly changed the nature of downtown, even if business activity there did not decline. Beginning early on, downtown lost many of its traditional industries to the relief route business district. The last grocery store in downtown closed and was reopened as a post office. Griesenbach's Furniture store moved from downtown to the new highway, as did M&K liquor. All the car dealerships in town moved to the relief route. The most recent business to move to the relief route is Cartwright's BBQ; according to one local official, the restaurant owner expected a 25 percent increase in business, but saw a 400 percent increase. A local doctor is also considering moving his practice to the relief route. "Retailers follow the traffic counts," said one businessperson. Service stations, grocers, restaurants and hotels were the most severely affected. Residents express ambivalence towards the antique shops now found downtown that cater to tourists. On one hand, these businesses are clearly drawing people to Bastrop. On Fridays and Saturdays, downtown is crowded with tourists. On the other hand, some argue that these tourist businesses do not employ many people and do not make large profits. Without so much of the historic downtown character intact, the downtown might

have been more severely affected, according to Joe Newman, the director of the local economic development corporation.

Development began along the bypass shortly after construction, but the first sizable development occurred in the mid-1980s. Super S, a regional grocer, was one of the first businesses along the new route and ushered in a new era in Bastrop. After the Super S, a steady exodus of businesses left downtown and a variety of new businesses opened on the relief route. Fast-food restaurants and service stations quickly appeared on the relief route. Wal-Mart and H-E-B moved to the relief route in the late 1980s; Wal-Mart recently moved to a new Supercenter along the relief route. Although several local businesses moved to the relief route, the majority of businesses locating there are nationally owned or are national or regional franchises. Many local businesses franchised in order to compete with large retailers, and a group of local optometrists formed a single entity to compete with Wal-Mart. Some interviewees cited high property values as the primary reason local businesses were unable to move to SH 71; the local businesses that relocated to the relief route did so early on and only one business has been able to move to the bypass. The 2000-01 Bastropian, an annual publication of the local paper, reports the number of businesses on Texas 71 is expanding at an increasing rate. Highway-related businesses are no longer the dominant business activity. Rather, the majority of new businesses on SH 71 serve Bastrop residents or residents of nearby communities.

The relief route has benefited the community in other ways. Mr. Sharp noted that access to services is better and safer on the relief route. The old route into town was a hazard to motorists; the old bridge was so narrow that semis would knock mirrors off each other. Mr. Lock felt access to downtown businesses was improved by removing through traffic from the old bridge. Others noted that the variety of services has increased over time. “You used to have to drive to Austin to get certain items, but now all your shopping can be done in Bastrop,” said Mr. Sharp. Dorothy Crawford, a Bastrop resident, feels “it’s brought a lot of business.” Conversely, some residents felt that access to services within Bastrop decreased as a result of the relief route. Bigger businesses are forcing the smaller operators out of business, but some residents feel the bigger stores offer more selection and better prices. The relief route may have contributed to other

negative trends in the community. Property is more expensive, though Nancy Sanders, owner of a gift shop, feels this change is due to proximity to Austin. Mr. Lock noted that the relief route created more traffic, but it does not bother him. Joe Newman, president of the chamber of commerce, noted that the "bypass eventually gets congested and then you need another bypass and the congestion keeps spreading. The ideal situation is for truck traffic to take the (relief route) and everybody else comes through downtown."

The relief route is not the only factor contributing to these changes in Bastrop. Residents cited numerous causes for Bastrop's current conditions and the transition of downtown from retail center to an office and tourist district. Many attributed changes in Bastrop to changing retail structure and retail consolidation. The city's market size in the mid-1980s made Bastrop attractive to national retailers, including Wal-Mart and H-E-B. Residents generally agreed that the national businesses would have located in Bastrop with or without the relief route because "Bastrop has the volume," according to Ms. Wesson. However, Ms. Sanders doubts whether the national chains would have appeared without the relief route. Others point to a lack of parking in downtown or a failure of local businesses to adapt to change. One official felt that businesses failed because "they didn't have the right product or they didn't have the right attitude." "A lot of businesses panic when Wal-Mart moves in," said Mr. Lock. Others feel that landlords charge exorbitant rents for downtown properties. A nearby military base closed and "after that there were a lot of vacant stores," added Mr. Lock. Residents feel that the county seat has played a large role in keeping downtown viable. Many residents feel proximity to Austin plays a larger role than the relief route.

3.1.4 Analysis

Although residents are uncertain of the immediate impacts of the relief route, an examination of traffic counts implies that the initial impact on existing businesses could have been significant. In 1958, the average daily traffic (ADT) count was 2,050 cars traveling through Bastrop. Following construction of the relief route, only 700 travelers passed the same point while 3,070 traveled along the new relief route in 1964. A decrease of this magnitude undoubtedly impacted local highway-related businesses. In 1996, approximately 14,300 cars traveled the eastern end of the SH 71 relief route and

3,400 used the old route. These data are consistent with residents' claims of an economic slowdown in downtown triggered by the relief route, followed by a period of explosive growth along the relief route. Bastrop has developed into the major retail center for Bastrop County and has become the hub of a growing ex-urban community.

This growth resulted more from growth in the Austin metropolitan area and growth in traffic between Austin and Houston than from the construction of a relief route. Market size and traffic counts are key factors in retail location decisions, and Bastrop rated well on both factors. The earliest businesses on the relief route were mostly highway-related, but as traffic counts increased retailers dependent solely on local traffic began to locate on the relief route as well. In the resulting "domino effect," most new retail development located on the relief route. As more business located on the relief route, the traffic counts increased, and as the traffic counts increased, the relief route became an even more attractive location for retail businesses, in a self-reinforcing cycle. Given the increase in traffic levels, the design of the relief route as an unlimited access facility almost certainly contributed to this growth. Over the same period, Bastrop's downtown has gone from being the retail heart of the community to being a specialized center for court- and tourist-related businesses. Bastrop's success in preserving its historic downtown has helped to keep the downtown viable. The growth in the Austin metropolitan area and growth in traffic between Austin and Houston have also helped downtown, by fueling a growing tourist trade.

3.2 BOWIE

3.2.1 Background

The area surrounding Bowie has been inhabited since the 1860s, but it was not until 1882 that a town site was laid out and 1884 when the town was incorporated. The impetus for the founding of the town was the arrival of the Fort Worth and Denver Railroad, and in 1893 the Chicago, Rock Island and Texas railroad came to Bowie. Bowie soon became a market and financial center for farmers and ranchers between Fort Worth and Wichita Falls. Bowie continued growing through the 1950s, but its population has declined since then (Figure 3-3).

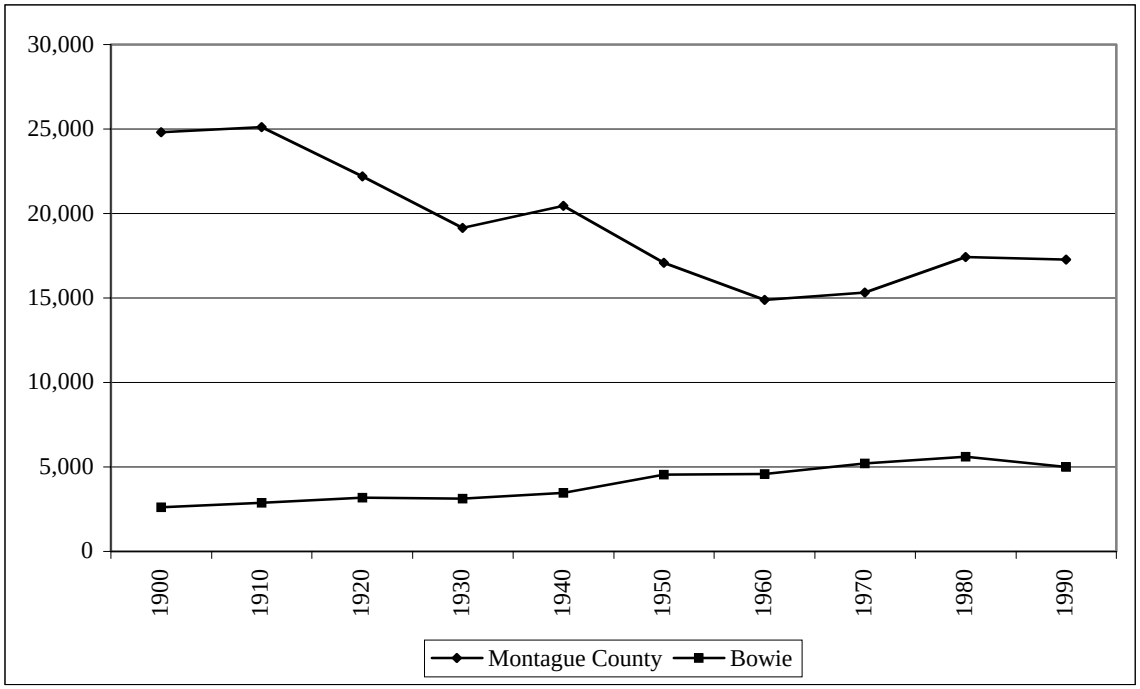

Figure 3-3. Population of Bowie and Montague County, 1990-1990

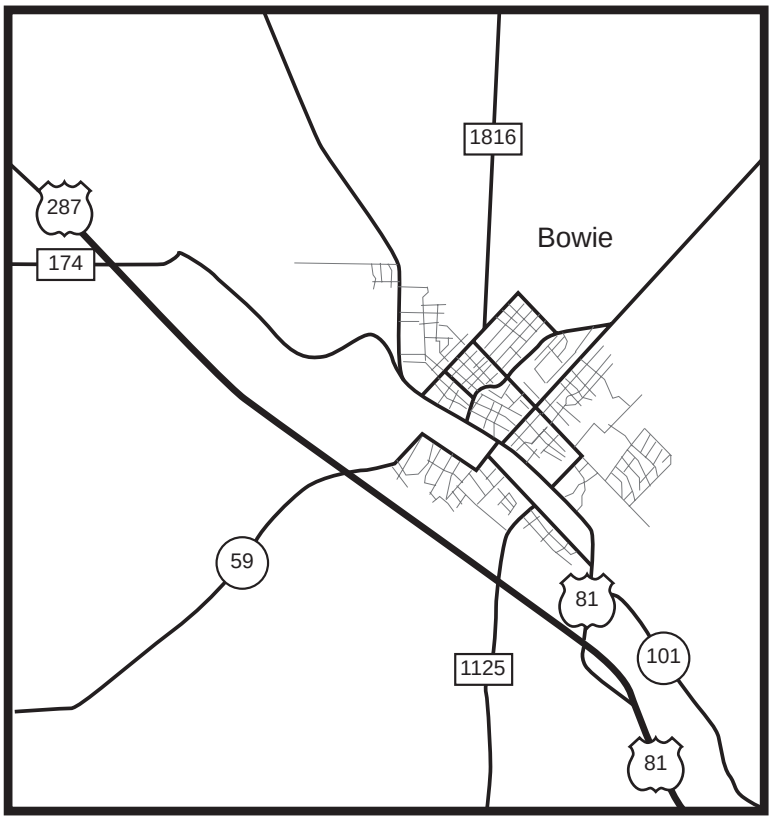

Figure 3-4. Map of Bowie Highways

Bowie is situated at the midpoint between Fort Worth, 70 miles to the southeast, and Wichita Falls, 49 miles to the northwest. Decatur, the northwestern-most edge of the Fort Worth metropolitan area, is only 30 miles away. Denton is approximately 55 miles to the east. Many Bowie residents commute to Denton, Wichita Falls, and Fort Worth. Several major highways converge in Bowie, adding to the need for a relief route on US 287. US 81 enters Bowie from the northwest and SH 59 enters Bowie from the northeast. In recent years, Bowie has become a center of the antique trade, attracting travelers journeying from Fort Worth to Wichita Falls or vice versa. Bowie is increasingly becoming a bedroom community of Fort Worth.

US 287 runs from Beaumont on the Gulf Coast to Denver. Portions of the facility run through sparsely populated plains and other portions function as suburban freeways. It passes through a number of medium-size towns and through two major metropolitan areas: Fort Worth and Denver. Prior to construction of the US 287 relief route around Bowie in 1978, the segment of US 287 through Bowie was a two-lane thoroughfare. The new facility is a four-lane, limited-access facility. A portion of the relief route has one-way frontage roads and other segments have two-way frontage roads. There are four access points from the US 287 relief route to Bowie. The relief route lies approximately 0.75 mile from the old route and downtown Bowie (Figure 3-4).

3.2.2 Preconceptions

The mixed reactions of Bowie residents and business owners to the proposed relief route were characteristic of many similar towns. The residents were generally in favor of the relief route and the business community was opposed. According to Gordon Heard, owner of a local hardware store, “When the proposal first began developing, it divided the town, badly, and to some extent (the town) has not recovered from that.” “There were quite a few hard feelings when it was first announced,” said Bill Yarbro, director of sales and marketing at a local bank. “The one meeting I remember, it was a time to have kept quiet and walk gingerly. It was a tepid meeting,” said Mr. Heard. The Bowie Chamber of Commerce advocated the relief route, but many of the owners of service stations, cafes, restaurants, and other businesses dependent on through traffic were nervous. “There was some conflict between merchants and their own association,”

said James Cantwell, city manager. According to Dick Allen, the owner of a local service station, the town initially voted the relief route down, but six weeks later it was brought before the town again and passed. Earl Yarbro, former president of the chamber of commerce and owner of Bell Industries, "thought it would help the town."

Townspeople anticipated a variety of impacts from the construction of a relief route. Many service station owners and restaurant owners expected a decline in business. Many of the residents, however, anticipated a decrease in heavy truck traffic. US 287 was extremely busy; Mr. Cantwell described it as "One wheat truck after another…bottlenecked going through here on the way to Houston." Other residents spoke of a blue haze of exhaust trapped between buildings downtown that they expected the removal of through traffic to eliminate. The chamber and business owners not opposed to the relief route assumed that businesses would be able to move to the new route. Bill Yarbro offers a different perspective: "the local merchants were quite concerned, they thought they were going to lose their customers."

3.2.3 Impacts

The most obvious result of the relief route around Bowie was the decline of local service stations. Driving down the old US 287 one sees dozens of empty stations. Some have been converted to car washes or plant nurseries and some sit empty. Other service stations limp along by operating on tighter margins. Interviewee after interviewee pointed to a decline in service stations as an impact of the relief route. According to a local business leader, there used to be about thirty service stations along the old route and now there are only a few. Mr. Cantwell notes the service stations "took a great beating… They lasted for a while, but one by one would close up." Mr. Allen views the impacts of the US 287 relief route as clear-cut. His business dropped by two-thirds after the relief route was constructed and never picked up. "We don't have the traffic and we don't have the tourists." He believes the traffic count is a third what it once was: "The only thing we get is what's on US 81 going to the freeway." Earl Yarbro, then the president of the Bowie Chamber of Commerce, feels that "filling stations that were about to go out did," but some service stations did all right.

The decline in service stations might not be entirely attributable to the relief route. As Mr. Heard said, “You can drive through town and see the impact on filling stations…If I had a service station, I would have resented [the relief route]. I would have fought it, because it would have put me out of business.” At the same time Mr. Heard acknowledges other forces were at work. When a local convenience store opened he estimates it put six to eight service stations out of business. The relief route also indirectly hurt his hardware store. “The filling station operators that were once here are not now here, and they were good customers of the store.” Filling stations bought many of their tools from Mr. Heard, but the new oil change and auto service stations are not buying their materials locally. Some trade goes to Wal-Mart and some to “truck jobbers." Mr. Cantwell and Bill Yarbro also noted the impact of convenience stores on local service stations.

Many residents described a change in the character of downtown following construction of the relief route. Susan Campbell, director of the Texas Main Street Program in Bowie, noted that “Downtown Bowie has more tourist-oriented businesses now than it did in 1980. A lot of “day-trippers” travel to Bowie to shop in local antique stores. Downtown now has “destination businesses,” according to Ms. Campbell. Through travelers electing to travel through downtown Bowie are now more likely to shop: “People are getting off the main highway on purpose.” Mr. Heard feels that enough antique stores have developed that it gives reason for through travelers to stop in Bowie: “The antique stores do a pretty doggone good job of drawing traffic.” Bill Yarbro explained, “I think the downtown benefited because people had more reason to get off the bypass. When they got off the bypass they had a reason to come to town. It seemed like the downtown got more progressive, modern, and customer oriented." According to Mr. Cantwell, local businesses prospered if “they catered to the hometown folks and some kind of specialty, then they benefited some.” Other local residents view the change in downtown less positively. According to one local resident, many townspeople think “it’s a fad, it will pass and Bowie will probably have the same problems again.”

Mr. Heard and others don't attribute the decline of downtown exclusively to the relief route. Discount retailers, such as Gibsons and Wal-Mart, drove many local merchants out of business. “Up until about that time Bowie had a real strong set of

downtown merchants in all kinds of businesses," said Mr. Heard. Earl Yarbro explained, "There was a lot of people that closed up and went out of business, but I think that was Wal-Mart and people like that." Bill Yarbro disagrees, "Wal-Mart helped make the downtown stronger. For the simple reason, people come to Wal-Mart and maybe Wal-Mart will not have it. So they go to the local businesses to find it and the local businesses have it. It has been a plus for the downtown community even though it's not downtown." Other residents feel the rise of out-of-town retail centers is at the root of Bowie's retail decline, as residents of Bowie began shopping in other communities. According to Mr. Allen, when the relief route came through "the rest of town shut down."

Bowie has not seen a dramatic increase in development along the relief route to compensate for the decline in businesses along the old route. When asked what businesses moved to Bowie due to the relief route, Ms. Campbell could not point to any specific business, but added that the relief route "is certainly one of our big selling points." There are several interchanges near town, and two of them have a modest amount of development, including both businesses relocated from the old route and businesses new to the community. The intersection of US 287 and SH 59 has a service station, hotel, and one restaurant, and the intersection of US 287 and CR 174 has a truck stop and feed lot. The largest presence on the relief route is North Central Texas College, one of several branches of a community college sharing the same name. The Jim Bowie Restaurant, a local eatery, moved from downtown to the relief route within 5 years of construction. Lipscomb Chevrolet moved from a location in town on old US 287 to a location on the relief route. Many of the small fruit stands, which used to be located on the old route, now operate on the US 287 relief route. A Hagar slacks manufacturing facility was built near the relief route; Mr. Cantwell feels that ease of access to the Fort Worth area encouraged the facility to locate in Bowie. A new Day's Inn and Texaco located on the relief route within 1 year and within 5 years of construction, respectively, at the same interchange as the Jim Bowie restaurant. A truck stop was built at another exit.

Despite modest development, several years after completion the bypass remains largely devoid of economic activity. According to civic leaders, there are not many businesses currently trying to locate on the relief route or in Bowie, but several

businesses have inquired about land on the relief route. Residents of Bowie have a range of explanations for the lack of development on the US 287 relief route. When the relief route was built, it was not within the city limits and no utilities were provided to areas around the relief route. This has hampered development on the relief route. A lack of demand for utilities on the relief route prevents the city from expanding service to the area. Mr. Allen claims he would have moved his service station to the relief route, but there was no sewer service to the relief route. Another factor is the terrain surrounding the relief route. The area is very hilly with rocky soil and geologic conditions make it difficult to deliver utility service to the area. In addition, Mr. Allen feels the one-way frontage roads have hindered development and made the location less desirable to service station operators. A railroad that runs along-side one portion of the relief route also makes development difficult. The northern end of town is less hilly than other sections along the relief route and this area is most suitable for development.

In addition to these constraints, a local banker feels that land prices are two high for developers. “A lot of people have heard the big prices they get on I-35, and they think this land is comparable, and other people have other opinions," explained Bill Yarbro. Development in this area is also limited by a feed yard. As one resident put it, “It’s not like people want to eat at a Burger King next to a feedyard.” According to local residents, one family owns a majority of the land near the relief route and the heirs are currently fighting over the estate. Consequently, none of the land has been sold. As one local resident put it, “two problems, the feed yard and that one family, has got Bowie tied up to the point that it's hard for it to ever get started.” Earl Yarbro attributes the lack of development to the county’s tax structure that taxes inventory as property. Mr. Yarbro pointed to the collapse of the oil industry as an example of the impact of this policy. When the industry faltered, he was stuck with inventory he could not sell. Neighboring counties do not have the same tax and therefore businesses interested in locating in the area will choose a different county.

Many residents lament the lack of development on the relief route. Mr. Heard, with the benefit of hindsight, feels that “I wish that it had been developed a little more thoroughly.” “I thought we’d see more industry moving in here and really that hasn’t happened," said Earl Yarbro. Still, most interviewees looked to the future with great

anticipation. Several interviewees are envious of growth in the nearby town of Decatur, which has a relief route that has attracted substantial commercial development. Many interviewees expected growth from the Fort Worth area to transform Bowie in the same way it transformed neighboring towns such as Decatur. “I think Bowie is on the verge of growth, ” said Earl Yarbro. “Bowie is a bedroom community and as the metroplex comes further this way its more and more like that," said another.

Despite the disappointment over the limited development along the relief route and the notable decline in businesses along the old route, residents see some positive impacts of the relief route. One result most residents share positive feelings about is the decline in traffic through downtown. “There is no way the existing thoroughfare could handle the traffic on US 287.... The community could not have survived the deluge of traffic," said Mr. Heard. According to residents, US 287 was “extremely full” before the relief route. Wheat truck traffic generated by the local agricultural industry and oil and cattle trucks clogged US 287 through Bowie. “I think it has made us a quiet community...I think it helped the looks of the town," said Earl Yarbro. Mr. Yarbro echoes Mr. Heard’s assessment: “We had one of the biggest bottlenecks in the country.” He believes Bowie would have been in terrible shape if the bottleneck existed.

Bowie was bypassed over 20 years ago and residents now look at the relief route with a mix of regret and hope. Many residents wish they had the benefit of hindsight when the relief route was proposed and many of these residents look to a time when growth from the Fort Worth metropolitan region will spur growth in Bowie. Most citizens don’t think much about the relief route anymore unless it impacted their business. “(The relief route) is not a topic of conversation among (downtown businesses)...it's not fresh in most people’s minds,” because most of the existing businesses were not in existence, explained Ms. Campbell. According to Susan Swint, a local realtor, “At this stage Bowie’s adapted.” Bill Yarbro feels, “It has evolved for the better for all those concerned.”

Individuals directly affected by the relief route express stronger views about the process and results. Several business owners and residents felt like they were bullied into accepting the relief route. One Bowie resident expressed his belief that TxDOT was not interested in Bowie’s concerns and that the threat of TxDOT instead building the relief

route 6 to 7 miles to the south forced Bowie to accept TxDOT's plans; TxDOT came to town with a plan and come "hell or high water" that thing was getting built. Given a second chance he would work with the highway department to achieve a "blend of our needs and the highway's needs before I'd be willing to vote a bond.... As long as someone wants something they'll call your number." Mr. Cantwell's family ranch was bisected by the relief route, but he holds no bitterness. "They weren't obnoxious or anything like that, but they were going to build that bypass.... It was the workout of a compromise, but TxDOT held the bigger hand.... We're better off, because we have in our economic development activities that we can say we have the big highway coming here and the transportation and access to the metroplex." Mr. Allen's feelings are more explicit. "The bypass ruined the town." Earl Yarbro is at peace with the results but would not wish the process on anyone. "I don't regret being a part of it because I enjoy it myself. The only people that wish we didn't have it are those that felt a crunch.… I tell you what, I wouldn't want to go through another one."

3.2.4 Analysis

Bowie has changed significantly since the construction of the US 287 relief route. An abundance of vacant or reused service stations line the old route through Bowie. The downtown, formerly a center of local commerce, has been colonized by antique stores. However, these changes may have occurred even without the relief route, and factors other than the relief route certainly played a role. At the same time, only limited development has occurred along the relief route.

Several factors contributed to the changes in Bowie's economy and conspired to inhibit development along the US 287 relief route. The alignment chosen created difficult development conditions along the relief route. Rugged terrain and rocky soil make city service extension prohibitively expensive. A lack of city services makes high intensity development out of the question. There are developable interchanges on the relief route, but characteristics of the adjacent land discourage development. One is in a hilly area and the other is adjacent to a cattle feed lot. Proximity to competing markets also inhibits commercial development on the relief route. Decatur is 30 miles from

Bowie and has developed a large retail presence on US 287. Much of the retail volume from Bowie is spent in Decatur.

Traffic through downtown Bowie dropped from 6,370 in 1975 to 2,380 in 1978. By 1996, traffic on the old route grew to 2,600 vehicles per day. Traffic on the relief route grew from 6,090 vehicles per day in 1978 to 13,200 vehicles in 1996. The loss of a significant amount of traffic through downtown and a declining population reduced the demand for local services, despite an increase in the total traffic on US 287. In addition, the local economy is heavily dependent on oil and farming. Declines in both sectors have hurt local businesses. Only recently has Bowie begun to develop as a bedroom community of Denton and Fort Worth.

3.3 CLEVELAND

3.3.1 Background

Cleveland was founded as a railroad station in 1878 at the junction of the Southern Pacific and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroads. Historically Cleveland has been an exporter of oil, gas, timber, cattle, sand, gravel, and farm goods. Cleveland lies deep within the East Texas forests at the northern edge of Liberty County but only 46 miles from downtown Houston. In 1965, Liberty County was included in the Houston Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. As Houston has grown, Cleveland has become a bedroom community (Figure 3-5). Cleveland is just 25 miles from Humble and George Bush Intercontinental Airport, a major center for employment and shopping.

US 59 connects Cleveland to Houston. This highway is a major north-south NAFTA corridor, running from Laredo to Texarkana through Houston, and is a part of the proposed Interstate 69. Most of the highway has been upgraded to a limited-access facility, as has the segment around Cleveland. Washington Avenue, widely thought of as the original route through Cleveland, was actually a bypass of an even older facility. The current relief route, constructed in 1988, runs west of the town about one mile away from the old route (Figure 3-6).

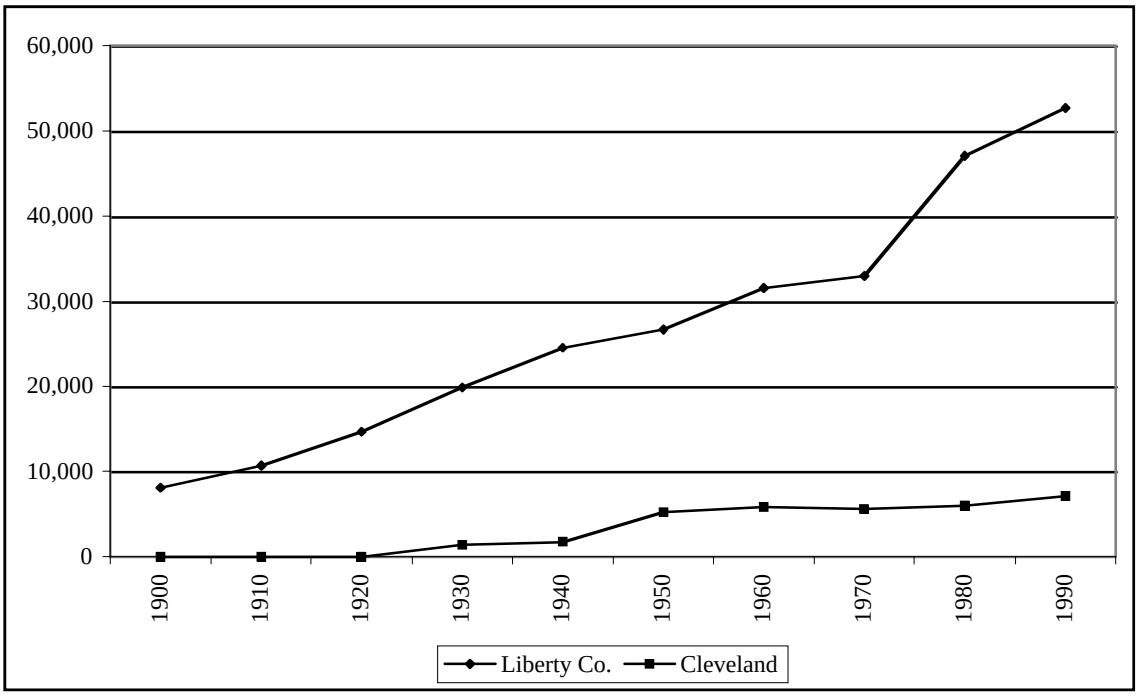

Figure 3-5. Population of Cleveland and Liberty County, 1900-1990

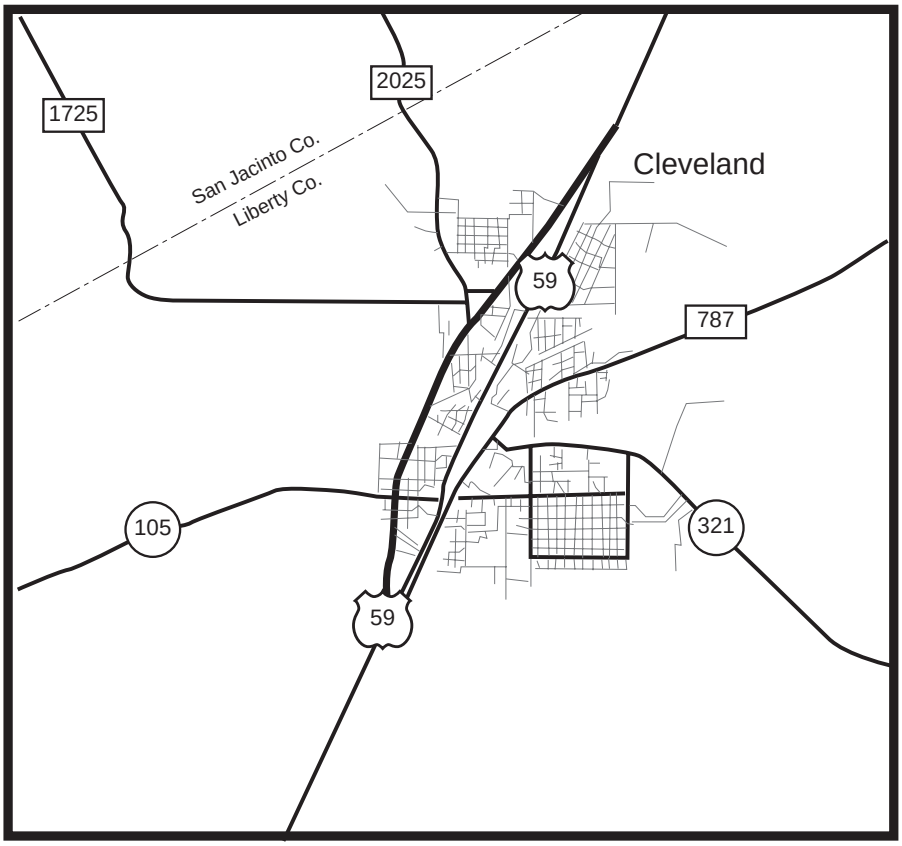

Figure 3-6. Map of Cleveland Highways

3.3.2 Preconceptions

Initial reactions to the proposed bypass in Cleveland were mixed. Some business owners were concerned that the relief route “would kill downtown," while others anticipated the benefits of reduced traffic congestion. The planning and construction of the US 59 relief route took close to 25 years and the delays created great uncertainty for local residents. Minutes taken at public meetings documented the concerns of residents about what changes would be made to the old route. Business owners worried about preserving access to their businesses and about the impacts of a reduction in the nearly 20,000 vehicles per day passing by their businesses. They feared that “the bypass will kill the town, and in all fairness, some businesses did go away," said Kenneth Riggs, a local banker. However, the primary concern was over the uncertainty of the alignment for the facility. Many property owners postponed construction pending right-of-way purchases and were concerned with the effects on their property.

Most members of the community welcomed the relief from traffic that the new route would bring. “Congestion was our biggest problem…bumper-to-bumper traffic was choking the city," said Garland Beshears, assistant public works director for the city. Traffic would back up for 10 miles on Friday afternoons as Houston residents headed to Lake Livingston and other points north, and every Monday morning the TxDOT district engineer would field complaints from Houston residents and others traveling through Cleveland. Traffic was so bad that citizens were unable to get across town. “There was a time when residents couldn’t get across the street," said Bill Petropolis, former city councilman. Police would direct traffic through town on Friday and Sunday afternoons, but even the police would get frustrated with the traffic and walk away. In addition, residents looked forward to the removal from downtown Cleveland of truck traffic generated by industry in Houston. Hurricane evacuation was expected to proceed more smoothly, emergency vehicle access would improve, and traffic accidents would be reduced.

3.3.3 Impacts

The impacts of the US 59 relief route have been positive for some and negative for others. Residents and business owners agree that through travelers and the trucking

industry have benefited from the US 59 relief route, but the impacts on Cleveland residents are mixed. The construction of the US 59 relief route carved through several residential areas and approximately thirty to forty houses were moved. Residents adjacent to the relief must live with traffic noise, but they also recognize the benefits of reduced traffic accidents on local streets. Residents are now able to cross the main thoroughfare at intersections without stoplights.

Downtown Cleveland entered a severe decline concurrent with the completion of the US 59 relief route. Pharmacies, dry goods merchants, grocers, and other local businesses all suffered at the same time, signaling a drop in downtown commerce. But many residents place the blame on factors other than the relief route. "Cleveland has had the same problem with downtown as Houston," explained Mr. Petropolis. "Cleveland did die…but it was the era of the big business corporations," said Glen Dotson, a local journalist. Regional shopping malls that opened in Humble and other neighboring communities may have contributed to the problem. "I shop in College Station because I like the shopping center," added Mr. Dotson. Some residents noted that downtown businesses died when the owners aged and their children did not take over the business. Others pointed to the lack of parking downtown as a contributing factor in the decline of downtown. Owners of the Liberty Café, a local eating establishment, feared the impact of the loss of pass-by traffic but have maintained a healthy business by attracting travelers from SH 105.

Shortly after the construction of the relief route, service stations in Cleveland began to falter. Although changes in traffic patterns clearly played a role, many interviewees felt that forces other than the loss of traffic contributed to the decline of most of these businesses. The relief route was constructed during a period of oil industry consolidation, as local vendors were replaced by larger franchises. Simultaneously, many locally owned service stations were required by EPA regulations to replace their gas tanks. The small operators ran at a narrow enough margin that they could not handle two such blows to their revenue.

A handful of local businesses were able to relocate to the relief route. Richard Boyett's family has owned and operated a hotel and restaurant in Cleveland for many years. Boyett's Family Restaurant (now called the Hot Biscuit and under different

ownership) was located on the original route through town. After the Washington Avenue relief route was built, they moved to a new location on that route. In the period preceding construction of the new relief route, but following the selection of the alignment, the Boyetts moved their restaurant to a third location, also on Washington Avenue. The third and current location is on the site of the Boyett's Cleveland Inn and has frontage on the US 59 relief route and on Washington Avenue. The owners of these businesses had knowledge of the proposed alignment for the new highway and were able to capitalize on that knowledge. However, the composition of Hot Biscuit customers changed. Prior to the construction of US 59 the majority of customers were through travelers, but after the relief route was completed the customer base shifted to local clientele.

Little development occurred on the relief route over the first 10 years after its construction, but a notable amount of development has occurred over the last 5 years. A local Ford dealership moved from the old route to a location 3 miles south of the intersection of US 59 and SH 105. Another car dealership expanded its lot east to the relief route. Two major service stations have opened at the intersection of US 59 and SH 105. More recently, a McCoy's hardware store, Burger King, and Wal-Mart have opened at this intersection. Wal-Mart opened its original store and is building a new store at this intersection as well. A Super 8 motel is another recent addition to the intersection. Most of these new businesses are nationally owned, reflecting changes in the structure of the retail industry. Beyond this intersection, little development has occurred along the relief route. Members of the business community noted that the majority of developable land is built or under construction; most of the route was built through a flood plain, limiting its development potential.

Although reactions were generally mixed when the relief route was initially proposed, the majority of citizens now view the relief route favorably. Mr. Dotson notes that immediately after the relief route was built Cleveland was stagnating, but as time moved on the local economy improved. "Of course there was a period of adjustment," but the town came around, said Mr. Beshears. The relief route was first proposed in the 1960s but not built until the 1980s, giving residents time to adjust to the idea. Mr. Riggs notes that it took so long that it was "anti climactic." Mr. Boyett is an enthusiastic

supporter of the relief route: “People sometimes resist change, but it is just better.” Cleveland is “without a doubt” better off for having the relief route, said Ed Seymour, the TxDOT area engineer. According to Mr. Dotson, the relief route changed but mostly helped the town.

3.3.4 Analysis

The dramatic change in traffic levels through town explains some of the mixed feelings about the relief route in the community. Initial traffic on the old route in 1987, the year before construction, was 19,200 vehicles per day. In 1988, after the relief route, traffic on the old route had plummeted to 4,700 and reached 16,400 on the new route. In 1996, ADT on the old route rose to 4,800 and ADT on the relief route rose to 22,000. Such a precipitous drop is likely to significantly impact businesses dependent on through travelers. The empty service stations and run-down motels lining Washington Avenue are indicative of the damage done to highway-related businesses. Interviewees, however, feel the city has bounced back from any ill effects caused by the relief route. The decline in traffic through town has clearly improved quality of life in other ways.

Given Cleveland’s status as a bedroom community and its proximity to Houston, the lack of development along the relief route is, at first glance, surprising. But several factors restrict development along the relief route. For one, proximity to Houston may limit highway-related business development. Travelers leaving Houston will not need to refill gas tanks for several hundred miles, while travelers to Houston may find it easier to continue onto Houston and refuel at their destination. The same holds true for customers of hotels, motels, and restaurants. These businesses developed under different economic conditions, and their markets have largely disappeared today. Cleveland is not a natural stopping point. In addition, proximity to Houston means that residents have access to shopping opportunities outside of Cleveland. Humble, just down the road, has a regional shopping mall that draws a substantial portion of Cleveland’s retail trade, according to interviewees. As a result, retail development in Cleveland has mostly been limited to discount stores. In addition, the presence of a flood plain restricts development along much of the relief route. Finally, the 20-year uncertainty about the alignment and construction of the relief route may have slowed the response of the business community.

3.4 EDINBURG

3.4.1 Background

Edinburg is located several miles north of the Mexican border in the Rio Grande Valley in the McAllen-Hidalgo County Metropolitan Statistical Area, one of the only metropolitan areas in the country without a dominant central city. Edinburg is adjacent to Mission, Pharr, McAllen and a variety of smaller communities. The town originally grew as a center of cattle ranching and sugar farming; grapefruit groves and oil wells followed. In the 1970s, the tourism industry began to grow, and in the 1980s increased trade with Mexico brought commercial freight carriers to Edinburg. Edinburg, so close to the border, functions as one of several Texas gateways to Mexico. Travelers to Mexico stop overnight when they reach the Rio Grande Valley in order to cross the border at the start of the day. Edinburg has seen almost continuous growth from its inception; the town grew from slightly over 10,000 in 1950 to just under 50,000 in 2000 (Figure 3-7).

US 281 traverses the state of Texas from north to south. It begins at the United States-Mexican border and travels north to San Antonio, continuing to Wichita Falls on the Texas-Oklahoma border. A portion of US 281 in Edinburg is part of the proposed IH 69 NAFTA corridor. In 1977, TxDOT completed construction of the Edinburg US 281 relief route, which carries traffic around the burgeoning community and speeds traffic to and from the border. US 281 is a four-lane, controlled-access facility with one-way frontage roads on either side. Several exits provide access to Edinburg. The relief route is 1 mile east of the original route, Closner Avenue, which travels through the center of town (Figure 3-8).

3.4.2 Preconceptions

Edinburg is larger than any of the other case study communities, but the concerns of its residents about the proposed relief route were generally the same though more muted than in other communities. Most business owners and residents approved of the relief route. According to Laurier McDonald, a civic leader and partner in a downtown law firm, the town was “all for it.” Joe Ochoa, mayor of Edinburg, recalls “there wasn’t much controversy...we don’t depend on tourism.” But the owners of highway-related

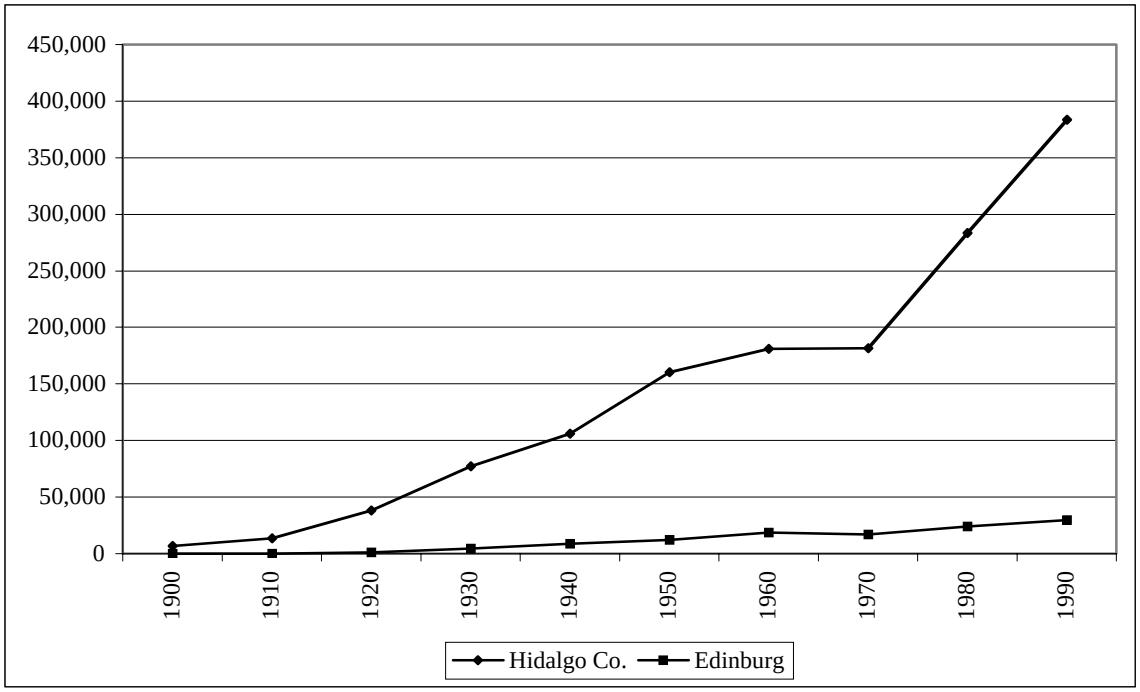

Figure 3-7. Population of Edinburg and Hidalgo County, 1900-1990

Figure 3-8. Map of Edinburg Highways

businesses had some fear about its impacts. Harry Roberts, owner of a downtown car dealership, remembers that: "Businesses...on old 281 were all scared because it...would cut down on the traffic that goes by." In contrast, Mr. McDonald asserts that although "downtown business owners knew all the through traffic would be shunted around the town, the downtown businesses did not anticipate losing any business." Mr. Ochoa indicates that civic leaders hoped to lure new businesses and "develop an industrial corridor." Residents of Edinburg generally welcomed growth and viewed it as inevitable and desirable. "Yes, the businesses in downtown and the old route will suffer, but it is a specific type (highway related businesses).… Do you stop development of a whole area because of one business?" said one resident.

The main issue confronting the city was whether to put the new highway east or west of downtown. Many residents wanted the relief route to travel west of Edinburg in order to maximize the development potential. McAllen is on the southwest side of town and residents felt that the relief route would help the two communities grow together. The Mexican-American community wanted to put the new facility on the east side of town. Development on the east side consisted primarily of colonias and the local Mexican-American leadership saw the relief route as an opportunity to replace substandard housing. As Al Herrera, an Edinburg residents, points out, "Urban renewal was in.… (They) wanted to improve the living conditions of minority areas." In the 1960s and 1970s, when the relief route was proposed, the relationship between white and Hispanic citizens was more contentious than today, several residents noted.

3.4.3 Impacts

Although their community has changed in many ways since the construction of the relief route, residents in Edinburg had difficulty directly pinning these changes to the relief route. Many long time residents described significant changes in downtown. For example, all the highway-related businesses formerly in downtown are now gone. According to Mario Jorge, the TxDOT area engineer, the relief route may have hurt downtown initially, but now there are other factors with a greater impact. Mr. McDonald notes that although downtown businesses did not expect a downturn, "with the bypass and Wal-Mart, that was the end of downtown." Several interviewees attributed a decline

in downtown to “volume stores” and changing buying habits. A lack of parking downtown has also hampered commerce. Mr. McDonald sees positive impacts of the relief route on downtown as well: “It is easier for people to access my offices without the through traffic. If it is congested it's not conducive to business.” Mr. Roberts also suggested that the new atmosphere downtown is conducive to nonretail activities: “As soon as a business goes out of business, a law office replaces it.” Mr. Jorge, along with a number of interviewees, noted that Edinburg is the county seat, and by virtue of this, downtown will remain active. The university, which is adjacent to downtown, has also generated a significant amount of traffic.

Local businesses have not relocated to the relief route, although business owners may recognize the benefits of relocation. Mr. Roberts, owner of Roberts Chevrolet, explained that car sales rely on highway traffic for visibility. “Chevy wants all dealers to move out to the expressway.… They’re after us to move.” He cites one dealer in the valley who tripled his sales following a move to a different expressway. Mr. Roberts believes his business would perform better if he moved to the highway.

Edinburg has primarily developed to the south and west, between McAllen and Edinburg and away from the relief route on the east. However, several large new developments on the US 281 relief route have come about through public-private partnerships with the city. These projects have generated a great deal of controversy, and many residents question whether the developments are in the best interest of the city. For example, the City of Edinburg constructed a water park and golf course that have experienced financial problems. In addition, the city offered heavy incentives to lure a Carmike Cinema to the relief route corridor. An industrial park on the relief route has attracted a range of industries: calibration services, electronics, clothing, and a microbrewery. According to Mr. Ochoa, the industries on the relief route would not have located in Edinburg without the relief route. However, only one highway-related business has located on the relief route, a joint venture between a Burger King and a convenience store. Mr. Herrera notes that three major hotels have been constructed in the previous 5 years, and not one has been on the relief route.

Local residents provided a variety of compelling reasons why more development has not occurred on the relief route. Mr. Ochoa pointed out that the majority of land

adjacent to the relief route was zoned agricultural until very recently. He also noted a lack of infrastructure on the relief route. Bill Reynolds, owner of a local hotel, feels that Edinburg is not a natural stopping point. Most trips to the valley do not end in Edinburg, and the communities are so close together that stopping in Edinburg does not make much sense. John Milford, Edinburg city manager, offers a different explanation. Water service in the relief route area is provided by an agricultural provider, not the city. The directors of the water supply corporation are not interested in promoting growth, do not pursue development aggressively, and want businesses to pay for infrastructure costs. Consequently, land in the service area has not developed. Aida Hernandez, an official at the Edinburg Chamber of Commerce, feels that previous councils were not progressive in attracting growth.

The relief route may have had broader impacts on the community, both positive and negative. Mike Allen, an economic development specialist in the Rio Grande Valley, cited several positive impacts. The relief route improved access to the university and the entire valley. It also reduced commuting times for area residents. Most importantly, it helped Edinburg and Hidalgo County develop into a trucking center. "It's a great asset for the community. It helps feed all sorts of traffic into the valley," said Mr. Allen. "Initially there was not much traffic around, but now there is a tremendous amount.… The bypass is a big plus," said Mr. McDonald. Other residents and civic leaders think the relief route has created room for Edinburg to grow. "It enabled the community to spread out," said Mr. McDonald. On the other hand, Mr. Herrera felt that the expressway, as locals refer to the relief route, has made shopping in McAllen easier and more attractive, thus draining business from stores in Edinburg. "Ask any kid in Edinburg to name ten businesses in the local area and nine out of ten won't know any, but ask them about businesses in McAllen and all of them will know," said Mr. Herrera. However, most long time residents attributed changes in Edinburg to factors unrelated to the relief route. Mr. McDonald also pointed to a hard freeze in 1983 that heavily impacted the local economy. "I just don't believe there was any effect at all" attributable to the relief route, said Mr. Reynolds. Mr. Herrera argued that a western alignment would have been more beneficial.

3.4.4 Analysis

The US 281 relief route around Edinburg has had mixed effects. While many case study communities experienced a decline in the vitality of their downtowns, Edinburg has not. The Hidalgo County seat is in Edinburg, and this guarantees a level of livelihood downtown. The downtown has changed from a retail center into a center of businesses related to the courthouse. The economy of Edinburg is large enough that it did not significantly depend on through traffic. Furthermore, traffic through town did not drastically drop following the construction of the relief route. In 1977, 7,420 vehicles per day traveled the US 281 corridor on the northern border of Edinburg. In 1978, following construction of the relief route, the number of vehicles on the old route increased to 8,410 and only 410 vehicles per day used the new route. By 1996, the number of vehicles on the new route increased to 9,800, and the number of vehicles on the old route decreased to 6,300.

Two factors explain the lack of a highway-related business sector in Edinburg. First, Edinburg is not a natural stopping point to those traveling to Mexico. Communities in the valley are close together, and other communities are closer to the border than is Edinburg. If a traveler wishes to begin or end their day with a border crossing, Pharr and McAllen, to the south of Edinburg, are more attractive overnight destinations. Second, Edinburg is not a natural stopping point for visitors to the valley. Most visitors are destined for one of the two largest cities in the valley, McAllen or Brownsville. These visitors are unlikely to stop in Edinburg, only 70 miles from their final destination, to refuel or spend the night. The absence of hotels on the relief route helps to confirm these points. The majority of hotels and motels in Edinburg have been built in the last 10 years, all of them on Closner Avenue rather than the relief route. A local hotel owner confirmed that the majority of his guests were destined for Edinburg and that through traffic played a minor role in generating business for the hotel.

The Rio Grande Valley is one of the fastest growing regions in the country. Between 1990 and 2000, the population of Edinburg almost doubled. Given the rapid growth of Edinburg and the presence of the relief route corridor it is surprising that more privately stimulated development has not occurred. The location of the relief route to the east of town away from Edinburg's two largest neighbors, McAllen to the southwest and

Pharr to the south, may explain why the relief route corridor has not developed as extensively as hoped. With a western alignment the relief route might have attracted more development.

3.5 FORT STOCKTON

3.5.1 Background

Fort Stockton was founded as a military fort in 1859 at a popular resting stop on several overland trading routes. The town was originally platted in 1868 and grew into an agricultural center. Although Fort Stockton was originally bypassed by the railroads, it became a center for sheep and cattle ranching, and in the 1920s the oil reserves in the Fort Stockton region were developed. In the 1980s, the Texas oil economy dried up and Fort Stockton suffered with the rest of the state. At the same time, several of the town's main employers closed up shop. A Firestone testing center closed shortly after the relief route was constructed and the town entered a deep recession. Several correctional facilities have opened in Fort Stockton and they have helped the economy rebound (Figure 3-9).

Fort Stockton is a natural stopping point between San Antonio and El Paso; San Antonio is 329 miles to the east and El Paso is 245 miles to the west. US 67, US 290, US 385, and IH 10 converge on Fort Stockton providing access to areas in all directions. In addition to its role as a travel center, Fort Stockton is a gateway to the Big Bend region. Fort Stockton is the largest community in the Big Bend region and has a much larger market area than most towns its size. People travel from as far away as Presidio to shop in Fort Stockton. Consequently, Fort Stockton provides a wider array of goods and services than comparably sized towns in other regions.

Interstate 10 is one of the major east-west interstate corridors. It travels between Los Angeles and Jacksonville, Florida. Along the way it travels through a number of major metropolitan areas: El Paso, Phoenix, San Antonio, and Houston. The Fort Stockton relief route, constructed in 1983, was the final section of Interstate 10 completed in west Texas. The Fort Stockton section of IH 10 is a four-lane divided highway with two-lane frontage roads on either side. IH 10 has five interchanges in the Fort Stockton area. The relief route bypasses Fort Stockton 1 mile north of Dickinson

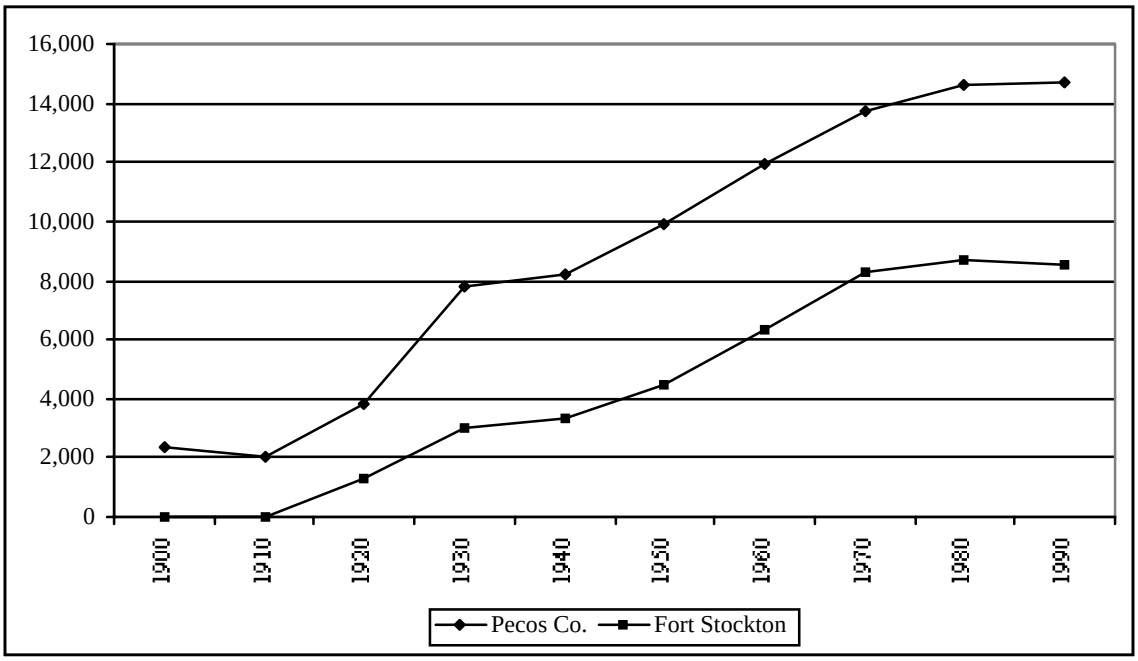

Figure 3-9. Population of Fort Stockton and Pecos County, 1900-1990

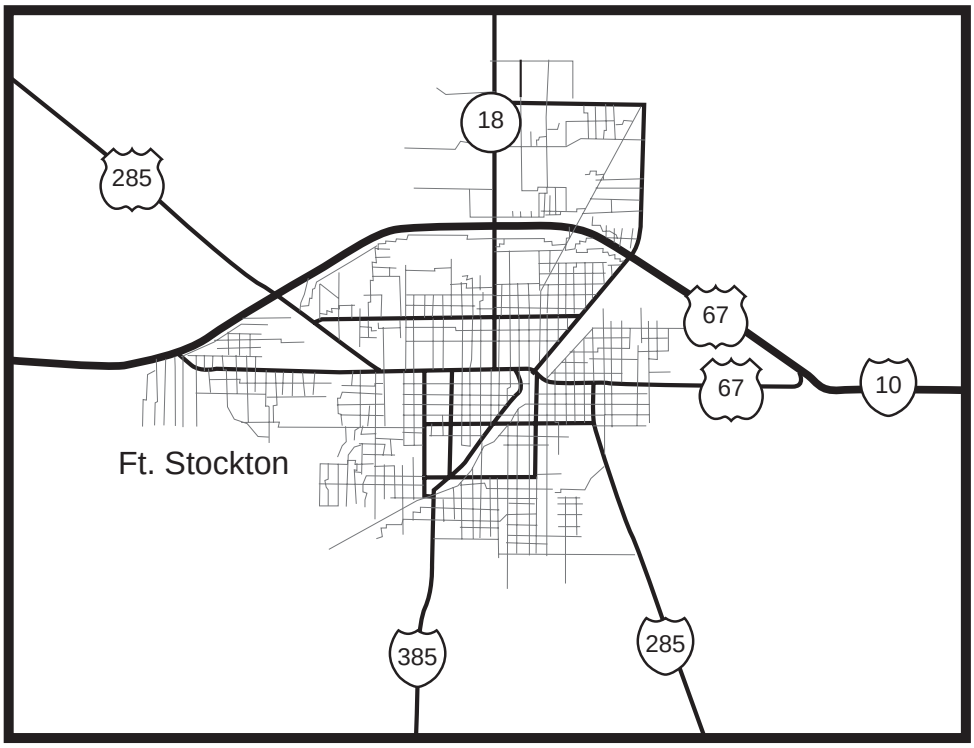

Figure 3-10. Map of Fort Stockton Highways

Avenue, the old route. Dickinson Avenue is a four-lane road with a center turn lane and is a commercial center of the town but not the historical downtown of the community. Downtown, centered on Main Street, is approximately 1 mile south of Dickinsen Avenue (Figure 3-10).

3.5.2 Preconceptions

"We were excited, we didn't know any better," said Pete Terrazas, owner of a downtown furniture store, suggesting a certain naivete on the part of the town as to what the impacts of the proposed relief route would be. Residents had known since the early 1960s that the highway would eventually be constructed and that the section bypassing Fort Stockton would be the final section constructed. Consequently, residents and business owners did not express much open anxiety, and several had the foresight to invest in property on the new route. Residents who did not own businesses viewed the coming relief route as a potential boon. They looked forward to the removal of truck traffic and thus better accessibility to businesses along Dickinson Avenue. Business owners were more skeptical. They expected an increase in traffic on IH 10, but realized there would be less traffic directly passing their establishments and feared that a decline in traffic would mean a decline in revenues. Residents were aware that some businesses might not handle the shock and would be forced out of business. For these reasons, residents of Fort Stockton had requested that the relief route be the last portion of the interstate constructed in West Texas.

3.5.3 Impacts

The construction of the relief route for IH 10 brought about a host of impacts, and in some sectors the effects were felt immediately. Interviewees identified both positive and negative impacts arising from the relief route. During the construction of IH10, a large temporary workforce was brought in to work on the highway. The temporary workers caused a minor boom in local retail and service activity, but the effect disappeared after the completion of the highway. Most residents of Fort Stockton were happy to have a reduction in truck traffic and congestion on Dickinson Avenue.

Downtown Fort Stockton is located on Main Street, which runs perpendicular to Dickinson Avenue. Several interviewees noted that due to its location, downtown did not lose much traffic when the relief route opened. However, opinions on the effects of IH 10 on downtown Fort Stockton vary. Some business owners and city leaders attribute the decline of downtown to IH 10. It was "the beginning of the end of downtown," said Mr. Terrazas, who pointed to the increase in vacant buildings downtown following the construction of IH 10 as evidence of this decline. Jesse Garcia, city manager, concurred: "It was a domino effect." As businesses on Dickinson Avenue moved to the relief route, downtown businesses moved to Dickinson Avenue. Other residents placed the blame for the decline of downtown elsewhere. Jim King, owner of several local convenience stores, and Jerry McGuairt, the TxDOT area engineer, feel that other forces were at work, particularly the opening of Wal-Mart and a dip in the oil industry severely impacted Fort Stockton. Mr. Terrazas also recognized that other factors affected the fate of downtown. "Wal-Mart was probably a bigger factor than the interstate in doing away with downtown. The interstate contributed to it, but Wal-Mart knocked it out," he said. While residents disagreed on the exact effects of the interstate, most agree that any impacts were felt immediately.

Highway-related businesses, such as hotels, service stations, and restaurants, were the most severely affected. Fort Stockton "used to have a gas station on every corner," according to Mr. Terrazas, but the number of service stations has dropped in recent years. Many of the old full-service stations along the old route have gone out of business since the completion of the relief route. The Beacon Truck Stop was one of the first businesses to fail. "Beacon was out of business in no more than a year," said John Pacheco, owner of a local restaurant. Many other service stations on the old route suffered a severe decline in business. On the other hand, the Comanche Springs Truck Stop, located at the intersection of US 285 and IH 10, benefited from the construction of the interstate. Mr. King noted that the interstate had a strong negative impact on his Dickinson Avenue location, but he built a store on the interstate and it has thrived. He estimated that the customer base of the Dickinson store changed from approximately 85 percent through traffic and 15 percent local traffic to the inverse; the location on the highway caters exclusively to the through traveler. Mr. King acknowledged that the Interstate 10

corridor has offered many opportunities to the residents of Fort Stockton, but he felt outside business interests have capitalized on those opportunities more rapidly. Mr. Pacheco worked at the Holiday Inn restaurant on Dickinson Avenue before and after the construction of IH 10 and noticed a decline in business at the restaurant over this time. The business he now owns, Pacheco's Steak House, does not cater specifically to tourists, but he acknowledges their importance: "Whoever tells you they're not dependent on tourists is lying to you." His feels his restaurant would attract a much larger number of tourists if it were located on the interstate. As the situation stands, many of his tourist patrons are repeat customers, but he would prefer a location on the relief route. "If I had the money I would move out there," he said.

Several restaurants have relocated to the relief route. The local Kentucky Fried Chicken, originally located next door to Jim Pacheco's restaurant, moved to the relief route several years ago, presumably to attract more highway-related business. However, Kentucky Fried Chicken waited over 10 years to move closer to the interstate interchange. Most likely, the owners needed to upgrade or replace their current building, and chose a new location over renovation, suggested Mr. Pacheco. Taco Bell also moved to the interstate, although interviewees could not specify when. In addition to the two restaurants, a retail tire service relocated to the interstate, but interviewees did not cite any other businesses that had relocated to the bypass. A few other restaurants have looked into relocating to the relief route, but none have taken any formal steps.

Several new businesses have opened around interchanges, particularly at the intersection of IH 30 with US 285 on the western edge of Fort Stockton. Most of the new development is clustered around several new motels. Unlike earlier motels, the new motels are national chains and are located within sight of the interstate. The motel industry expanded rapidly after the construction of IH 10. Existing motels along Dickinson Avenue were severely hurt by the traffic diversion and the competition from new motels. The construction of new hotels actually lowered the amount of hotel/motel tax collected, according to interviewees. The traffic on the interstate did not increase at the same rate as the number of motel rooms and so the market became more competitive. Motel operators lowered prices, which lowered tax revenue. Existing motel owners were hurt, and the city lost tax revenue. Motels on the east side of town suffered the most. In

addition to the motels, several service stations have opened along the interstate. For example, Mr. King opened a second Kings Court convenience store. Residents hoped the interstate would attract distribution facilities and other industries, but non-highway-related development has not occurred yet. Residents are also surprised by the amount of time it took for development to occur at the interchanges. According to Mr. King, the highway-related markets are saturated and this may limit additional development in the near future.

The residents of Fort Stockton have mixed opinions regarding the IH 10 relief route. Many individuals find themselves holding conflicting views. The citizen in them appreciates the decrease in traffic, but the business owner in them laments the loss of business. According to Mr. Terrazas, “it hurt, it hurt real bad,” but he acknowledges that there were larger forces at work. “I think nationwide (the interstate) had to be built...There’s going to be pluses and minuses.” Mr. Pacheco was also ambivalent about the relief route, appreciating the fact that it took the “eighteen wheelers” off the road, but also recognizing that it took a lot of business from him. Mr. King felt that Fort Stockton was not hurt by the relief route but that many smaller towns were “killed.” “Over the years I think it’s helped the community," said Mr. McGuairt. According to Mr. Garcia, the town has gotten used to the relief route. A theme of self-reliance emerged in most interviews and Mr. Garcia lends it a voice: “The town needs to use (the relief route) to their advantage.… You can make it do whatever you want.”

3.5.4 Analysis

Fort Stockton can be described as a natural stopping point. It is midway between El Paso and both San Antonio and Austin and is approximately 250 to 300 miles from all three cities. In addition, it is the gateway to the Big Bend region. There are very few sizable communities between Fort Stockton and these cities. A traveler failing to stop in Fort Stockton can look forward to a 3 to5 hour drive to the next community with as many motels and restaurants. A traveler needing to stop has no choice but to patronize businesses in Fort Stockton. These factors combine to make Fort Stockton a logical stopping point and mean that highway-related businesses did not suffer as a result of the IH 10 relief route.

However, the city's position as a natural stopping point has contributed to a saturation of the highway-related markets. Fort Stockton has over 800 motel rooms for a population of just under 10,000. Evidence of saturation is found in motel room prices. Rates in Fort Stockton are considerably lower than rates in comparable motel in other small Texas cities. This over building, coupled with low traffic growth, has stymied real estate development on the IH 10 relief route. In 1982, the average daily traffic count on Dickinson Avenue was 4,000. In 1983, following the completion of the relief route, traffic on Dickinson had fallen to 1,700 and traffic on the relief route was 3,100. In 1996, ADT stood at 3,000 on Dickinson Avenue and 4,500 on the relief route. According to several business owners, this is not enough traffic to generate substantial highway-related business development.

3.6 GATESVILLE

3.6.1 Background

The economy of Gatesville and its transportation needs are dominated by the adult correctional facilities located in the area. Prisoners account for nearly half of the 15,000 inhabitants of the city (Figure 3-11), and the prisons employ approximately 3,500 workers. The nonstop operations of these facilities mean that two-thirds of these employees start or end their shifts at the same time, creating traffic demands that overwhelm the local capacity three times daily. Most of these workers are only able to find affordable and available housing in Temple and Copperas Cove to the south, Waco to the east, and other small cities throughout the region, according to Brandon Emmons, city manager. The local economy relies heavily on this industry and is relatively undiversified. The traffic congestion caused by the prison industry is at the center of debates about transportation infrastructure in the community.

State Highway 36 links the Gulf Coast to the plains of Texas. The SH 36 relief route around Gatesville is a two-lane, uncontrolled-access facility completed in 1986. It runs primarily north-south along the eastern edge of the city, 3 to 4 miles east of downtown (Figure 3-12). The prisons are located on the northern end of town, and the relief route connects with the old route just north of the prisons. The old route and new

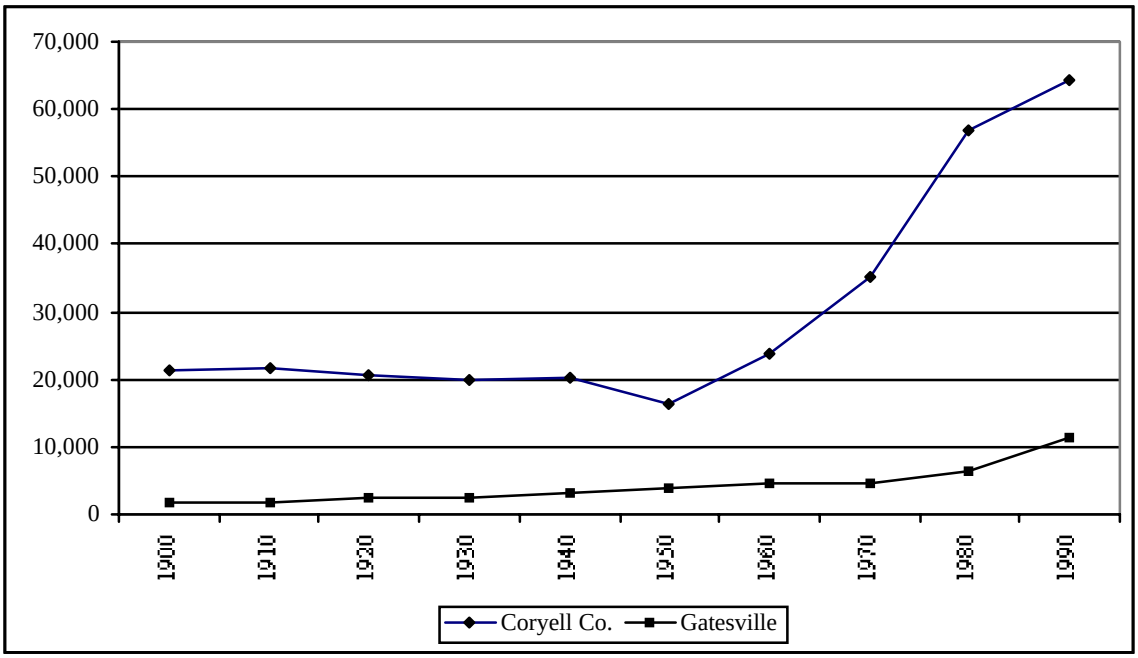

Figure 3-11. Population for Gatesville and Coryell County, 1900-1990

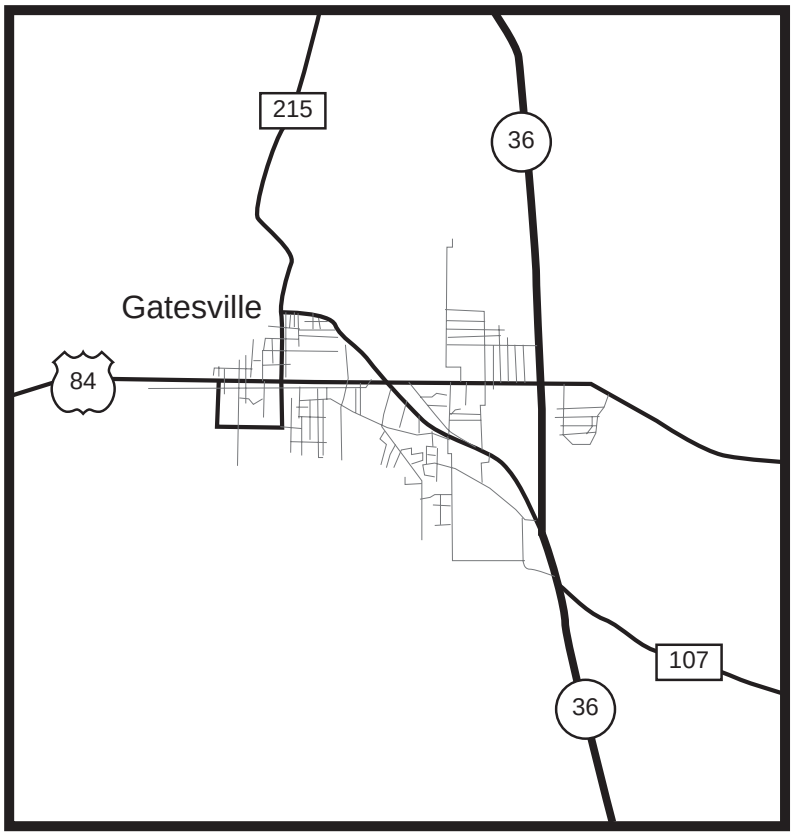

Figure 3-12. Map of Gatesville Highways

one intersect with US 84 as it runs east-west through the city. The city of Temple is about 30 miles to the southeast of Gatesville on SH 36. The Fort Hood Military Reservation, one of the largest in the U.S., is located just south of Gatesville. A new facility has been proposed that would create a partial loop around the west side of the city and would serve prison traffic by extending RM 116 north to SH 36.

3.6.2 Preconceptions

Most interviewees said that resistance to the relief route was not strong at the time it was proposed. The route was perceived to be a needed remedy for the congestion created by the prison employee traffic. The primary area of congestion was, and continues to be, the portion of old SH 36 that merges with US 84 for a couple of miles through the center of town. Residents believed that the new facility would help to relieve this congestion. Downtown business owners were more concerned about the impacts of Wal-Mart than of the relief route on their businesses. The only noted resistance to the relief route came from landowners along the route who did not want their land divided or did not want to see growth in the community.

The new proposal to extend RM 116 is being met with strong resistance from local landowners. One reason is that this area is still viable for ranching and goat farming, according to Mr. Emmons, and farmers and ranchers do not want their operations disturbed. The new facility would take most of the remaining prison traffic out of the city. Many business owners consider this possibility a mixed blessing. Businesses such as gas stations, grocery stores, fast-food restaurants, and hotels rely not only on employee traffic, but also on traffic from family members visiting inmates. Owners of the motels and fast-food restaurants located at the intersection of the SH 36 relief route with US 84 are not overly concerned about the new proposal, which is part of the area's 10-year transportation plan.

3.6.3 Impacts

The downtown area has changed significantly since the construction of the relief route, though interviewees pointed to factors other than the relief route as causes of change. Ten years ago, downtown was home to Sears, Goodyear Tire, and True Value

Hardware stores and a locally owned pharmacy that are no longer there, although residents seem unsure about the timing of these changes. As the county seat, however, downtown Gatesville still has many court-related businesses. Because the type of activity at the courthouse is related more to criminal offenses than land transactions and other commercial activity, the nature of the legal and other professional offices around the courthouse is slightly different than in communities like La Grange, according to one interviewee. The businesses around the courthouse consist of about one-half retail stores and one-half professional offices. The downtown is not considered the commercial center of the city, and its current mix of businesses has not changed much since the early 1970s, according to Mr. Emmons. The local Main Street Program seems to have helped downtown recover from a low point several years ago.

For the most part, downtown businesses have not been fleeing to the relief route. A local Chevrolet car dealer moved to the relief route, but the chamber of commerce moved from downtown to the old route south of US 84. The eastern intersection of US 84 with the old SH 36 route has emerged as the commercial heart of the community, with Wal-Mart serving as the anchor for businesses in the area, according to local business owners. Most residents believe that Wal-Mart has had a greater impact on downtown businesses than the relief route. Two former business owners stressed that they needed a minimum of drive-by and foot traffic to generate enough sales. They claimed that Wal-Mart directed traffic away from the downtown and even hurt businesses that were not direct competitors. A regional car dealer opened a store next to Wal-Mart about 6 years ago, and fast food restaurants have located in the same area along the old route over the last 3 years. Likewise, the H-E-B supermarket at the western intersection of US 84 with the old SH 36 route serves as the anchor for businesses in that area, including the downtown just west of this intersection. Dale White, a local pharmacist and formerly the owner of a downtown business, commented that if H-E-B moves from its location the remaining downtown businesses will also go. Unless a large anchor for the old route, such as Wal-Mart or H-E-B, decides to move to the new route, development along the new route may remain slow.

Local officials and business owners cite several other reasons why development along the relief route has been relatively slow. For one thing, the prisons are located just

off the bypass in the northern part of the city. The bright lights from the prisons and the around-the-clock operations help to deter development. Mr. Emmons sees only industrial development as a compatible neighboring use. Also leading to the slow development is the reluctance of landowners to sell. Some owners don't want the added development or don't want to split up a large family tract, while others are waiting until the price is right. Landowners are able and willing to hold their property until they get the asking price they want, which is between $15,000 and $25,000 per acre without infrastructure, or ten times what it is worth for agricultural use, according Mr. Emmons. Lucille Plane, longtime resident, city council member, and retired warden of the women's facility in Gatesville, adds that influential landowners in the area will only make their land available for sale to certain industries because they are concerned about the type of growth that occurs in the area. Mr. Emmons thinks a more fluid land market along the bypass is necessary for the city to prosper in the long run. Another reason for slow development of land along the relief route is the lack of consensus on policy towards extending infrastructure. The relief route has not had complete water and wastewater infrastructure on both sides until recently. Some residents and leaders are reluctant to provide infrastructure because it might contribute to population growth. More generally, businesses in Gatesville are hurt by the ease with which residents can travel to Waco or Temple to shop, according to Charles Herring, manager of a local store.

3.6.4 Analysis

One of the most striking characteristics of Gatesville is that the old route remains a viable commercial center and, in fact, continues to attract new businesses. The old route, until recently, had several parcels available for development with existing infrastructure. As long as Wal-Mart remains on the old route, the center of commercial activity remains on the old route. However, according to Mr. Emmons, Wal-Mart has been rumored to be moving to the relief route for years. The company wants a Wal-Mart Supercenter in the area, and the current location will not allow for that type of expansion. In the meantime, neither the relief route nor the downtown serves as a center of commercial activity for the community. The new proposal to extend RM 116 might shift

some traffic away from the Wal-Mart area and thus encourage the company to relocate finally.

Infrastructure and annexation decisions have also had an important impact on whether or not development goes to the relief route. However, it is not entirely clear how the decisions to provide infrastructure to particular areas, or not, have been made. Landowners on the west side of town have resisted infrastructure improvements through their land that the city has proposed. Both the city manager and a former city councilwoman describe a conservative, no-growth attitude on the part of local civic leaders. This attitude seems to be due, at least in part, to a fear of the type of development that might occur in and near the city. In particular, residents and leaders seem to fear low-income residential development associated with the prison employees. Furthermore, land values are low enough, at least west of the city, to make ranching activities and goat farming a viable activity near the city.

3.7 LA GRANGE

3.7.1 Background

La Grange, the county seat of Fayette County, was first settled in the 1820s and attracted German, Czech, and Moravian immigrants in the following decades. Agriculture, particularly cotton production, dominated the economy until the 1960s, when the city succeeded in attracting a more diversified industrial base to the city. More recently, the economy has come to depend on tourism. The rich history and cultural heritage of the area have made tourism a viable and increasingly important industry. La Grange is only 60 miles east of Austin and 100 miles west of Houston along SH 71 and is a popular stopping point for people traveling between the two cities and for weekend getaways. La Grange is a bit too far from either city to serve as a bedroom community, but as both Austin and Houston expand towards La Grange, the number of local residents commuting to these metropolitan areas is bound to increase (Figure 3-13).

Construction on the SH 71 relief route for La Grange began in September 1985 and was finally completed in January 1991, over 10 years after the initial public hearings. The relief route is a four-lane, controlled-access facility with two-way access roads on both sides and four exits within La Grange. The new route runs east-west and is located

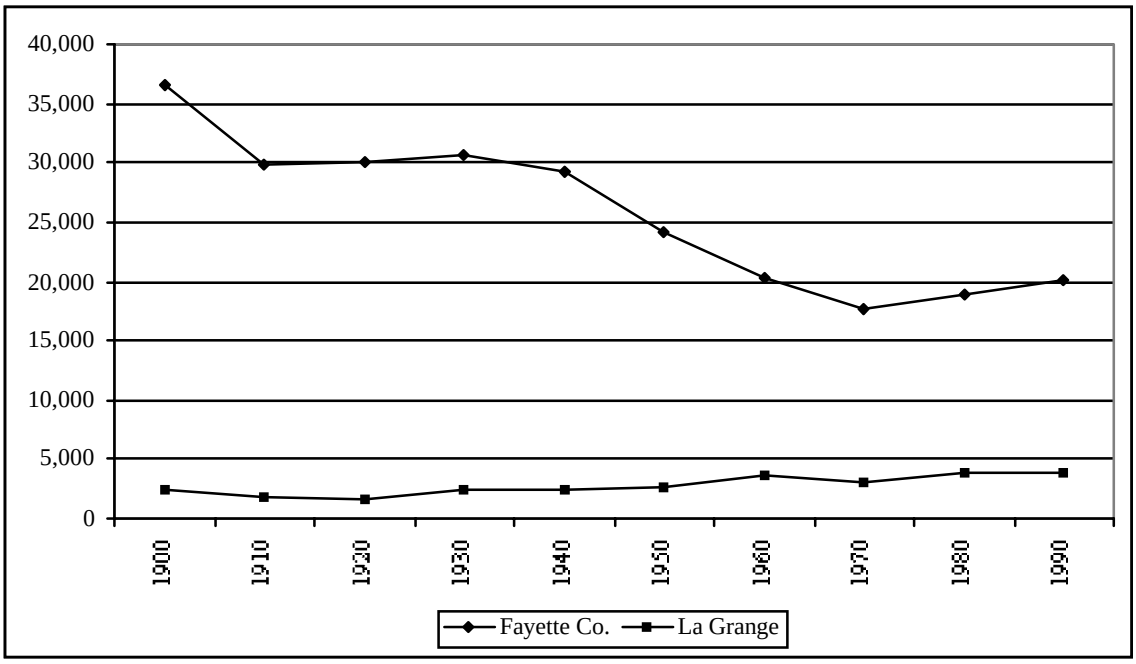

Figure 3-13. Population of La Grange and Fayette County, 1900-1990

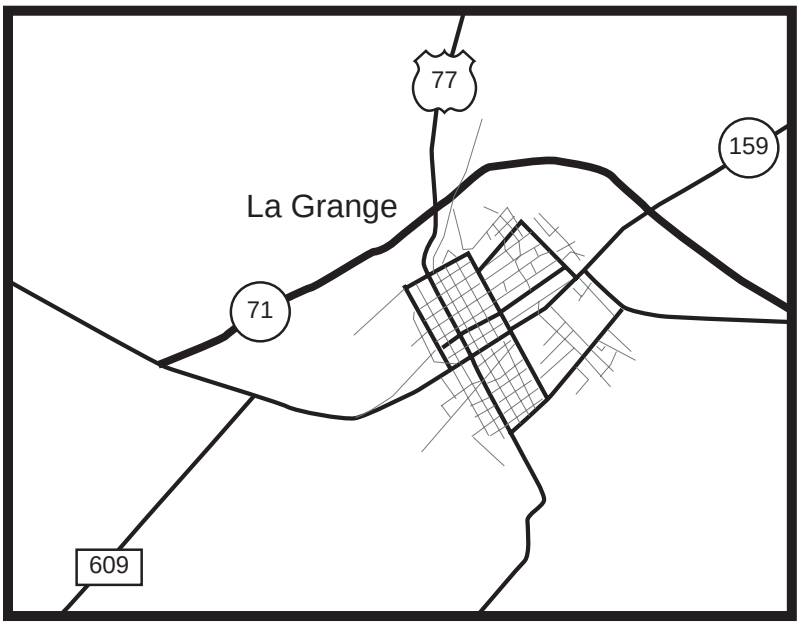

Figure 3-14. Map of La Grange Highways

about two miles north of the downtown. Proposals have also been put forth to build a relief route for SH 77, which runs north-south through the center of town and intersects with the SH 71 relief route to the north of downtown. Some residents are concerned that a winding section of SH 77 on a bluff south of downtown is an unnecessary safety hazard. David Noak, mayor of La Grange, said that large trucks periodically collide with oncoming traffic, get stuck, or have spills. The intersection of the old SH 71 route and SH 77 at the southeastern edge of downtown continues to serve as a center of commercial activity, including a bank, a car dealership, a fast-food restaurant, the original city post office, and other small businesses (Figure 3-14).

3.7.2 Preconceptions

As in many of the other case studies, residents of La Grange were ambivalent about the proposed relief route. However, memories differ as to the degree and nature of opposition to the relief route. A business owner in Smithville, just to the west of La Grange along SH 71, commented that the construction in La Grange was held up for years due to a dispute over whether to cut down trees with historical significance in the planned route just west of the city. Dan Chovanec, a former mayor of La Grange, reports that the project was delayed for years due to resistance from local merchants. The current mayor and other residents said that downtown merchants resisted the relief route but did not report a lengthy delay of the project. The TxDOT area engineer, James Ivy, said that the only resistance to the new route that he perceived was from a few large landholders whose properties were traversed by the proposed alignment. Local stakeholders successfully negotiated with TxDOT to provide two-way frontage roads on both sides of the relief route to ensure adequate access for landowners in the area.

Two interviewees characterized the residents of La Grange as conservative in their support of economic and population growth in the city and as uninterested in the growth potential along the bypass. In addition, residents feared a decline in business in the established commercial areas that might occur with the construction of the relief route. However, the chamber representative, current local officials, and all business owners interviewed agreed that the traffic along the old route was overwhelming the downtown area and diminished access for patrons of local businesses in the downtown.

As a result, the relief route came to be seen as an “imperfect, but available option” by business owners in the city.

Jimmy Weikel, a business owner who opposed the bypass and whose business failed after moving from the downtown to the western intersection of the old and new routes, described three common perspectives at the time of the proposal. He said non-business owners did not care; they wanted the traffic to go away and for the bypass to be located as far from the city as possible. He also distinguished between local business owners who were old at the time and those who were young. He said the young owners tended to acknowledge the business potential of the bypass, while the older owners did not. Mr. Chovanec also commented that the bypass proposal only “went through” once many of the local business owners were no longer in business due to retirement or otherwise.

3.7.3 Impacts

Most residents see the relief route as a positive change in the community. The downtown and the commercial areas along the old route in La Grange appear not to have suffered or even changed significantly as a result of the relief route. Several interviewees said that local businesses benefited from the removal of through traffic that did not patronize these businesses from the old route. This through traffic is thought to have been a barrier for the patrons of downtown businesses that may have encouraged local residents to shop elsewhere. The old route currently supports retail services oriented towards the local market, including a grocery store, hardware store, and automotive supplies, among others, primarily east of the intersection of the old route and SH 77. Local officials assert there was a net gain in the number of retail establishments after the relief route was constructed and that few establishments closed as a result of the relief route. At least three interviewees claimed that no existing businesses were harmed by the bypass. In reality, the impact of the relief route may not have been quite this benign. Mr. Chovanec said that some gas stations went out of business and did not relocate to the relief route. However, three to four businesses may have closed due to the opening of a Wal-Mart on the old route a few years before the opening of the SH 71 relief route.

Downtown business owners and local officials have worked together to maintain downtown as a viable commercial center. La Grange participates in the Main Street Program run by the State Historical Commission, and many downtown businesses used funds from this program to renovate. The program also funded improvements to sidewalks and streetlights. The retail stores in downtown, including a meat market, pharmacy, clothing stores, a small grocery store, four banks, and a jewelry store, cater to the daily needs of local customers. Some local officials are proud of not having any antique shops in the downtown, and make specific reference to the presence of these stores in Bastrop and Smithville. A proliferation of antique stores in the downtown is viewed, even by officials in cities with antique stores in the downtown, as a sign of decline. Also, although La Grange is the county seat, the area around the courthouse is not dominated by office space for lawyers and accountants.

A notable amount of development has occurred along the old route east of SH 77 since the construction of the relief route, including a relatively large H-E-B grocery store and a small Sears store. The development in this area may attest to the ability of a few large anchor retailers to influence the location of new development. H-E-B's decision to remain at this location is perceived by some to have been a strategic move to eliminate the only competition in the area, a Super S grocery store, at the intersection of the old route and SH 77. The decision may also be related to the lack of available sites on the relief route when the decision was made to renovate the store in 1995. The Super S closed recently after a minor fire in the store. A notable amount of development has also occurred along the old route between downtown and its western interchange with the relief route. This development, composed mostly of fast-food restaurants, hotels, and gas station/convenience stores, is clearly oriented towards traffic on the relief route.

Development along the relief route itself is limited to the four interchanges. The county fairgrounds, at the intersection of SH 77 with the relief route, predates the relief route. A storage business recently opened at this intersection, and a suite of medical offices will soon open there in anticipation of the relocation of the local hospital, according to Margo Johnson, the president of the chamber of commerce. An Exxon gas station and a Whataburger restaurant owned by a local businessman opened recently at the next interchange to the east. Mr. Chovanec reports that the city annexed only the land

around the four interchanges after the construction was completed and that utilities were extended to both sides of the relief route at these interchanges. No interviewees indicated a plan or logic to this policy, although it may be influenced by a lack of interest on the part of local landholders in subdividing and selling off their land. As a result, although the two-way frontage roads allow for easier access, little development has occurred away from these interchanges.

3.7.4 Analysis

The unusual pattern of changes, or lack thereof, in La Grange seems to be attributable to several factors. The first factor is that this is a rather new facility, having been completed in 1991. The lack of development on the relief route and the lack of decline in downtown may be partially attributable to the newness of the facility. In addition, the limited annexation and utility-extension policies of the city may have kept development along the frontage roads in check. The new development and renovation along the old route indicates that the lack of new development along the relief route is not due to a general lack of investment in the community. In downtown, local officials seem to have made good use of Main Street Program funds to maintain a physically attractive downtown and diverse base of businesses serving the local community in this part of the city. The decline in traffic downtown might actually have increased the viability of downtown businesses by making them more accessible to local residents. Finally, the resilience of downtown might also be attributable to SH 77, which continues to funnel traffic through town. The proposed relocation of SH 77 might impact downtown in a way that the SH 71 relief route has not.

3.8 LIVINGSTON

3.8.1 Background

Livingston is located in the Piney Woods of Texas, a dense stand of forest covering much of eastern Texas that has shaped the economy and culture of the community. The county seat for Polk County, Livingston was founded in 1839 and served from the beginning as an agricultural center. In 1880, the Houston East and West Texas Railway came through Livingston, leading to growth in the local population and

contributing to the development of the lumber industry. Timber reserves disappeared in 1920s, but oil was discovered in 1932. The economy of Livingston is currently based on a revived timber industry, oil, cotton and truck crops, and tourism. Livingston is 73 miles north of Houston at the junction of US 190 and US 59. A steady stream of traffic from Houston heads to Lake Livingston, to the west of the city, on summer weekends. Livingston has a large retirement community and is a becoming a bedroom community of Houston (Figure 3-15).

US 59 is a major north-south NAFTA corridor and a part of the proposed Interstate 69. Most of the highway, which runs from Laredo through Houston and to Texarkana, has been upgraded to limited access. In 1981, TxDOT completed construction on the US 59 relief route around Livingston as a four-lane, controlled-access facility located west of the town about 1 mile from the old route (Figure 3-16). The original route through Livingston, Washington Avenue, is located several blocks east of downtown Livingston.

3.8.2 Preconceptions

Residents of Livingston viewed the proposed US 59 relief route with as much ambivalence as residents of the other case study communities. Residents of the town were not entirely happy to hear of the proposed relief route, but they were resigned to its construction and even acknowledged the necessity of the relief route. According to Joe Buller, the TxDOT area engineer, the town was ready for it: "It was impossible to get around downtown." Most interviewees described the relief route as mildly controversial at most. Marilyn Sutton, a city official, gave voice to this view, "Personally, I do not remember any negative comments. There had been some minor concerns from small service station owners, some of the motels located on Business 59, and also some of the restaurants...had some initial concerns.… It was viewed by most people, maybe not completely positive, but there never was a negative reaction to it."

The main contentions arose over alignment. According to Joe Pedigo, owner of a local furniture store, "Many of the people at that time, the landowners, the people that were very influential, that had land around the lake wanted it on the west side. The city council wanted it on the east side. Businessmen in the city of Livingston downtown

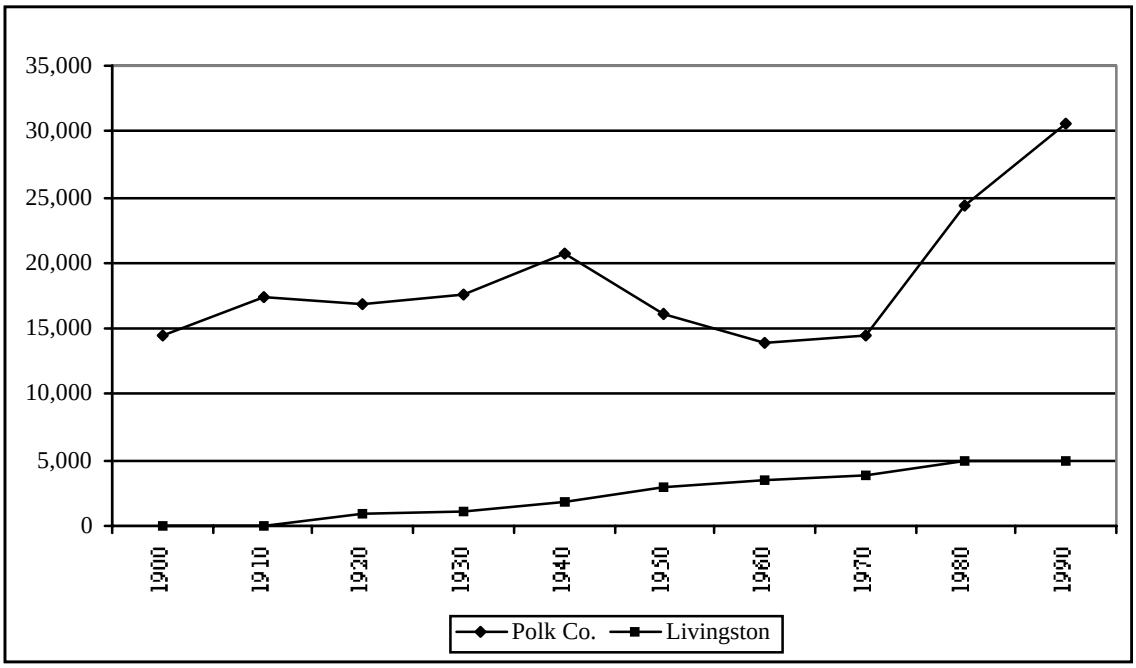

Figure 3-15. Population of Livingston and Polk County, 1900-1990

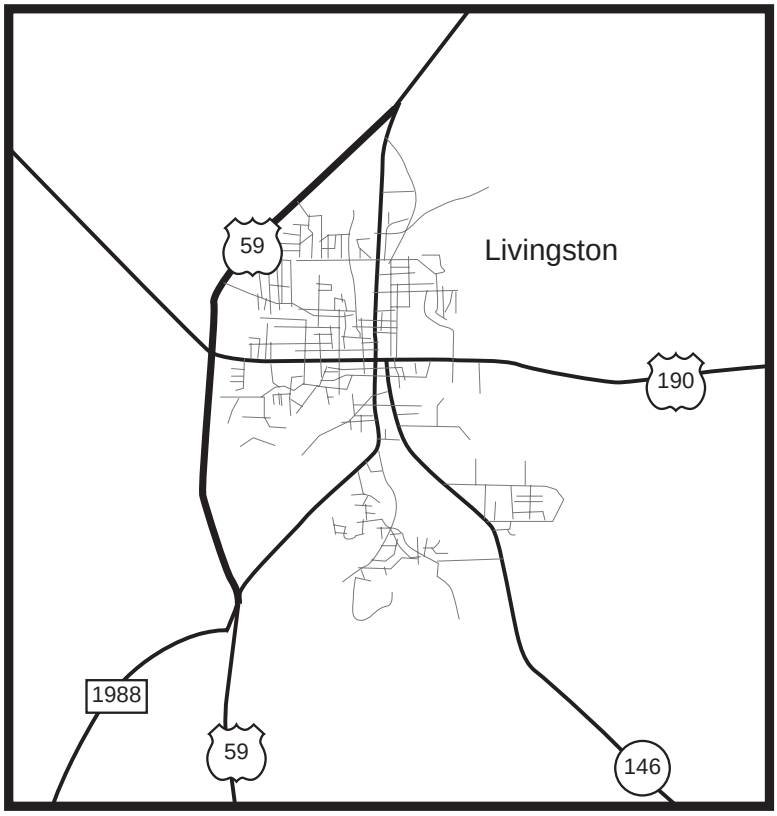

Figure 3-16. Map of Livingston Highways

wanted it to continue through the middle of the city. It was stymied...the city council saw that nothing was going to happen unless they gave in." Eventually the relief route was built to the west, thus routing traffic destined for Lake Livingston away from town.

The reduction in traffic through town was seen as the primary benefit of the relief route. According to one resident, the town was being choked by "heavy, heavy traffic every Friday and Sunday afternoon as Houstonians came from Houston up through different points in East Texas. It was a traffic nightmare. We had traffic backed up for miles on Highway 59, with the two lanes and all the traffic signals. The locals avoided that area on Fridays and Sundays." On weekends traffic was so bad that the city assigned police officers to direct traffic in downtown. Residents of Livingston expected reduced congestion to result in greater mobility and safer transportation in and around town. Residents anticipated an economic boom associated with the relief route. According to Ms. Sutton, "they realized there would be new growth associated with that bypass."

3.8.3 Impacts

Because the old route did not pass through downtown, the relief route seems to have had little impact on downtown Livingston. While the types of businesses downtown have changed substantially, downtown has remained relatively vibrant. Courthouse-related businesses have taken over spaces formerly occupied by retailers, and there are few vacant buildings. However, Washington Avenue, the old SH 59 route, is littered with vacant buildings and has seen no new development since the construction of the relief route.

The US 59 relief route had significant impacts on some highway-related businesses. Mr. Buller attributes the demise of the White Kitchen Restaurant to the US 59 relief route. However, Mr. Pedigo, who claims the White Kitchen Restaurant was famous all over Texas, lays much of the blame on the relief route, but he attributes part of the decline to a change in management. The White Kitchen Restaurant survived for approximately 5 years after the relief route's construction. Service stations and motels were severely affected by the relief route. According to Mr. Pedigo, "Many service stations, probably eight or nine service stations" went out of business. Remaining service stations adapted their services to survive. A local Exxon station started offering heavier

services and catered to local businesses. Motels suffered greatly. A Holiday Inn was built downtown shortly before the relief route was constructed. "It did pretty good before the bypass, but when the bypass came in it hurt that motel bad," said Mr. Pedigo. Many of the motels on the old route altered their strategies to cope.

Unlike most case study relief routes, the US 59 relief route has seen significant development since opening in 1981. Development shifted west along US 190 towards the future US 59 relief route even before construction was completed. The majority of development has occurred around interchanges and consists of new businesses rather than relocated businesses, with a few exceptions. The Texas Pepper was originally located on US 190 west of Livingston; following construction of the relief route Charlie Stovall moved his business to the new highway. Several residents noted that local automobile dealerships moved to the relief route. "All of our automotive businesses expanded and increased in business," one resident said. Several restaurants, notably Shrimpboat Manny's and the Texas Pepper, located on or near the relief route. According to Mr. Pedigo. Wal-Mart and H-E-B arrived shortly after the relief route was built. "I am sure that without the bypass Wal-Mart would not have built a Supercenter here," he said.

According to locals, the initial development on the relief route occurred on the south side of town. The southern portion of the relief route is more heavily traveled than the northern portion because the bulk of US 59 northbound traffic turns west on US 190 and continues to Lake Livingston. But local policies also played a role. "Soon after the bypass started going in, the city annexed [the land near the relief route], and since then the majority of annexations have gone out 190 West. It redirected the growth pattern of town," said Ms. Sutton. A Holiday Inn Express and a Factory Outlet Mall have been built on the southern reaches of the relief route. Some interviewees felt there would be more development if the southern portion of the relief route were not in the flood plain. "The flood plain is on the south end and that's where the traffic is," said Mr. Buller. In recent years, the bulk of development has occurred on the northern end of the relief route. Most of the northern development is not dependent on highway traffic. According to Ms. Sutton, the sites were developed because large parcels are easier to assemble on the relief route. Recent developments have included a telephone co-op, hospital, nursing home, and an assisted-living facility. A new junior high school is currently under construction.

The business community of Livingston views the relief route in a positive light with the exception of owners of highway-related businesses on the old route, who attribute the collapse of their businesses to the relief route. Residents of Livingston view the relief route as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it alleviated an untenable traffic situation in downtown and provided a new corridor for growth. Interviewees felt the reaction of the city government and business community to the relief route ameliorated any negative impacts. "Had we sat out there and not developed that area, there would have been a lot different effect than we have today.… It did help spur growth in the community," said Ms. Sutton. "We're much better off. We had to have a bypass," said Mr. Pedigo. However, several interviewees lamented the alignment and what might have been. "The highway really, really did a terrible injustice to this community, I mean, in where it could have gone by spending more money" to build an eastern alignment, explained Mr. Pedigo, that would have opened more land for development.

3.8.4 Analysis

Several factors contribute to the amount, scale and location of development in Livingston. The loss of traffic to the relief route undoubtedly played a significant role in the decline of Washington Avenue. In 1978, traffic along the old route averaged 14,420 vehicles per day. In 1981, after construction, the ADT on the old route dropped to 4,700 and grew to 8,300 on the new route. By 1996, traffic on the old route declined to 3,500 and traffic on the new route stood at 16,500. The continued decline on the old route suggests an absolute and relative decline in the importance of Washington Avenue as a commercial corridor. But other factors also contributed to the decline. According to residents, the regional shopping center in Humble draws a significant amount of retail trade from Livingston. In addition, the collapse of the oil industry at about the time the relief route opened reduced the flow of traffic from Houston to Lake Livingston and may have contributed to the decline along Washington Avenue.

Livingston has benefited from serving as the turnoff point to Lake Livingston. While lake-bound traffic now skirts Livingston to the east instead of traveling through downtown, these travelers have greater demands for local services than the average traveler does. While most highway travelers require only food, gas, and lodging,

travelers to Lake Livingston will be spending their weekend in a private home and will therefore require many of the goods and services of a full-time residence. The fact that Livingston is the final opportunity to pick up supplies for the weekend vacation creates a market for grocers and other local services on the relief route. The demand from travelers to Lake Livingston has drawn business to the southern portion of the relief route and to US 190 west of the US 59 relief route.

3.9 SMITHVILLE

3.9.1 Background

Smithville was initially settled in 1827 but did not grow significantly until 1887 when the railroad arrived. The disappearance of railroad jobs in the 1950s led to a period of decline, but the population has grown since then as Smithville has developed into something of a bedroom community and tourist center (Figure 3-17). Located at the junction of SH 71 and SH 95, Smithville is 43 miles east of Austin and 120 miles west of Houston on SH 71. The neighboring case study communities of Bastrop and La Grange are 13 miles to the west and 21 miles east, respectively. Smithville's retail and service sector continues to decline as the retail sector of Bastrop expands, and residents now depend on Bastrop for their daily needs. Even so, the town retains much of its historic charm, and several movies have been filmed in Smithville, most recently *Hope Floats*.

SH 71 is a major corridor running from Brady in west central Texas, through Austin, connecting with IH 10 in Columbus and continuing to the Gulf of Mexico. SH 71 initially ran through the heart of Smithville along what is now Loop 230. A relief route was proposed in the 1960s to alleviate congestion downtown. George Woodruss, mayor at the time, proposed an alignment for the relief route along the railroad right-of-way in the center of town, but that plan was not followed. In 1984, the Smithville SH 71 relief route was completed as a controlled-access facility with two interchanges for the town. The SH 71 relief route is approximately 1 mile north of downtown (Figure 3-18).

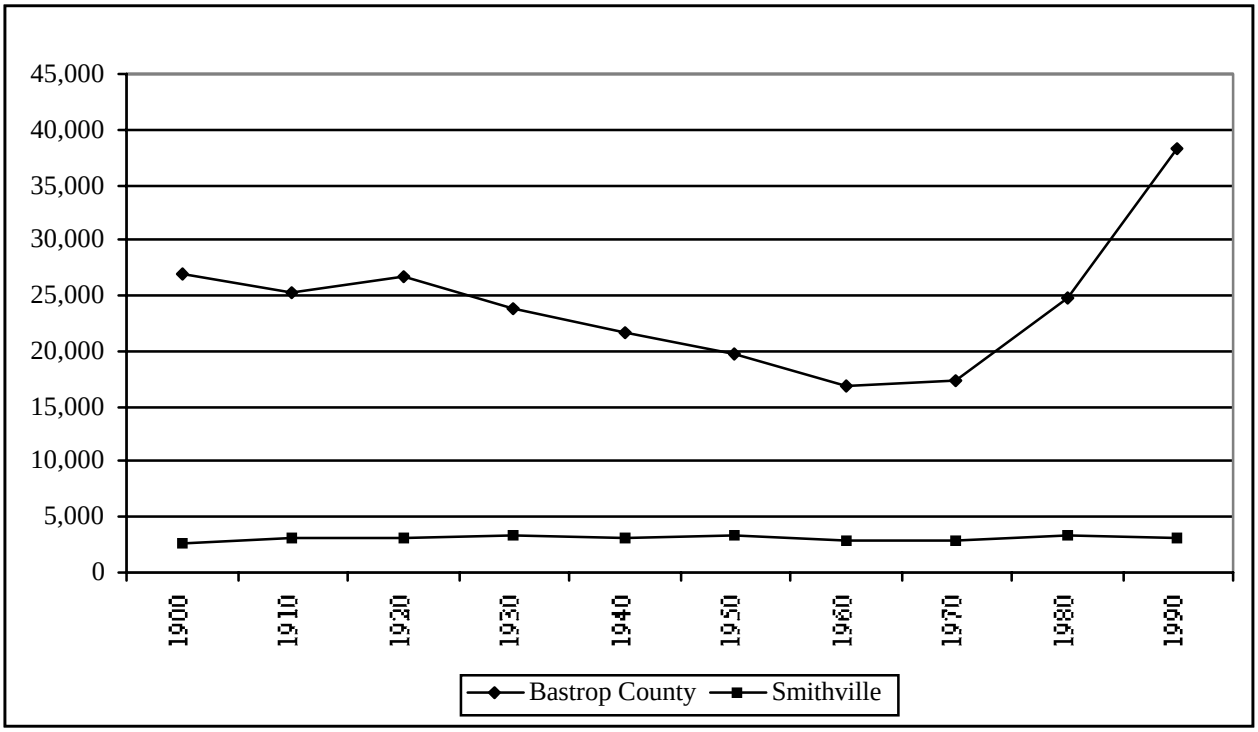

Figure 3-17. Population of Smithville and Bastrop County, 1900-1990

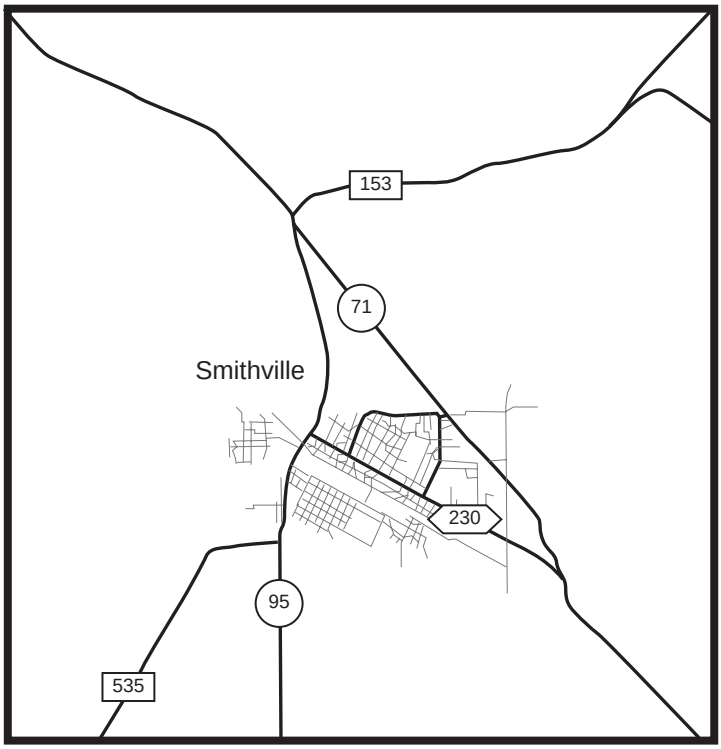

Figure 3-18. Map of Smithville Highways

3.9.2 Preconceptions

Residents of Smithville initially displayed a degree of skepticism about the proposed relief route. According to a local service station owner, everyone in the city knew the relief route "wasn't positive" but thought it was "inevitable." Molly Todd, a local realtor, said, "Everybody felt we were going to dry up." Owners of service stations and fast-food restaurants expressed the most concern. According to some interviewees, the town has always relied on travelers and tourists, but others disagreed. According to Mr. Woodruss, mayor during the initial planning, the town was not dependent on through traffic, and local business owners were not very interested in the bypass, but over time the relief route generated strong feelings. While most homeowners wanted the relief route on the outskirts of town, the business community wanted it through town. Ms. Todd expressed sympathy for highway-related business, but feels the rest of town was presented with an opportunity. "I felt sorry for the service stations…. I was never concerned about losing anything downtown…. I thought it was an opportunity for us."

According to Renee Blashkee, the current mayor, residents were "either very strongly for it or against it." Most city officials anticipated that residential areas would spread out and that the residential tax base would increase. They also expected the town to expand its limits and annex more land. Others anticipated safety improvements. Dangerous intersections would be improved, and the city would be safer for children. Prior to the construction of the SH 71 relief route, many of the town's children had to cross the highway to go to school.

3.9.3 Impacts

Smithville is not the town it was before the relief route, and its downtown has changed drastically. Service stations and fast-food restaurants have been the most strongly affected. Billy Davis, owner of a local Texaco station, witnessed a serious decline in his business. By Mr. Davis' estimation, 75 percent of his business was highway-related before the relief route. But after construction of the relief route, through traffic accounted for only 5 percent of his sales. Prior to construction of the SH 71 relief route, he employed between four and six people; he currently employs no one. Mr. Davis

knew of the highway project before purchasing his service station and paid off his debt before the highway was completed. He probably could not have purchased his service station after the construction of the relief route. Priest's Tire and Automotive, a local automobile repair shop, was a full-service station prior to construction of the SH 71 relief route. They currently offer minor servicing and tires. According to the owner, they experienced a slight drop in sales after construction, but Environmental Protection Agency regulations played a larger role in halting their fuel sales. The combination of the cost of the required tank replacement and the loss of highway traffic made it uneconomical to replace the old tanks. During the same period, self-service stations began eroding the market of full-service stations. The impacts of the relief route are difficult to separate from these other factors.

Many residents place responsibility for the decline of downtown squarely on the relief route. The downtown lost pharmacies, grocery stores, and cafes. Dry goods stores and car dealerships also moved out of downtown. "Downtown lost traffic and had a lot of vacant buildings," said one resident. Despite this sentiment, many business owners did not feel that their own businesses suffered substantial negative effects. Ms. Blashkee and her husband ran a downtown pharmacy and felt the "bypass had no effect on us." Similar sentiments were voiced by other business owners. Dana Bunte, owner of Zimmerhanzel's Barbeque, felt that her location was good before the relief route and has remained good after the relief route. During the week, the majority of Zimmerhanzel's clientele is local, but on the weekends she gets a lot of customers from Austin and San Antonio. In contrast, the owner of Charlie's BBQ disagrees, "it affected us that's for sure."

Despite disagreement over the impact of the relief route, most residents feel there were other factors at work. Supporting this conclusion is the fact that the decline in Smithville did not start until the early 1990s, several years after the construction of the relief route. One factor may have been the tremendous growth in the mid-1980s in commercial development in Bastrop that may have drawn Smithville residents away from local businesses. Other residents point to changing demographics. Many local business owners were approaching retirement when the relief route was constructed and their children did not take over the family business, and many business owners chose to retire

rather than compete with national retailers. In addition, many locals feel that community leaders are stifling growth in Smithville. As one local resident stated, "There's a group in this town that wants to keep Smithville as a little bitty community."

Residents feel the relief route hurt Smithville economically, but they acknowledge that the bypass brought tangible benefits to the town. City officials feel the construction of the SH 71 relief route allowed and justified the town to expand its city limits and allowed residential areas to spread out. Most interviewees cited safety and traffic improvements as the most important benefit of construction. Ms. Blashkee noted that before the construction of the SH 71 relief route their regular customers had trouble reaching their store. "I had to wait for a red light to cross the street," said Ms. Todd. Removing the traffic from the old route "got traffic out of the residential parts of town" and reduced the number of accidents. "Many parents were relieved that their children could cross the town," said Ms. Blashkee. However, several residents noted that the intersection of SH 95 and Loop 230, part of the old route, is still problematic.

Residents acknowledge that some downtown businesses benefited from the bypass. "Quaint" businesses, or antique shops, have filled many of the vacant buildings downtown. Most residents recognize the benefits of filling vacant buildings, but many question the value of the antique businesses. Antique shops are owner operated and typically don't hire many employees. In addition, most of the antique shops are owned by "transplants" or newcomers to Smithville. Mr. Davis views antique stores as a barometer of community health. "Antique stores in your downtown is a sign that things are not going well." Antique stores typically don't make enough money to locate in a high-traffic or high-value downtown.

Smithville has not experienced a large amount of retail or industrial development along the SH 71 relief route. A Texaco, a motel, the Pine Point Inn, and a major medical facility represent the only development on the Smithville relief route. Several factors seem to contribute to the lack of development. Interviewees frequently cited apathy towards growth by several large landowners along the relief route. Citizens feel that the powerbrokers in the town have prevented Smithville from growing. According to locals, some downtown property owners refuse to lease their property, and others point to a conspiracy to keep H-E-B and Wal-Mart out of Smithville. An alternate possibility is

that not enough time has passed to allow development to occur. Conversely, the development along other portions of SH 71, specifically Bastrop, could discourage development in Smithville.

The residents of Smithville are concerned that neighboring communities such as Bastrop are developing faster. They expected that the relief route would bring development, and many are disappointed that it has not. Residents focus their concerns on why development has not occurred, and accept the impacts of the relief route. The SH 71 relief route exacerbated trends that were already underway, and the community has not completely recovered. “The bypass definitely made a big impact...Loop 230 is still hurting," said Elaine Siedell, from the chamber of commerce. Mr. Davis, owner of a local service station, acknowledged the need for relief routes but feels they kill small towns. Despite these impacts, many residents view the relief route positively because of its effects on traffic.

3.9.4 Analysis

The relief route resulted in a dramatic drop in traffic through downtown Smithville that clearly contributed to a decline in highway-related businesses. In 1982, approximately 7,000 vehicles passed through Smithville daily. In 1985 that number had risen to approximately 8,300 and about 75 percent of the traffic used the relief route. By 1996, the total number of cars through Smithville increased to 9,000. During this period, the number of vehicles on the old route dropped from 2,100 to 1,300.

This drop in traffic exacerbated several trends affecting Smithville. First, the agricultural population in the surrounding area traditionally served by businesses in Smithville is declining. Second, proximity to Bastrop and even to Austin means that local businesses compete with the larger concentration of businesses in these larger communities. Although Smithville is closer to Austin-Bergstrom International Airport than many of the northern and western suburbs of Austin, Bastrop is even closer. As the commuting population of Bastrop grows, so does its retail and service sector. Eventually, Smithville is likely to attract more commuters as well.

In addition, the relief route has several characteristics that limit development at interchanges and discourage through travelers from frequenting Smithville’s businesses.

The relief route is only 1 mile from downtown at its closest point, but the majority of the relief route is much farther from the center of Smithville. Second, the SH 71 relief route has only two interchanges in the Smithville area, and the interchanges have poor visibility. Third, the land adjacent to the relief route is controlled by a small number of landowners that have not shown much interest in development around the interchanges and on frontage roads.

3.10 STAMFORD

3.10.1 Background

The West Texas town of Stamford, founded in 1898, has provided services to surrounding ranches and farms throughout its history. Oil was discovered in 1935, but the impacts were not lasting and the population of Stamford has been in decline since the 1950s (Figure 3-19). Located at the junction of US 277 and SH 6, Stamford is 40 miles north of Abilene on the border of Jones and Haskell Counties. Wichita Falls is 114 miles to the northeast and Fort Worth is 188 miles to the east. Stamford is surrounded by comparably sized towns on the north, south, and west. Two of the communities, Anson and Haskell, are on US 277 and are not circumvented by a relief route. Anson and Haskell are also the county seats of Jones and Haskell Counties, respectively. The four neighboring communities, Hamlin, Haskell, Anson, and Stamford, all offer a comparable range of services.

US 277 traverses the state from Del Rio in the south to Wichita Falls in the north. The US 277 relief route around Stamford is a four-lane, controlled-access facility with two-way frontage roads on both sides. Three exits provide access to Stamford. The old route traveled through the center of town, but only skirted downtown on the northwest corner. The relief route, built in 1987, travels approximately 0.5 mile to the west of downtown Stamford, but runs adjacent to developed areas of town (Figure 3-20).

3.10.2 Preconceptions

Stamford residents initially approached the proposed relief route with a degree of ambivalence. Maxie Allen, an engineer with TxDOT, recalls that when the subject of a

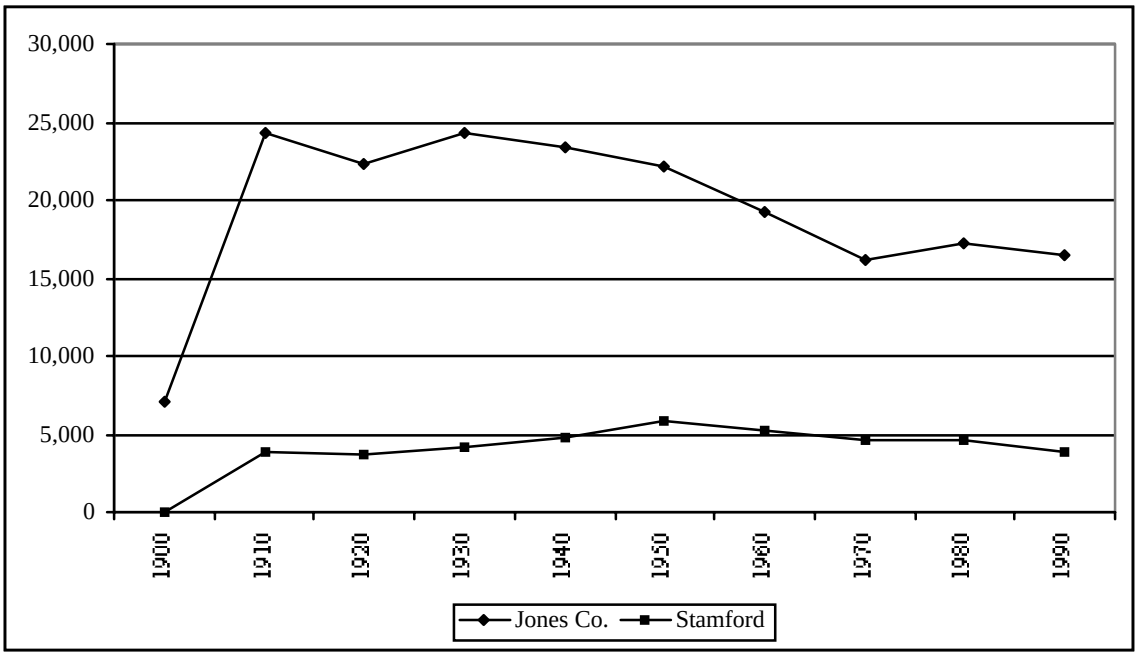

Figure 3-19. Population of Stamford and Jones County, 1900-1990

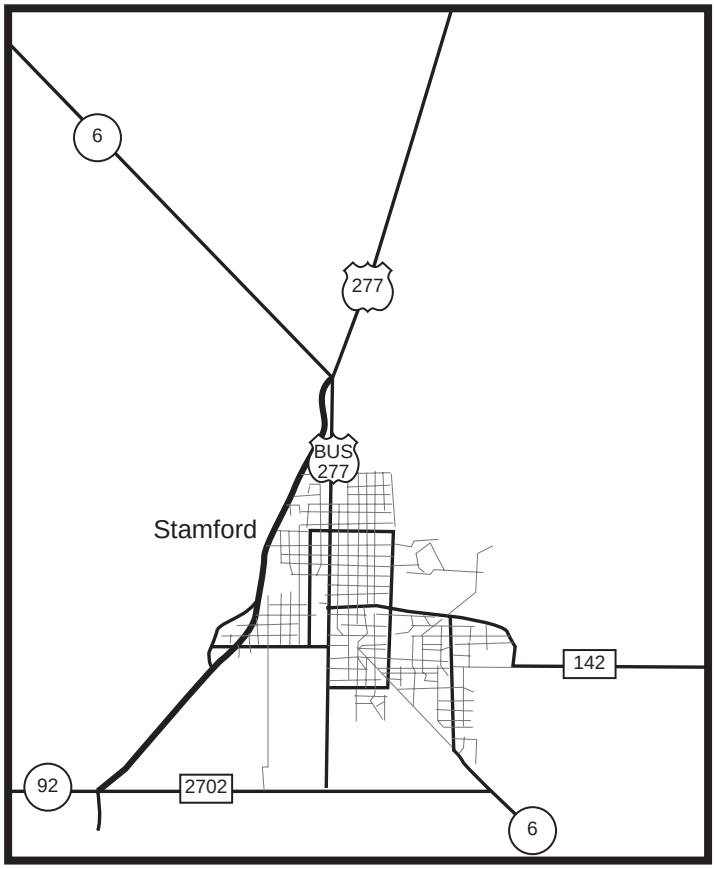

Figure 3-20. Map of Stamford Highways

relief route was initially broached, the town was divided approximately "50/50," but over time the relief route gained favor. Joe Higgens, the TxDOT area engineer, reports that at the first public hearing the relief route was shot down, but five years later the townspeople asked for the relief route. "People are generally opposed to what's fixing to happen" and those opposed tend to be the most vocal. Residents may also have been influenced by the fears of business owners.

Dwayne Nauert, former owner of a service station and current owner of an oil change/car wash establishment, reports that the business community at large "was scared it was going to leave them out." Several TxDOT officials familiar with the project confirmed Mr. Nauert's account of the fears of business owners. Mr. Nauert felt apprehensive, but he "knew it would be a lot more convenient for the people who are traveling." Prior to the construction of the relief route, one local banker "worried the town would start dying" but at the same time "thought it would save our streets." Mr. Higgens believes "the main thing (a town) worries about are businesses tied into traffic," but Mr. Allen felt that the concern was not limited to one type of business. In contrast, Jim Ashton, the local director of the local economic development agency, anticipated an increase in development. He expected that highway-related businesses might suffer, but that it would be offset by growth in non-highway-related businesses.

3.10.3 Impacts

A variety of forces affected small Texas towns in the 1980s, Stamford included. But the US 277 relief route seems also to have impacted Stamford in many direct and indirect ways. One resident argued that the relief route shunted traffic away from the downtown area, leading to several business closures, including a small hotel. But Mr. Nauert expressed doubt about the impact of the relief route on businesses that mostly served local residents: "How many people are going to stop at a clothing store on their way from Lubbock?" The decline of non-highway-related businesses must be explained by factors other than the relief route. A couple of examples illustrate the complexity of sorting out the impacts of the relief route.

Mr. Nauert, who owned a service station prior to the construction of the US 277 relief route, said "It definitely had to have an impact, but I don't really remember how

much." He closed his service station and opened a specialized oil and lube business at the same time the relief route opened, but he attributes the closing of his first business to other factors: "The factor in my closing was the underground storage tanks. It was going to cost so much to upgrade, it was cheaper to close down." At the same time, specialized oil and lube businesses were establishing a market niche. Mr. Nauert did not open his new business on the relief route despite the fact that approximately 85 percent of his business is from outside Stamford. Instead, he located his business adjacent to Wal-Mart to attract spillover customers. "If it wasn't for Wal-Mart I wouldn't be here, because they bring in the traffic." He hypothesized that if his service station had remained open, the relief route would not have affected his business. "Overall I don't think it matters any. If people are going to stop they are going to stop."

Fareed Hassen, owner of Hassen's Department Store, located in downtown Stamford, expressed a different opinion: "Once the bypass opened, our business dropped 20 percent." His store relied on vacationing retirees for a large portion of its business, and he believes the relief route wasn't designed to provide easy access to Stamford. "People can easily miss the cut off…. Coming in from Abilene you can very easily miss the access road." As a result, many through travelers, who formerly would have shopped in Stamford, drive to the next town to shop. He heard from more than one customer that they intended to shop in Stamford, but drove by without realizing they had missed the exit. By the time they realized their mistake they were in the next town, which doesn't have a relief route, and decided to shop there. He acknowledged that the construction of Wal-Mart impacted local retailers, but he specialized in "hard-to-fit" sizes and was not competing with Wal-Mart. "If we had to rely on local people, we would have been out of business a long time ago." Mr. Hassen could not identify any business that may have benefited from the construction of the US 277 relief route. When asked if there were any positive impacts he replied, "not at all, not yet."

Not everyone agrees that the impacts have been all negative or that the relief route is to blame for changes in town. "I don't think it's hurt my business…the traffic has to stop some time," said Mr. Nauert. Stamford is "better off, much better off" according to Ken Roberson, city manager. Mr. Ashton observed both positive and negative impacts. On a positive note, the relief route improved traffic patterns and decreased congestion

downtown. On the other hand, the relief route may have magnified existing problems. “Service stations were probably going to be stressed whether the bypass went around or not. The bypass exacerbated that problem.” Several TxDOT officials said that while there may have been some negative impacts, the impacts were not as severe as the town initially believed. Mr. Allen noted that the town square became easier to navigate. Carrie White, a local banker, related stories of parked cars being clipped by turning trucks on the old route. Mr. Higgens feels that the old route is now safer for young and elderly citizens to cross.

In addition, interviewees identified several factors in the economy at large that impacted the town during the same period. Mr. Higgens posited that small towns are declining across the board as they lose business and population to larger communities. Historically, Stamford has been tied to oil and agriculture, and both segments of the economy have experienced severe declines in the last several years. Mr. Allen pointed to the development of convenience stores as a cause of service station decline. Mr. Ashton identified several other issues that may have impacted Stamford as well. The population of Haskell County has been declining, and the region has been in a drought for several years. Sam Tankersly, a prominent citizen, described how many of the town’s businesses closed when they heard Wal-Mart was moving in. Mr. Tankersly asserted that full-service stations could not compete with convenience stores and faced the problem of having to replace aging gas tanks. He also described Stamford as a rural banking center in the past, but over the years the banking industry has declined.

The residents and business community of Stamford expected the US 277 relief route to bring new development to Stamford. “There’s always something that goes up on the bypass to attract through traffic," said Mr. Nauert. However, the development along the Stamford relief route has been relatively limited. A truck stop is currently under construction along the relief route, and a Texaco station has been constructed at the northernmost interchange. In addition to the Texaco station, two other businesses have located on the relief route, a Higgenbothem-Bartlett Lumber store and the Auction Barn. Aside from these businesses very little development has occurred. “We haven’t had any development go on that thing," said Mr. Ashton. Mr. Hassen said that the town was trying to attract a new hotel to the relief route. CR Anthony’s, a clothing store;

Osborne's, a hardware store; and a local grocery store moved to locations adjacent to Wal-Mart but remained on the old route. According to Mr. Ashton, a new hotel was constructed shortly after the relief route was completed, but it too was constructed on the old route. Mr. Ashton offered a compelling reason for the lack of development. He noted that both Haskell and Jones Counties are dry counties. Several "wet" precincts in Haskell County lie along the old US 277 route. Consequently, most new restaurants and convenience stores have located on this corridor. Hotels have located adjacent to restaurants and, in general, development has been confined to "wet" precincts. Joe Higgens pointed out that businesses are looking at traffic as the primary instigator of development, and "there's just not enough traffic on the bypass."

At least two interviewees expressed concerns over the design of the relief route and a lack of responsiveness on the part of TxDOT to their concerns. Mr. Hassen was dissatisfied with the public involvement process and feels that TxDOT could have done more to minimize impacts. Mr. Hassen said he went to the public meeting and pointed out the poor visibility from the relief route but felt that his concerns were not acknowledged. Mr. Ashton was also critical of the access provided by the relief route, but "at the time we didn't think of it." He feels that a lack of visibility and poor design means that the current interchanges discourage through traffic from exiting. He also feels that indecision regarding the construction of the US 277 relief route may have hurt economic development prospects in Stamford. Several industrial and retail establishments expressed interest in Stamford, but were scared off by the uncertainty surrounding the relief route. "We either needed to stop the talk of the bypass or let it happen," he said.

Residents also expressed concern that TxDOT did not also construct relief routes around the communities that neighbor Stamford. Fareed Hassen voiced an opinion common to many citizens of Stamford: "When the other towns were bypassed we'd be ready to be bypassed, but they didn't bypass the other towns." Many residents of Stamford feel that the other towns have faired better with their planned relief routes . The new facility through Haskell will go down the old railroad right-of-way in the center of town. "It will be a decided advantage for them," said Mr. Ashton. One Stamford resident asserted that if the relief route had been constructed in the city limits then the city would

have had to acquire the right-of-way, but in Haskell TxDOT is paying for right-of-way through the center of town. Mr. Ashton offered a solution to this dilemma: "If TxDOT takes the position to move the traffic then they need to take the position that we're going to try to give you the best access off [the highway]."

3.10.4 Analysis

Stamford is a town in decline. The backbone of the economy is agriculture, and changes in the agricultural sector impact Stamford directly. Rural populations have been in steady decline for decades, and the size of farms has been increasing. Stamford, like many small towns, was founded to serve a farming and ranching population. A decline in the farming and ranching population will result in a declining market size for the businesses in Stamford. In addition, nationwide changes in the structure of the retail industry have led to fewer but larger stores in most sectors. Shoppers are willing to make longer trips to reach large regional shopping centers such as those in Abilene.

The relief route does not shoulder the blame for the abandoned gas stations and a vacant hotel in Stamford. With or without the relief route, Stamford is on a lightly traveled corridor. In 1986, ADT measured 2,900 on the old route through town, and in 1987, following completion of the US 277 relief route, traffic on the old route was 2,600. By 1996, 3,200 vehicles used the old route. Traffic on the relief route increased from 2,800 in 1987 to 6,100 in 1996. Due to meager through traffic, the economy of Stamford was never reliant on highway-related businesses or tourism. The closed service stations can be attributed to declining population, and the vacant hotel closed well before the relief route was constructed.

The lack of development on the relief route can be attributed to several factors. First, the traffic levels were not large enough to attract new highway-related business development. Second, Stamford is only 18 miles from two similarly sized communities, Anson and Haskell. Neither community has a relief route, but both communities have numerous highway-related businesses. These businesses have already saturated the market, and there is no need for more service stations, hotels, or restaurants on a short stretch of highway. In addition, Stamford straddles the border of two dry counties. Existing restaurants are found in the wet portion of Stamford along the old route. Many

restaurant and service station owners readily admit that while they are dependent on through travelers, the bulk of their business comes from locals. If a new restaurant opened along the relief route it would undoubtedly attract more through travelers, but it could not attract local customers. However, the design of the relief route may have exacerbated these problems. The fact that residents perceive the design to be a factor, whether or not it really is, is itself an issue for TxDOT.

CHAPTER 4. CASE STUDIES WITHOUT RELIEF ROUTES

Four additional case studies were completed for communities without relief routes. These case studies give an indication of what might have happened in the relief route communities if the relief routes had not been built. In this way, they provide a baseline for analyzing the impacts of the relief routes in the communities described in the previous chapter. The case study reports, presented in alphabetical order, are organized as follows: Background, Changes, and Outlook.

4.2 ANSON

4.2.1 Background

As it enters the town square of Anson, US 277 splits to pass around the centrally placed historic courthouse. Old buildings, mostly vacant and in various stages of disrepair, border the split highway around the courthouse. The Opera House, built in 1907, and the recently renovated Anson Library Building (previously the town's Meat Market) represent the few well-maintained structures in the square. Today these buildings in Anson tell the story of all those West Texas rural communities that are struggling to recover from the loss of their traditional economic base.

Anson was founded in 1881 as the county seat of Jones County, one of the richest farming areas in Texas. The town is located at the crossroads of US 277, US 83 and SH 180, 23 miles north of Abilene (Figure 4-1). The Cowboy's Christmas Ball, held annually since 1880, originated in Anson. Traditionally the Jones County economy revolved around farming and livestock rearing activities. With the discovery of oil in the county in 1926, and the opening of the Bullard oilfield one mile southwest of Anson in 1950, Anson became the supply center for the county's agricultural and oil industries. Until the 1970s, Anson's economic base depended on these industries. The population of Anson declined steadily from the 1920s to the 1970s, remained stable until 1970, and increased somewhat between 1990 and 2000 (Figure 4-2).

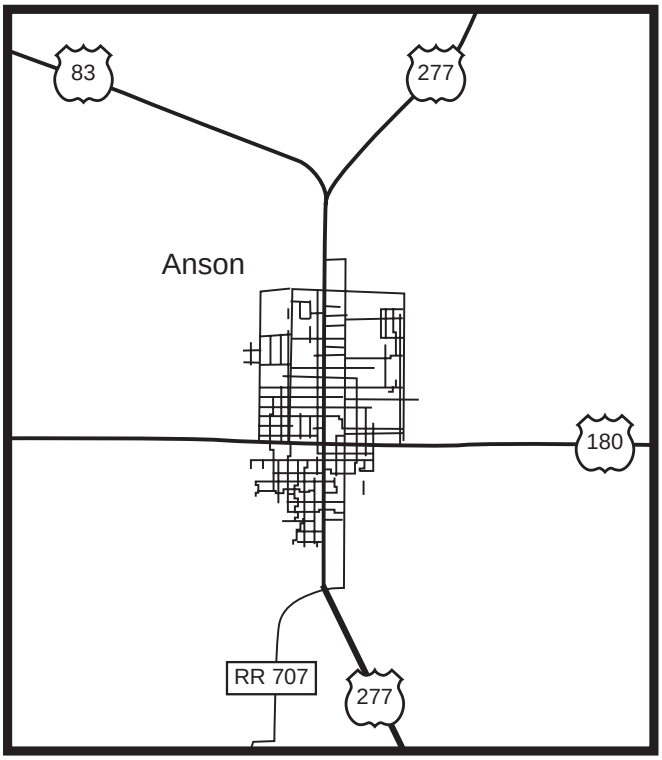

Figure 4-1. Map of Anson Highways

Figure 4-2. Population of Anson and Jones County, 1900-2000

4.1.2 Changes

Mitch Heidenheimer, long term resident of Anson and former owner of a local apparel store, recalls that until the early 1980s, Anson had a healthy retail sector consisting of shops selling drugs, apparel, furniture, hardware, and groceries as well as auto shops, filling stations and family-style restaurants. However, in the last 20 to 30 years, Anson changed from a significant regional retail center to a declining town faced with the challenges of limited job opportunities, a diminishing working population and little sales tax revenue.

Today the few buildings in use in the town square include the City Hall, Chamber of Commerce, a pharmacy, two jewelry stores, two banks and a dry cleaners shop. Most businesses in town are located on US 277, and these include an eating establishment, Bill's Dollar Store, a recently renovated hardware store, the Anson Jones Museum, two gas stations (one with a convenience store), and the Anson Inn. The only other local motel, “The Morning Star Inn,” was built in 1996 on US 180 and is approximately four blocks west of US 277. A trailer manufacturing company that employs 20 people and a Chevrolet auto dealer represent the more successful employers in Anson in recent times.

Anson's economic decline since the late 1970s was mainly caused by the mechanization of farms and drying up of oil fields, which lead to a decline in both jobs and population in the county. In recent years, the drought-stricken region has been witnessing the migration of young families to more prosperous metropolitan areas. According to Anson's mayor Tom Isbell, Anson's economic slump quickened around the mid 1980s when four major businesses shut down, including a company that manufactured service-to-farm implements and a White's Auto Store. Mr. Isbell's observation that the tax base of the town has been diminishing in the past 15 years at the rate of $10 million dollars per year is yet another indication of the town's slowing economy.

A change in shopping patterns is seen as another significant reason for the town's economic downslide. All interviewees identified the opening of Wal-Mart stores in Stamford and Abilene and the malls in Abilene as a big blow to Anson's retail sector. As Mr.Heidenheimer put it, before Wal-Mart and the malls came, "people shopped [in town] out of necessity, now they do it as entertainment". Mr.Isbell feels that the Super Wal-

Mart at Abilene affected the local retail sector more than the Wal-Mart at Stamford though the latter is closer.

It is the general view of city leaders that it was not feasible to keep businesses open in the face of the declining economy. As City Manager Wayne Lisenbee put it, “From an economic standpoint, Anson is like any other West Texas rural community. We have the same kind of challenges presented to us.” The local “mom and pop” stores were unable to compete with Wal-Mart, and eventually many of them died out. In many cases the business owners were unable to sell their stores. The aging of local business owners also contributed to the decline of local businesses. In other cases, the businesses closed down when the owners died, and their children were unwilling to take over the business.

The slow economy also affected full service gas stations that closed mainly because they could not afford to meet environmental regulations. In the words of Mr.Lisenbee, "Small rural businesses do not have the capital to meet with these regulations. Any money that the small towns may have set aside for economic development has to be used up for meeting with these regulations". One of the old full-service gas stations was converted into a convenience store with a self-service gas station while the others remain vacant. The Mayor observed that the present owners of the converted station invested considerable time and money in making the business work, and the business has been doing very well. Proximity to a larger community like Abilene may have hurt local motel businesses whose indifferent performance was exacerbated by Anson's location in a dry county and inadequate local restaurant facilities.

Traffic patterns from the 1970s through 1996 indicate a significant increase in vehicular movement on US 277 both before and after entering the town. The traffic counts on US 277 before it merges with US 83 rose from 2,690 in 1975 to 3,800 in 1996, an increase of 41%. A review of traffic counts before the highway enters the town square shows that the traffic volumes grew by nearly 75% over the last three decades. Further south, some of the vehicular traffic is diverted from US 277 to US 180. The traffic counts on US 277 as it leaves Anson have nearly doubled since the 1970s, increasing from 5,830 in 1970 to 8,500 in 1996.

Despite the fact that US 277 creates unfavorable traffic conditions at the town square, its current location is perceived locally as vital for Anson's economy because it

gives visibility to the town. Motorists driving through town stop by to take pictures of the courthouse and look around the local stores while they are there. Lynda Wills, an employee at a local jewelry stores feels that the route also brings in residents from outlying communities who realize that they can buy agricultural produce and other necessities in Anson without having to drive to Abilene.

4.1.3 Outlook

TxDOT proposed in 1984 to build a relief route for US 277 around Anson. But this proposal was not met with much enthusiasm from residents, especially business owners who think that the current location of US 277 is vital for the town's economy because it brings in through traffic. While the mayor and city manager were open to the idea of a relief route, provided that the town would have ample time to prepare for it, business owners feared losing the business of people from outlying communities who currently drive through Anson.

Mr.Lisenbee opines that traffic on US 277 will keep growing as drivers who are trying to avoid I-35 look for alternative routes. More traffic could translate into more people stopping in Anson and spending their money there. The mayor feels that specialized businesses like the Goldworks jewelry shop will help rejuvenate Anson's economy, because the owner has carved a specialized niche for her business. In recent times, Anson has had a few success stories of old businesses being bought out and restored. These successes are viewed by some as a sign of good times ahead for the town's economy. One example is that of a hardware store that the earlier owner sold because he was making losses, but according to Mr.Lisenbee, "the new owner bought it and turned it around. He brought down the prices of the hardware items to be competitive with the prices of the same material in Abilene - now local contractors no longer have to drive all the way to Abilene to get items that are available at Anson too. Now it is cheaper to buy locally." However, a lack of financial resources is also perceived as an obstacle in providing incentive packages to new businesses to locate in Anson.

For now, given its fiscal constraints and locational advantages, Anson seems to be positioning itself a potential bedroom community for residents of nearby Abilene. City leaders generally feel that Anson currently has its biggest opportunity in the housing

market. People working in Abilene are likely to find housing more easily and at cheaper rates in Anson, which has good water supply and a good school district. Many city leaders see the recent growth in population in the county as a positive sign. It is anticipated that once there are enough residents to give the town a good tax base, other businesses will also start moving in. The town is currently working on improve the quality of services it can offer to potential residents.

4.2 DAYTON

4.2.1 Background

The town of Dayton is located on the main line of Union Pacific railroad and on US 90 and SH46 three miles west of Liberty in southwestern Liberty County (Figure 4-3). Initially called West Liberty, Dayton was considered part of the original town of Liberty. These two parts of town were divided by the Trinity River and were directly connected by a road and a ferry. Dayton was made an incorporated municipality in 1911. Located 43 miles southwest of Houston, Dayton lies in the highly industrialized Houston metropolitan area, which has the nation's largest concentration of petrochemical plants. Dayton's chief economic activities in the early 20th century were in lumbering, cattle-raising, cotton ginning and rice-growing. Oil development in the 1920s introduced new industries in the town and by 1940 the town was a railroad center with nearly 70 businesses.

4.2.2 Changes

Today Dayton is a fast growing community that has experienced population growth throughout the century despite the decline in its economic fortunes (Figure 4-4). While the initial population growth may have resulted from accelerated economic activity in the town, the explosive growth in the Dayton's outlying areas after the 1970s, much of it outside of the city limits (and thus not captured in census figures), was caused by the spillover of population from neighboring communities in the rapidly growing region. As one resident pointed out, "Dayton is peaking now" in terms of population.

The last three decades saw the small community's diverse retail sector succumb to the changing national economic trends that favored large-scale retail and national chains.

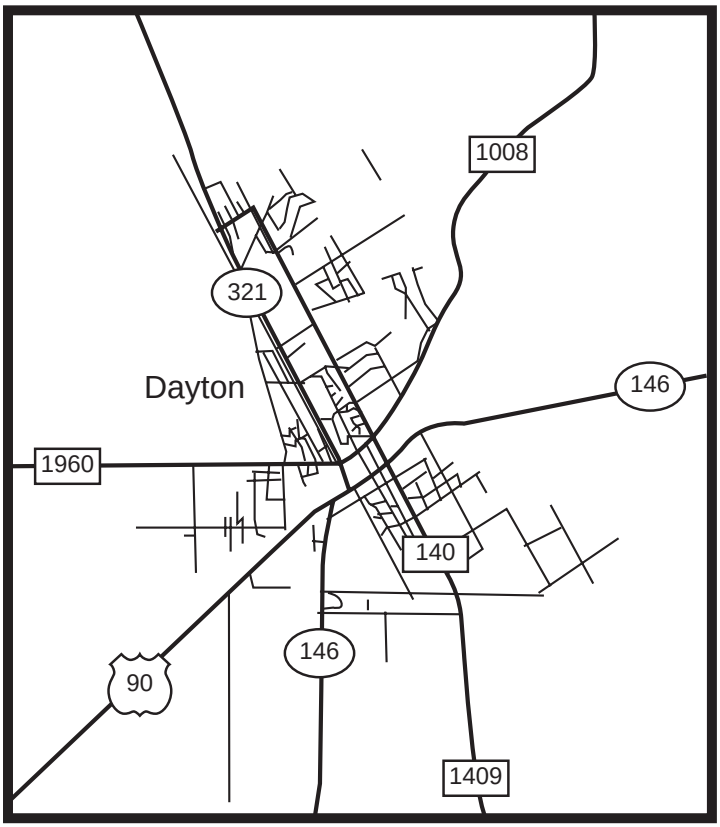

Figure 4-3. Map of Dayton Highways

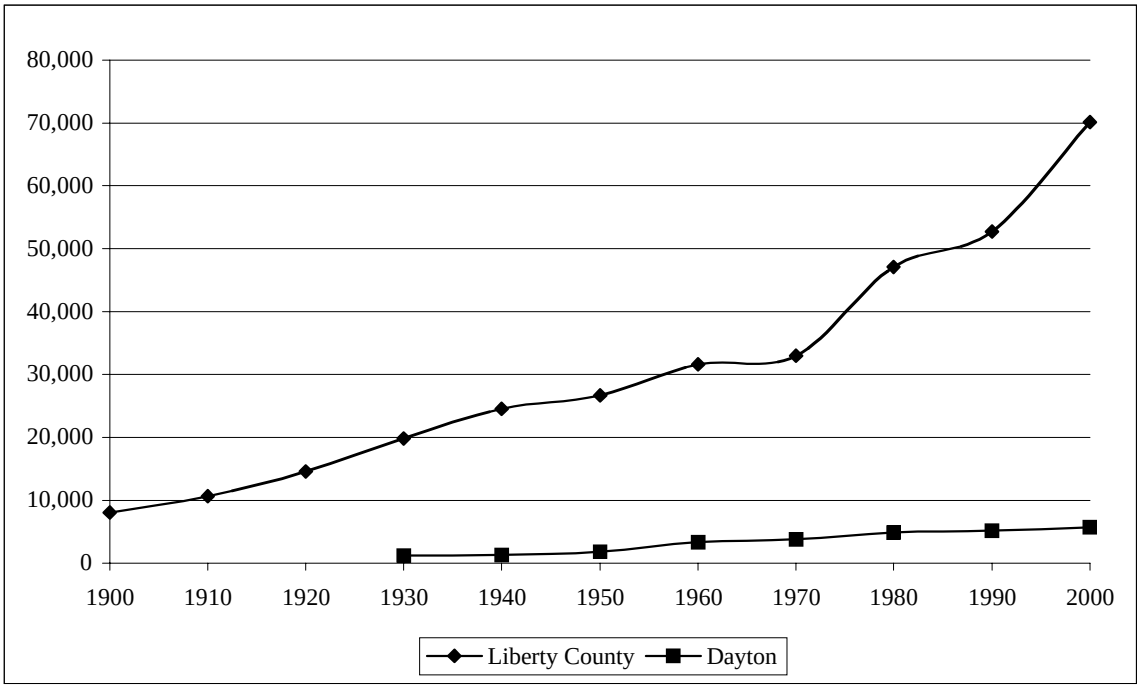

Figure 4-4. Population of Dayton and Liberty County, 1900-2000

Until the late 1970s, Dayton had a vibrant downtown with stores located along US 90 and a block away from it. Today, the downtown a shopping center built in 1978 on FM 1960 lie half vacant with nearly all the older retail businesses closed or replaced by antique stores, novelty stores, and resale shops. What used to be the jewelry store is now occupied by the year-old Dayton Chamber of Commerce. The major employers in town include a medium security prison, the school district, and a Sam's Distribution Center. The frontage on US 90 is mostly occupied by fast-food franchises and multi-pump convenience stores. The town also has two grocery stores, one locally owned, but residents drive to Liberty (6 miles east), Baytown (21 miles southwest), Humble (22 miles west), Cleveland (23 miles northwest) or Houston (35 miles southwest) to meet most of their shopping needs.

A combination of factors contributed to the loss of businesses in the 1980s. The collapse of the oil industry in the late 1970s was a major reason for the decline of local economic growth. The nationwide decline in agricultural activity also affected the large farming community in the area. The opening of new retail centers in several neighboring towns within a radius of 30 miles also contributed to the decline in local businesses beginning in the late 1970s. The local “mom & pop” stores, which “did not change with times,” closed down when Wal-Mart opened in Liberty and Deerbrook Mall, which had 165 stores, opened in Humble during the 1980s. According to one interviewee, “The Deerbrook Mall devastated Dayton. People just went shopping there in Humble after the mall opened.” Other factors expediting Dayton's economic decline include lack of support from the local residents (who preferred shopping at the larger retail centers in neighboring towns) and the demise of businesses when their owners retired.

During the 1970s, the major thoroughfares around Dayton had twenty to thirty full-service gas stations, but these stations closed for a variety of reasons. In some cases the owners retired, and in others the stations were forced to close due to non-compliance with EPA regulations. Some full-service gas stations were purchased by national chains and converted into self-service gas stations or replaced by fast food franchises on US 90.

4.2.3 Outlook

Dayton is a burgeoning community with a low quality of services. City leaders feel that Dayton is lagging behind in terms of economic status compared to neighboring communities such as Liberty, which is the county seat and has a relatively larger retail sector. In contrast, Dayton has not been able to attract any major retail chains to serve the local community. However, in the words of one resident, the town "is growing too fast not to have retail centers". Laura Wilson, an official at the Dayton Economic Development Corporation (EDC) believes that a good strategy to improve Dayton's economy would be to recruit businesses that do not already have a market in neighboring communities.

A lack of infrastructure seems to have limited the town's development in the past and it continues to do so today. The town is faced with a housing shortage and a lack of affordable land and building space to accommodate new businesses. Unregulated residential development without adequate infrastructure outside of the city limits is another problem facing the town. The City Manager opined that some of local residents who wanted to start their own businesses could not do so because of the prohibitive land costs. The land around US 90 is considered prime property, but “the land owners were saving it up for something in the future.”

Residents see traffic congestion as a significant issue, especially at peak hours. Traffic counts along US 90 through Dayton between the years 1970 and 1996 indicate a tremendous growth in vehicular movement in the area over time. While traffic increased by almost 75% on the stretch of US 90 between Dayton and Liberty, average daily traffic counts on the southwest bound US 90 grew from 4,200 in 1970 to 9,900 in the year 1996. The large amount of truck traffic northbound from Houston towards the Sam's Distribution Center and the prison causes inconveniences for the local commuters and business owners. The increasing activity around the railroad is another reason for growing congestion; the railroad traffic causes the road traffic to be backed up for up to a mile on US 90. Lack of regular public transit was cited as another transportation problem in the town.

However, city leaders see US 90 as an important component of Dayton's local economy because it passes through the heart of the town. The transportation networks

around Dayton, including the Union Pacific railroad, are seen as important assets to the town and its future development. The recent construction of a Foreign Trade Zone near the railroad is being viewed as one of Dayton's most significant economic developments. There seems to have been a TxDOT proposal at one time for a feasibility study for a relief route around Dayton. While one official felt that a relief route would curb any new development, another felt that reducing congestion on US 90 where it passed through town would probably improve the area, opening it up for economic development and revitalization. One resident suggested that simply re-striping the highway would go a long way toward solving the city's congestion problems.

4.3 GIDDINGS

4.3.1 Background

Giddings is at the crossroads of US 290 and US 77, approximately 60 miles east of Austin, and is the county seat of Lee County (Figure 4-5). It was founded in 1871, when the Houston and Texas Central Railway came through the area. The town was laid out with wide streets; both main thoroughfares were 100 feet wide and other streets were 80 feet wide. This legacy continues to influence Giddings' transportation network today. Giddings became the county seat in 1874 when Lee County was established. An agricultural economy developed with cotton as the preeminent crop. In the early 1980s, the area experienced an oil boom due to drilling in the Austin Chalk formation. This boom abated in the late 1980s, and the economy has not recovered to early 1980s levels. Giddings economy has, in many ways, been a crossroads economy – deriving benefits from being a stopping point between Houston and Austin.

4.3.2 Changes

Giddings has been impacted by many of the changes that have impacted other small towns in America over the last 20 to 30 years. During the 1970s, Giddings' downtown included a furniture store, two insurance companies, a sports shop, a lumberyard, a bakery, a sweet shop/confectionary, and a meat market, as well as other retail stores. Today, downtown has lost much of its retail presence in the community and is no longer the retail/commercial hub of the city. Instead, the center of retail activity has

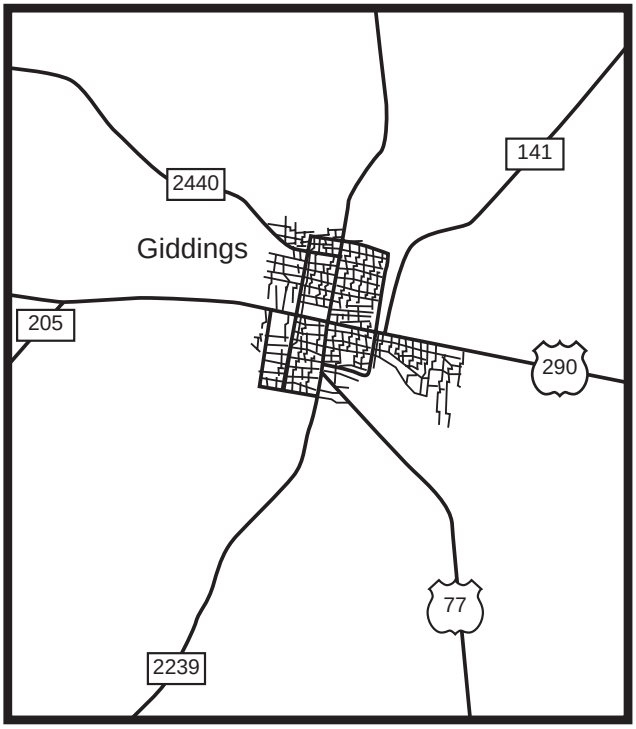

Figure 4-5. Map of Giddings Highways

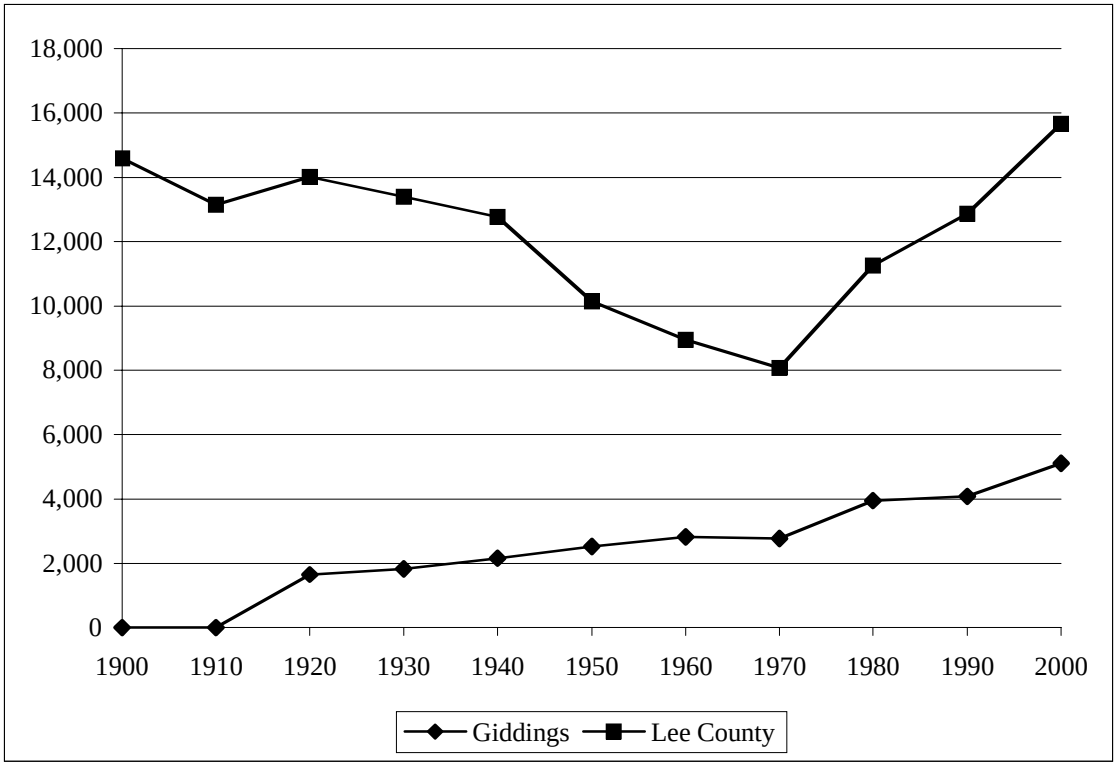

Figure 4-6. Population of Giddings and Lee County, 1900-2000

migrated eastward on Highway 290 where Wal-Mart opened in 1983. Giddings Plaza, a small strip center where Wal-Mart is located, includes Rhodes, a Western Wear store, and Dollar General. Additionally, Giddings faces strong retail competition from surrounding communities that have larger stores, including Brenham, Bastrop, and Austin.

Dramatic changes have also occurred in the gasoline service station industry. Full-service gas stations have been closing; currently there are two left in town. Taking their place is the multi-pump convenience store. According to local residents, some stations may have closed as a result of owners retiring, but they were still having trouble competing in the changing environment. Convenience stores play a prominent role in Giddings' economy. As one resident said, "we are everyone's bathroom stop between Austin and Houston." The opening of Buccee's, an Exxon convenience store, highlights this trend: it has twelve pumps and advertises "clean restroom."

Restaurants and eating establishments have also followed recent industry trends. Giddings has experienced a decline in family-style sit-down restaurants and seen an increase in the number of fast-food restaurants. Dairy Queen, Sonic, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, McDonalds, and Subway are already in town; a Whataburger, a Bumpers, and a Burger King are slated to open. Several of the family-style restaurants closed because the owners retired and there was no one to take over the business. Ongoing highway construction on 290 also claimed at least one restaurant. Lee County BBQ closed, at least in part, due to the difficulty in getting customers into the restaurant during construction. The owner said that 60% of her business came from through traffic on US 290, and the restaurant was only open from 11am to 3pm Monday through Saturday.

The hotel/motel industry in Giddings has been relatively stable over the last thirty years, with five motels, although some have been converted from independent to franchise status. The industry gets a boost from the antique show in Round Top, twenty miles away, and from various rodeo events sponsored by the county. One motel owner stated that the motel's clientele comes from a variety of sources: construction and oilfield workers, snowbirds, rodeos, family reunions, and weddings, as well as drive-by traffic.

Traffic continues to play an important supporting role for Giddings' tax base, and traffic has consistently increased on US 290 and US 77 over the last 30 years. In 1970, traffic on Highway 290 east of the city was 3,410 vehicles per day, and west of the city it

was 3,110. By 1980, these figures had grown to 11,000 vehicles east of Giddings and 5,900 vehicles west of town. In 1996, the counts measured 19,400 east of town and 14,400 west of town. Likewise, Highway 77 grew from traffic counts of 1,750 vehicles south of town and 2,330 vehicles north of town in 1970 to 6,000 vehicles and 7,300 vehicles in 1996.

This large volume of traffic, as well as Giddings' proximity to a major metropolitan area, have helped buffer the community from the dramatic declines seen in more rural communities. However, these factors have not prevented a significant decline in full-service gas stations, downtown businesses, and sit-down restaurants. The growing traffic counts have bolstered an impressive array of fast food establishment for a community of Giddings' size but the increase in traffic has not increased the number of hotels and motels in the community. Giddings remains the restroom/restaurant stop between Houston and Austin.

4.3.3 Outlook

Giddings recently renovated the county airport, working to turn it into an economic development asset. As a result of the upgrade in facilities, a commercial security company moved to Giddings and operates out of the airport facility. The director of the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) also noted that several local companies are currently undergoing expansion, and the EDC is working with these firms to support their efforts. The companies are primarily niche manufacturers: a salon furniture manufacturer, a ceramic doll factory, and a Teflon-coated gasket manufacturer.

The sales tax base is also healthy for a community of Giddings' size and reflects the importance of the community's position as a central stopping point between Austin, Houston, Bryan/College Station, and San Antonio. To capitalize on this position, the community is trying to invest in high-speed broadband access to support businesses that want to take advantage of the community's location. The city does not participate in the Main Street Program but is currently working on downtown revitalization. Plans include rebuilding the sidewalks with cobblestone-type sidewalks in the downtown area.

Highway 290 is currently being rebuilt; the originally 100 foot width of the street means that TxDOT had room for roadway improvements without needing additionally

right-of-way. While construction hinders traffic flow, particularly on Friday and Sunday evenings when traffic between Houston and Austin is at a peak, no residents interviewed seemed displeased with the construction, considering it a necessary evil.

City leaders feel that Giddings will grow due to its proximity to the Austin metropolitan area. Growth may be tempered somewhat, however, because some segments of the community do not want any growth or change, according to some residents. As an example of this reluctance, one resident mentioned a failed effort to bring a water park to Giddings. Some residents thought that the park would provide economic benefits, drawing people to the community as well as supplying summer jobs for young people in the community. The proposal was voted down by a 3-to-1 margin. This opposition and reluctance is attributed to older people that have been in the community for a long time. Limited economic and recreational opportunities in the community may also slow population growth. According to one resident, there is no incentive for young people to move back to Giddings, although others felt that Giddings was attracting younger families looking for "a safe place to raise their kids."

4.4 HASKELL

4.4.1 Background

Located at the junction of US 277 and US 380, Haskell is the county seat of Haskell County (Figure 4-7). Farming and ranching was the basis for the town's settlement, and it incorporated in 1907. In the early 1900s, a railroad line was acquired and brought to town. Oil was discovered in the early 1940s, but a long economic downturn began during a prolonged drought in the 1950s. The town's population peaked in 1970 as agricultural changes led to population declines, and Haskell suffered through another in 2000 (Figure 4-8). An alternate route for US 277 is currently being planned several blocks east of the current route. City leaders hope US 277 will become part of the extension of IH 44, which currently ends in Wichita Falls.

4.4.2 Changes

A few decades ago, downtown Haskell was home to retail stores where people were able to purchase clothing, groceries and other everyday needs. "Twenty years ago,

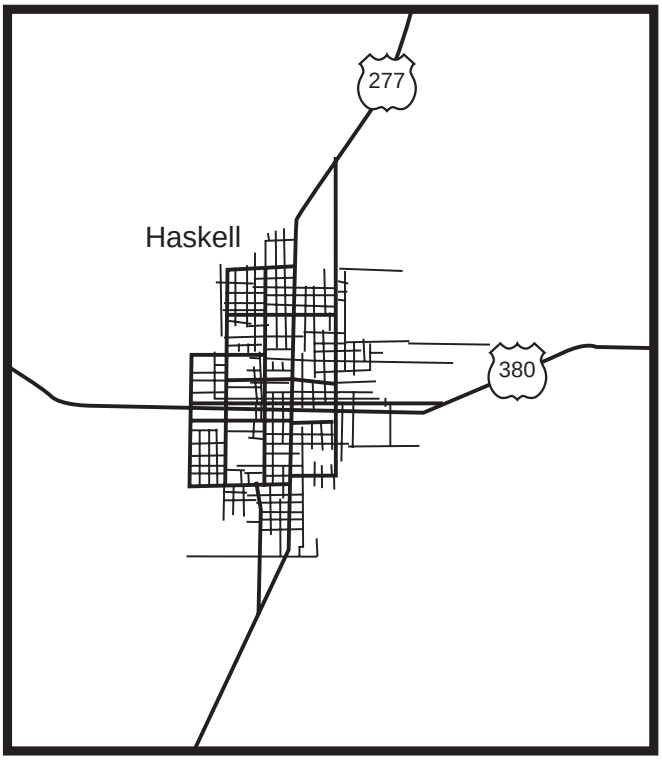

Figure 4-7. Map of Haskell Highways

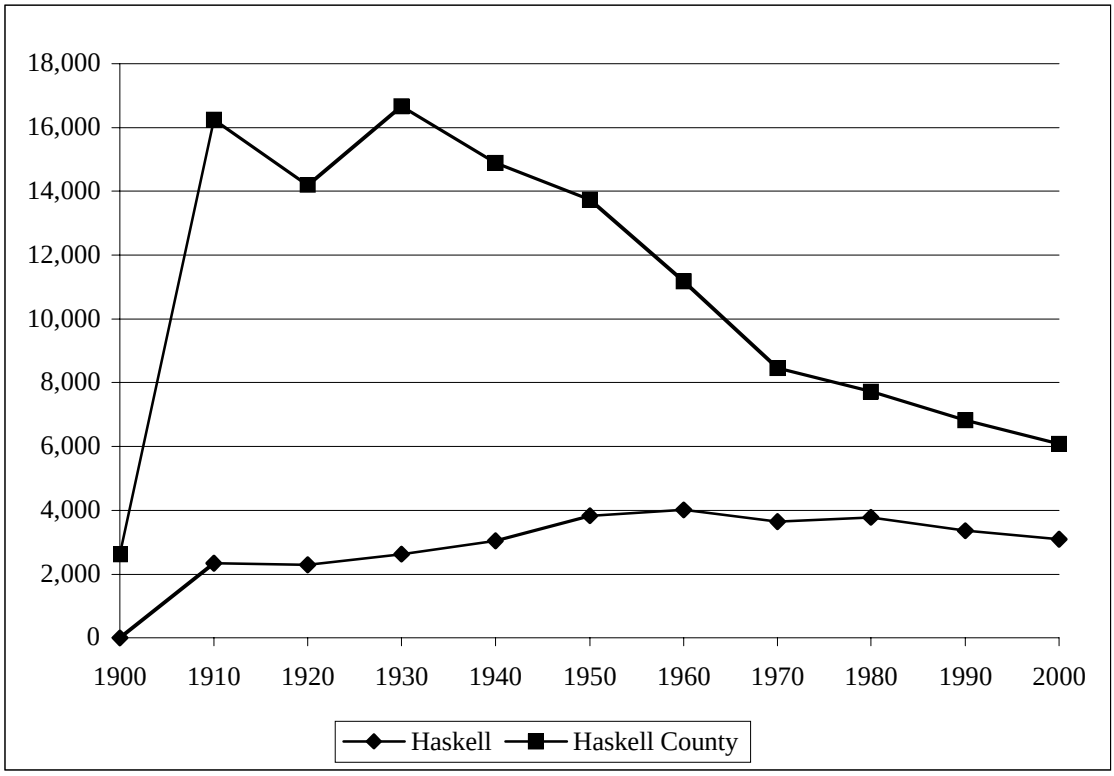

Figure 4-8. Population of Haskell and Haskell County, 1900-2000

the square was full of shops. Now, it is more than half empty, and now much what is there is not full retail," according to one resident. Others recalled that the retail sector was prosperous with two furniture stores, three grocery stores, apparel stores, pharmacies full service auto stores and other retail. Most of these traditional businesses have closed, for a variety of reasons.

Most notably, Wal-Mart opened in Stamford in the early 1980s. A local realtor said that Haskell was already in decline when Wal-Mart opened, but that it contributed to the decline in the local retail sector. A city leader said that Wal-Mart beat local businesses with lower prices and attributed their decline to the "discriminatory sale" of goods by wholesale dealers, which allows volume buyers cheaper prices. As a result, other retailers could get goods cheaper from Wal-Mart than from wholesale dealers. Sam Bittner, owner of the IGA Supermarket, said, "Wal-Mart is killing small town U.S.A." All residents interviewed agreed that Wal-Mart affected the health of the retail sector in Haskell. Declines in agriculture and oil in the region also had some impact on retail businesses in Haskell, and recently Haskell has been affected by department store bankruptcies that have become common across the U.S. Six years ago, Anthony's, a department store, opened on the square. It went into bankruptcy, and was bought by Bealls. In 1999, Bealls went into bankruptcy reorganization, closing their store. Now, the only stores to carry white goods are Bill's Dollar Store and Dollar General. Neither carries a complete line of white goods. Businesses in Haskell must also compete with a large shopping mall, Super Wal-Mart, Target, Home Depot, and other large stores in Abilene, 55 miles away. Local residents sometimes "make a day" of a trip to Abiline: they shop, see a movie, buy groceries at a large chain store, and eat while there. .

Haskell has also seen significant changes in the gas station and hotel/motel industries. Nearly 20 gas stations have closed in the past 20 years, replaced by four multi-pump convenience stores. Business leaders stated the stations closed for a variety of reasons, including the decline in population, changes in the industry, the retirement of long-time business owners, and new environmental regulations regarding underground storage tanks. The closed stations were sometimes abandoned, leaving the city with the problem of cleaning up the underground tanks. The hotel/motel industry has also seen a decline since the late 1960s, with at least one hotel and one motel closing. Much of their

business came from oilfield workers. Currently, Haskell has one small motel and two bed-and-breakfasts, one of which opened in the last couple of years.

The restaurant industry in recent times appears to have been fairly stable, with six to eight eating establishments in the community. Almost all are locally owned; a Dairy Queen and Sonic are the only chains currently in Haskell. A Subway is scheduled to open in June 2001 and will share space with a convenience store. Four restaurants are sit-down type establishments. The Modern Way IGA Supermarket also includes a deli/pizzeria that serves fried chicken, pizza, sandwiches, etc.

New businesses/industry during the last 20 to 30 years include a trailer manufacturing business that closed within a year of opening due to lack of skilled labor. Other new businesses include the two bed-and-breakfasts, Dollar General, Tru-Value Hardware, Modern Way IGA Supermarket, a specialty furniture/decorator items store, Anthony's/Bealls (now closed), and a pharmacy. The hospital is the largest employer, followed by the supermarket, which draws shoppers from north and west of Haskell. Hunting is an important industry, but tourism is relatively undeveloped. One city leader cited the lack of a really nice restaurant and the fact that county is dry as impediments to the development of a tourism industry.

Haskell's economy has been impacted by a number of factors that have affected other rural areas. Changes in agriculture and the decline of the oil and gas industry are cited as primary causes for decline in the economy. Other factors includeconsolidations and changes in retailing nationwide and the growth of the large discount retailers. In addition, the decline in population led to a decline in the overall retail health of the community. Another theme mentioned was the lack of opportunity for young people, causing them to leave Haskell in search of greater economic opportunities. One factor not mentioned, but clearly impacting rural communities, is the ease of travel in the region. Residents of Haskell did not think it was much of an impediment to drive fifty-five miles to Abilene to shop.

4.4.3 Outlook

The most important economic development activity that Haskell is involved in is a joint city/county partnership to build a 500-bed private prison and 12-county regional

jail. Construction is currently underway, and the prison is projected to open in 2002. The city has a three-year contract with a private company that has contracts with the federal government for prisoners. The community expects prisoners will probably be from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), due to their proximity to the border. If the project goes according to plan, the city and county will be able to obtain bonds to build another 500-segment unit after the first phase has started operations, doubling the prison's capacity. The prison is expected to eventually generate 25% of the city's payroll. It is not seen as a panacea for all of the economic ills besetting the community, but an important first step in developing an economy base independent of the weather or extractive in nature.

Haskell and TxDOT are currently working on an alternate route for US 277. Originally, the plans called for a bypass west of town. However, the community worked with TxDOT and proposed an alternate route for US 277. The new route is proposed to run several blocks east of downtown, along the right-of-way for the old railroad. If adopted as the route, three families, one church, and two businesses will be relocated. Overall, support for the route (or any alternative route) appears positive in the community. The rerouting of the highway has some opposition, however, among local businesses owners. Sam Bittner, as a business owner, thinks the alternative route will be devastating for local businesses (his business would be affected, particularly the gasoline business), and feels that the bypass did Stamford great harm. According to Mr. Bittner, "it doesn't hurt them (traffic) to slow down two miles while they pass through town."

Ken Lane feels the completion of the US 277 corridor is more important economically to Haskell than the alternative route. Monty Montgomery also feels that the completion of US 277 into a four-lane divided road between Wichita Falls and Abilene and the designation of US 277 as IH 44 are more important than the relief route. When the last 85 miles of the corridor are completed, trucks can travel from El Paso to Oklahoma City on the four-lane road without having to pass through the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. The city anticipates a fourfold increase in traffic after the corridor is completed.

CHAPTER 5. ANALYSIS

The case study methodology does not provide statistically significant results, but it does enable an in-depth and exploratory look at what happens to a community after the construction of a relief route and why. Each of the stories presented in Chapter 3 is unique in important ways, yet together they paint a relatively consistent picture of the changes that occur in small- and medium-size communities where relief routes are built and of some of the key factors that determine those changes. The stories presented in Chapter 4 of communities where relief routes have not been built suggest that the ten case study communities would have changed significantly even if the relief route had not been built, but the evidence also suggests that the relief routes contribute to and reshape these changes. This chapter describes the common themes that emerge from the case studies as well as the important exceptions. The changes and key factors explaining those changes in each case study are summarized in Table 5-1.

5.1 IMPACTS

Although residents, business owners, and civic leaders identify both positive and negative impacts of the relief route on their communities, most of them now recognize that the relief route was both necessary and ultimately beneficial for the community. Across the case studies, the relief route reduced traffic through town by as much as 75 percent (Table 5-2).[1] This reduction in traffic improved access to local businesses, increased safety within the community, and generally enhanced the quality of life for residents. However, this reduction in traffic also may have had significant negative impacts on businesses. These impacts are concentrated in downtown areas, along the relief route, and in highway-related businesses in general.

One of the challenges in trying to determine the extent of impacts from the relief route within the case study communities is that no one within the community answers this

[1] The reported traffic counts are for locations along the old route and the relief route that serve primarily through traffic. These locations are near the junction of the old route and the relief route on the side of town away from large or nearby communities. These counts are intended to illustrate the relative impact of the relief route but are not exact counts of through traffic.

Table 5-1. Summary of Changes and Key Factors

CHANGES				KEY FACTORS*									
Case Study	Changes in Downtown Businesses	Development on Relief Route	Net Change in Highway-Related Businesses	Near Metro Area	Near Other Towns	Stopping Point	Traffic Levels	Alignment	Visibility	Annexation/Utilities	Local Programs	Land Owners	Unique Factor
Bastrop	change	lots	increase	+			+						uncontrolled access
Bowie	change	slow	decline	+	-			-		-	+	-	
Cleveland	decline	slow	decline	+	-			-					
Edinburg	change	slow	no change		-	-		-			+		
Fort Stockton	decline	slow	increase			+	-						
Gatesville	change	slow	no change							-		-	prisons
La Grange	increase	slow	increase				+			-	+		Main St Program
Livingston	change	lots	increase	+		+	+	-		+			lake
Smithville	change	slow	decline	+	-			-	-			-	
Stamford	decline	slow	decline	-	-		-		-				dry county
Anson	decline	n/a	decline	-	-								
Dayton	decline	n/a	decline	-	-								
Giddings	decline	n/a	increase	+			+						
Haskell	decline	n/a	decline	-	-		-						

* - negative impact on community, + positive impact on community

question with complete objectivity. Officials from the chamber of commerce and the local government have a vested interest in portraying the relief route in a positive light. Business owners impacted by the relief route transfer their feelings and experiences with the relief route to the community at large and assume that residents of the community share their views. Residents may speak candidly about their own views and experiences, but they may not have knowledge of some of the impacts of the relief route and other trends within the business community. By considering all of these perspectives together with observations of the community and comparing the relief-route communities to the non-relief-route communities, it is possible to develop a reasonably objective assessment of the changes within the case study communities.

5.1.1 Downtown Impacts

The decline of downtown is one of the primary fears in communities facing the construction of a relief route and a decline in traffic through town. However, the impacts on downtown were not so straightforward. In six out of the ten case studies, the downtown area has changed dramatically over the past couple of decades, from a center of retail and services for the community to a center of specialized activity. Gone from downtown are the grocery store, pharmacy, and clothing store. In their place have opened either court-related businesses or tourist-dependent businesses. Bastrop, Edinburg, Gatesville, and Livingston are all county seats and thus home to the county courthouse that in all of these cases a historic building at the center of the downtown square. Court-related businesses include law offices, title companies, and bail bond businesses. In Edinburg, Gatesville, and Livingston, these businesses now dominate the downtown area. While they have filled otherwise vacant buildings, they are of limited use to local residents. Businesses targeting tourists rather than local residents, antique stores in particular, have moved into the downtown areas of Bastrop, Bowie, and Smithville. These communities have capitalized on their historic character and proximity to metropolitan areas to build a new industry in downtown. Yet many residents and civic leaders see these businesses as a sign of the decline of downtown. In contrast, in Cleveland, Fort Stockton, and Stamford, the downtown has largely declined as traditional businesses have closed or moved out and have left mostly empty buildings behind. For

Table 5-2. Traffic Volumes on Original Route and Relief Route

	Original Route					Relief Route		
Case Study	Before	After	Change from Before	1996	Change from Before	Opening	1996	Change from Opening
Bastrop	2,050	700	-66%	3,400	66%	3,070	14,300	366%
Bowie	6,370	2,380	-63%	2,600	-59%	6,090	13,200	117%
Cleveland	19,200	4,700	-76%	4,800	-75%	16,400	22,000	34%
Edinburg	7,420	7,640	3%	6,300	-15%	1,660	3,600	117%
Fort Stockton	4,000	1,700	-58%	3,000	-25%	3,100	4,500	45%
Gatesville	5,100	3,000	-41%	3,700	-27%	2,300	4,700	104%
La Grange	3,700	3,400	-8%	3,900	5%	2,400	8,000	233%
Livingston	14,420	4,700	-67%	3,500	-76%	8,300	16,500	99%
Smithville	7,000	2,100	-70%	1,300	-81%	7,200	7,700	7%
Stamford	2,900	2,600	-10%	3,200	10%	2,800	6,100	118%
	1970			1996	Change			
Anson	5,600			10,600	89%			
Dayton	9,090			21,000	131%			
Giddings	3,410			19,400	469%			
Haskell	2,310			4,700	103%			

Source: TxDOT District Traffic Maps

one reason or another, these communities have not capitalized on civic activities or the tourist trade to maintain activity downtown. La Grange is the interesting exception among the ten case studies. Only here has the downtown retained much of its original function as a commercial center for the community. Despite a Wal-Mart and an H-E-B supermarket down the road, many small businesses serving local residents remain downtown. The town's Main Street Program surely deserves some credit, but otherwise this success is hard to explain.

In all the case studies, it seems likely that these changes would have occurred even without the construction of the relief route, although the relief route may have magnified them. The downtown areas of all four non-relief-route case studies experienced similar changes, losing traditional businesses to competition from Wal-Mart and other discount stores. In none of these communities have courthouse- or tourism-related businesses made up for the loss of traditional businesses.

5.1.2 Development Along Relief Route

If the greatest fear is the decline of downtown, then the greatest hope of communities facing the construction of a relief route is that it will open up a new corridor of development and attract new businesses to the community. In all ten case studies, some development has occurred along the relief route. In eight of the ten case studies, however, the amount of development is considered limited, at least relative to the hopes and expectations of the community. Most new development is concentrated at the interchanges of the relief route rather than along the frontage roads, even where two-way frontage roads and the necessary utilities have been provided. In several cases, development is concentrated on the old route near the interchange of the old route with the relief route. In most cases, the development mainly consists of businesses new to the community rather than existing businesses that have relocated to the relief route. Two factors seem to explain the limited number of relocations in these communities. First, most businesses in these communities prior to the opening of the relief route were locally owned and lacked sufficient resources to finance a relocation. Second, the owners of many of these businesses were approaching retirement age and lacked sufficient interest in relocating, often preferring to simply close down and retire in the face of a decline in

business. Many of the new businesses locating along the relief route were national or regional chains or locally owned franchises of national chains. Although residents did not express concern about this trend, it may have important implications for the community. These businesses are often less inclined to purchase their supplies locally and more likely to spend their profits elsewhere. One could also argue that communities begin to lose their unique local character as chains move in. In each of these eight communities, some development has occurred along the relief route.

Two of the case studies, Bastrop and Livingston, have seen a significant amount of development along the relief route, at least in comparison to the other case studies. The relief route in Bastrop is the oldest of those studied and is the only uncontrolled access facility. These characteristics help to explain why so much development has occurred along this route. In addition, the proximity of Bastrop to Austin has contributed to an explosion in the local population and the services needed to support the new residents. The development along the Bastrop facility has become so intense that the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is in the process of planning an upgrade of the relief route to a controlled-access facility. In Livingston, the heavy stream of travelers from Houston to Lake Livingston who use the relief route helps to explain the extent of development there. Until recently, most of the development was along the southern portion of the relief route, that is, the stretch of the relief route used by lake-bound travelers. More recently, businesses catering to local residents have opened along the northern portions of the relief route.

5.1.3 Net Change in Highway-Related Businesses

The owners of highway-related businesses, including service stations, motels, and restaurants, express the greatest concerns prior to the construction of a relief route and understandably so. They depend on pass-by traffic for much of their business and may fall into the red with even a small decline in traffic. The available evidence in the case studies suggests that at least four of the case studies experienced a net decline in highway-related businesses after the construction of a relief route. In places like Bowie, Cleveland, Smithville, and Stamford, empty gas stations and motels line the old route and have not been entirely replaced by new businesses on the relief route. The dramatic

decline in traffic on the old route in these communities, even after a period of time, provides an obvious explanation for the decline in these businesses (see Table 5-2). However, highway-oriented businesses have also been impacted by dramatic changes within these industries that also help to explain this net decline. In addition, the change in sales might not match the change in numbers of establishments, if the new businesses are doing bigger volumes than the old ones. Edinburg and Gatesville have seen little change in highway-related businesses, mostly because these businesses were not a significant part of the economy before the relief route. Even with the relief route, traffic volumes remain low. Bastrop, Fort Stockton, and La Grange seem to have experienced a net increase in highway-related businesses for different reasons: Bastrop because of the uncontrolled-access facility, the age of the facility, and population growth in the area; Fort Stockton because of its geographic location that makes it a natural stopping point; and La Grange because of its success in maintaining existing businesses while still attracting some new development along the relief route.

The role of the relief route in these changes seems limited. The econometric models developed in an earlier phase of this study and presented in Report 0-1843-2 showed that a relief route results in slightly lower sales per capita in highway-related businesses, all else equal. Three out of the four non-relief-route communities also experienced a net decline in highway-related businesses, particularly with the closure of full-service gas stations. In the non-relief-route communities, new businesses such as multi-pump convenience stations and fast-food franchises have moved in, partly off-setting the decline in traditional highway-related businesses, just as they have in the relief-route communities. In Giddings, the new businesses seem to have more than made up for the loss of traditional businesses, thanks to the rapid growth in traffic along US 290. The major impact of the relief route seems to be on the location of new businesses.

5.2 KEY FACTORS

The case studies also help to shed light on the key factors that have shaped the changes within the community and influenced the nature and extent of the impacts of the relief route on the community. Although residents, business owners, and civic leaders all point to the relief route as causing changes, mostly negative but some positive, in the

community, they also identify other important factors unrelated to the relief route that may be to blame. Most interviewees view the relief route as an exacerbating factor rather than a primary cause of the current state of the community. Two categories of factors emerged from the case studies: structural factors relating to trends in the national economy and demographic patterns, and local factors relating to the geography of the community, the characteristics of the facility, and the policies of the local government.

5.2.1 Structural Factors

None of these communities is insulated from larger trends in the national economy and in demographic patterns. Three trends seem to have had a notable effect on the case study communities: the decline of rural populations and growth of metropolitan areas, increases in the scale of stores and shopping centers in the retail industry, and consolidation in distribution channels for gasoline. These trends may explain some of the impacts commonly attributed to the relief route.

For most of the twentieth century, rural populations declined as a proportion of the total U.S. population. At the same time, metropolitan areas were growing, largely at the fringes. Innovations in farming technologies have led to larger farms that employ fewer people. As farm populations have declined, so have the economies of the small- and medium-size towns that supplied their needs. This trend has affected towns like Fort Stockton, Smithville, and Stamford, as well as its neighbors Anson and Haskell. On the other hand, small- and medium-size communities within commuting distance of the expanding fringe of metropolitan areas have seen growth in their populations and in the portion of the local economy that serves the local population. Bastrop, Bowie, and Cleveland have been affected by this trend, as have the non-relief-route communities of Giddings and Dayton. In general, ups and downs and changes in the economic base of the community, whether farming, ranching, oil, tourism, or commuting, will impact the local retail and services sectors.

In recent decades, the structure of the retail industry has changed across the U.S. as the scale of stores and shopping centers has increased. Through economies of scale, national chains of larger stores can offer customers a wider range of products at lower prices. These stores often drive smaller, locally owned stores out of business. This has

been called the "Wal-Mart effect," although Wal-Mart is not the only retailer that has had this effect. All of the relief-route case study communities except Smithville have a Wal-Mart that opened around the same time as the relief route, sometimes before and sometimes after. Interviewees in these communities often stated that Wal-Mart has had more of an impact on the local economy than the relief route. In Gatesville, the Wal-Mart has become the center of commercial activity in the community, drawing existing businesses away from downtown and new businesses away from the relief route. In other communities, business owners also discussed the importance of locating near Wal-Mart to capture some of its customers. In addition, the willingness of consumers to travel beyond the community to shop at regional centers in larger cities can been seen in Cleveland and Stamford, as well as the non-relief route communities of Anson, Dayton, and Haskell.

Consolidation in the oil industry, particularly in distribution channels, helps to explain the dramatic decline in the number of service stations in these communities. As large oil companies acquired small companies, they closed redundant service stations. Economies of scale have also contributed to a decline in the number of service stations and an increase in the size of the average station. As one report notes, “In the past three decades, the number of petroleum retail sites has dropped from 225,000 to 175,000, yet volume per site is way up, and so is the consumption of gasoline. Smaller operators aren’t able to match the volume of the large sites, and the spiking and plunging gasoline margins make it a challenge every day” (Vavra 2000). In addition, most new service stations are combined with a convenience store and sometimes with fast-food outlets as well. Older stations that don't offer this combination of services have a tough time competing. Peter Sodini, CEO of The Pantry, a large convenience store chain, has been quoted as saying, “If I had fifty stores today, I’d be selling” (Vavra 2000). The decline in traditional full-service gas stations and their replacement by multi-pump convenience stations was observed in all case study communities, both those with and those without relief routes.

5.2.2 Local Factors

A variety of local factors shape the impact of the highway relief route on the local community: geographic factors, facility characteristics, and local policies. The relative importance of these factors varies across communities, but it appears that geographic factors have the most significant impact, followed by facility characteristics, then followed by local policies. Unfortunately, there isn't much that a community can do about its geographic factors. A community can, however, influence facility characteristics by working with TxDOT on decisions about alignment and access, and it can adopt policies that will help to mitigate possible negative impacts of the relief route.

Geographic Factors

Several interrelated factors having to do with the size of the community and its location relative to other communities are important determinants of the impact the relief route will have on the community. The econometric models summarized in Report 0-1843-2 suggested that smaller communities experience a greater decline in sales than larger communities, all else equal. The models also suggested that proximity to a large city has a positive impact on retail sales and that the larger that city is, the greater this effect will be. The case studies support these conclusions but also add some interesting twists.

Proximity to a metropolitan area was found to have a positive impact on the local economy in Bastrop, Bowie, Cleveland, Livingston, and Smithville, as well as the non-relief-route community of Giddings. This proximity has contributed to growth in the local population, as noted above, and has contributed to a general increase in traffic through the community, as described below. Both of these effects may contribute to development along the relief route. The metropolitan areas have also been a source of tourists for those communities that have been able to build a tourism industry, including Bastrop and Bowie, thus reinforcing the changes in the nature of downtown businesses. On the other hand, local residents may take advantage of shopping opportunities in the metropolitan area at the expense of local businesses. This effect was noted in Cleveland. to some extent in Bastrop and Smithville, and in the non-relief route community of Dayton; Stamford as well as Anson and Haskell are affected by competition with

Abilene. The smaller communities seem to be especially vulnerable to this latter effect, as they offer a limited range of goods and services to local residents. However, the net effect of proximity to a metropolitan region seems to be positive.

Proximity to surrounding communities and their size also seems to be a factor. These communities may provide competition for the business of both local residents and through traffic. Stamford, close to three other cities of similar size, offers a good example of this effect. Highway-related businesses have been slow to develop along the relief route because of an abundance of these businesses in the neighboring communities. At the same time, business owners in Anson and Haskell, non-relief-route communities, complain about having to compete with businesses in Stamford, particularly the Wal-Mart. In Smithville, local establishments compete with the growing commercial center in Bastrop, just up the highway, for the business of Smithville residents. Businesses in Cleveland and Datyon, a non-relief-route community, compete with the regional center in Humble. In Gatesville, residents travel to Waco and Temple to shop. The relief route in Edinburg seems to have increased the tendency for residents to shop in the neighboring towns of McAllen and Pharr. The opposite effect can be seen in the case of Fort Stockton, which is the largest community for hundreds of miles in West Texas. The isolation of Fort Stockton ensures that its establishments capture most of the business of local residents as well as through traffic.

This isolation also helps to make Fort Stockton a natural stopping point, thus contributing to the growth in highway-related businesses there. But isolation isn't the only characteristic that makes a city a natural stopping point. Livingston, for example, is the turn-off point from the main highway from Houston to Lake Livingston, a popular weekend destination. As such, it is a natural place for lake-bound travelers to stop for provisions on their way to the lake. Edinburg, on the other hand, is not the natural stopping point one might expect it to be, given its proximity to the border. Traffic bound for Mexico often stops for the night on the U.S. side in order to make the border crossing in the morning. But Edinburg is farther from the border than McAllen and Pharr and so doesn't make sense as a stopping point for this traffic. The factor of proximity to these two other cities outweighs the factor of proximity to the border and means that Edinburg has never attracted much highway-related development.

Geography also plays a role in determining the relative volume of traffic passing through a community. Location on a major trade route or a route that links major population centers helps to guarantee a larger customer base for highway-related businesses. Bastrop and La Grange have benefited from the high volumes of traffic on SH 71 between Austin and Houston, as has Giddings, a non-relief-route community, on US 290 (see Table 4-2). Livingston has benefited from the volume of traffic heading to Lake Livingston from Houston; Cleveland also has a high volume of traffic heading to and from Houston. Fort Stockton has benefited less than one might expect given its location on an interstate route because the volumes on IH 10 in West Texas are relatively low. Similarly, US 277 does not carry enough traffic through Stamford to justify the construction of service stations, convenience stores, or restaurants. Edinburg also suffers from a low volume of traffic through town.

Facility Characteristics

The characteristics of the facility itself may determine its impacts on the community. The most critical decision TxDOT makes is the alignment of the new facility. The most common complaint from residents and civic leaders in the case study communities was the choice of alignment. There are two primary ways in which alignment impacts the community: the location of intersections with other highways and the type of land adjacent to the relief route. Livingston provides an example of both. US 59 travels west of downtown Livingston and intersects with US 190, 1 mile due west of downtown. Given the current alignment, travelers from Houston to Lake Livingston bypass downtown Livingston. Some local business leaders argued that an eastern alignment would have forced lake-bound traffic through downtown, thus helping to maintain the viability of existing businesses but doing nothing to alleviate local congestion. In Bowie, Cleveland, and Livingston, the alignment passes through land that is less than optimal for development. In Smithville, the alignment is mostly too far from the town to make stops there likely for through travelers. In Edinburg, the relief route was located on the opposite side of the city from the direction of greatest growth. In many cases, the relief route passes through areas where landowners are not interested in developing or selling, a problem discussed below. Of course, in the communities where

the alignment was raised as an issue, it's not always clear what other alignment would have been better or even feasible.

Access is another critical issue in determining a relief route's potential impact. Access can be broken into three components: frontage roads, the number and location of interchanges, and the visibility of interchanges. When discussing access to the facility, interviewees frequently complained about one-way access roads, which they felt would inhibit development because customers would not put up with the hassles of dealing with such roads. However, in most of the case studies, TxDOT in fact provided two-way frontage roads but these communities still saw little development away from interchanges. The number of interchanges and their location are also critical. Many highway-related businesses rely on the local market as well as through traffic. If the interchange is too far from the center of town, businesses at the interchange might not be able to draw enough local business to survive. At the same time, existing businesses in town may fail due to the loss of through traffic. With only two interchanges relatively far from the center of town, Smithville suffers this fate. The more universal problem seems to be the visibility of the town from the relief route as determined by both the location and design of interchanges and by signage. Stamford has extremely poor visibility. We accidentally passed Stamford on our site visit and did not realize our mistake for several miles. Several interviewees felt Stamford had been shortchanged by TxDOT where visibility is concerned. This problem can affect both highway-related businesses and tourist businesses often found downtown.

One more facility-related factor merits mention here. In several cases, notably Cleveland and Edinburg, the length of time between the decision to build a relief route and the construction of the route was long enough to create a pervasive sense of uncertainty that may have inhibited development. In the case of Cleveland, the uncertainty was due to lengthy delays in construction. Citizens were not kept apprised of new developments in the highway project and many forgot it was being built or were not sure when the highway would be constructed. In the case of Edinburg, uncertainty in the alignment kept some property owners from developing their land. Uncertainty not only may stifle development, it may also deter the local community from taking steps to mitigate the impacts of the relief route.

Local Actions

The actions of local governments also help to determine the impacts of the relief route. Most obviously, the decision to annex the land adjacent to the relief route and provide utilities and other city services seems to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for new development. The decision not to provide utilities, or delays in providing utilities, can inhibit new development along the relief route, as was the case in Bowie, Gatesville, and La Grange. It was not clear in these cases, however, whether the delay in providing utilities was a conscious effort on the part of local government officials to discourage development. Once local governments have annexed the land along the relief route, they can also zone this land for development. In nine of the case studies, zoning was not cited as a factor in either encouraging or discouraging development, however. Edinburg, where much of the land along the relief route remained zoned for agricultural uses, was the one exception.

City programs to promote development can help to mitigate the impacts of the relief route and other trends impacting the community. Bowie, Gatesville, and La Grange are a part of the Texas Main Street Program that helps communities to preserve and enhance their historic downtown areas. The program in Bowie has helped to build a tourism economy that has at least partially offset the decline in highway-related businesses that occurred after the opening of the relief route. The program in La Grange has contributed to the continued presence of many traditional businesses in the downtown area that still cater to local residents. In contrast, city officials in Edinburg worked to encourage development along the relief route through public-private partnerships. This effort has had some limited success but has also created considerable controversy within the community.

In a number of communities, the owners of land along the relief route were apparently uninterested in developing their land. In places like Gatesville, the willingness of particular landowners to subdivide and sell their land explains much of the development along the relief route. This factor also proved significant in Bowie and Stamford. If this is the case, there isn't much that the city can do to encourage

development. The choice of alignment may determine whether this factor will surface, however.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

The case studies cannot be used to predict what will happen in communities where relief routes are proposed. The larger national trends affecting the communities described here may decline in importance while others grow. Unique characteristics may make a particular community an exception to the patterns identified here. The case studies convincingly show that most communities have been changing in significant ways whether or not a relief route has been built. However, the case studies do provide an indication of what factors might come into play and what kinds of impacts a small- or medium-size community might experience as a result of the construction of a relief route. Although the case studies suggest that geographic factors are strong predictors of how a community will change as a result of the relief route, they also provide some direction for both TxDOT and local communities as to what they can do to minimize the negative impacts of the relief route and maximize the positive impacts. Report 0-1843-4 describes some of the techniques used by communities in Texas and elsewhere in the U.S. to successfully plan for relief routes.

REFERENCES

Kurland, Wendy. "Indian Americans Check into Prosperity." *Nashville Banner*, 4 December 1996.

Vavra, Bob. "Getting Large." *National Petroleum News*, 92(13): 44, December 2000.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS

COMMUNITIES WITH RELIEF ROUTES:

Bastrop
Reed Sharp. Banker, 6/19/00
Art Sullivan. Director of Historical Society, 6/19//00
Dorothy Crawford. Citizen, 6/19/00
Joe Newman. President of Bastrop Economic Development Corporation, 6/20/00
David Lock. Drugstore Owner, 6/20/00
Kay Wesson. Realtor, 6/19/00
Edelin Vatthauer. Planner, 6/19/00
Laura McQuery. Chamber of Commerce, 6/19/00
Neal Gurwitz. Former City Councilman, 6/19/00
Nancy Sanders. Gift Shop Owner, 6/19/00

Bowie
Tracie Jennings. Chamber of Commerce, 7/27/00
Bill Yarbro. Director of Sales and Marketing of Bank, 7/27/00
Dick Allen. Service Station Owner, 7/27/00
Earl Yarbro. Owner of Manufacturing Firm, 7/28/00
Gordon Heard. Hardware Store Owner, 7/27/00
James Cantwell. City Manager, 7/27/00
Susan Swint. Realtor, 7/28/00
Susan Campbell. Texas Main Street Program, 7/28/00

Cleveland
Bill Petropolis. Former City Councilman, 6/27/00
Ed Seymour. TxDOT Area Engineer, 6/28/00
Kenneth Riggs. Banker, 6/28/00
Richard Boyett. Hotel Owner, 6/27/00
Glen Dodson. Local Journalist, 6/27/00
Garland Beshears. Assistant Public Works Director, 6/27/00

Edinburg
Harry Roberts. Car Dealer, 7/18/00
Mike Allen. Economic Development Specialist, 7/18/00
Joe Ochoa. Mayor, 7/19/00
Bill Reynolds. Hotel Owner, 7/19/00
Aida Hernandez. Executive Vice President of Chamber of Commerce, 7/18/00
Mario Jorge. TXDOT Area Engineer, 7/18/00
Al Herrara. Hardware Store Employee, 7/18/00
John Beverly. Hardware Store Owner, 7/18/00
Laurier McDonald. Lawyer, 7/18/00
John Milford. City Manager, 7/19/00

Fort Stockton
Jeri Sue Jackson. Chamber of Commerce, 7/13/00
Jesse Garcia. City Manager, 7/13/00
Jim King. Convenience Store Owner, 7/14/00
John Pacheco. Restaurant Owner, 7/14/00
Jerry McGuairt. TxDOT Area Engineer, 7/14/00
Pete Terrazas. Furniture Store Owner, 7/13/00
Roy Armstrong. Realtor, 7/13/00
Gordon Wisemen. Realtor, 7/13/00

Gatesville
Brandon Emmons. City Manager, 7/24/00
Kyle Pruitt. Service Station Owner, 7/24/00
John Hull. County Judge, 7/24/00
Barbara Simpson. County Clerk, 7/24/00
Dale White. Pharmacist, 7/24/00
Charles Herring. Store Manager, 7/24/00
G. Lucille Plane. Retired Prison Warden, 7/25/00

La Grange
Don Chovanec. Former Mayor and City Councilman, 6/26/00
Margo Johnson. Chamber of Commerce President, 6/26/00
Harvey Zatopek. Former Drugstore Owner, 6/26/00
Milton Schmidt. Jewelry Store Owner, 6/26/00
James Ivy. Engineer, 6/26/00
Dave Noak. Mayor, 6/27/00
Shawn Raborn. City Manager, 6/27/00
Jimmy Weikel. Restaurant Owner, 6/27/00

Livingston
Joe Buller. TxDOT Engineer, 6/29/00
Herber Bickley. TxDOT Area Engineer, 6/29/00
Don L. Williams. TxDOT Engineer, 6/29/00
Marilyn Sutton. City Secretary, 6/29/00
Joe Pedigo. Furniture Store Owner, 6/30/00
Charles LeBlanc. Former Service Station Owner, 6/29/00

Smithville
George Woodruss. Former Mayor, 6/21/00
Clinton Wright. Funeral Home Owner, 6/21/00
Renee Blashkee. Mayor, 6/21/00
Elaine Seidel. Chamber of Commerce, 6/22/00
Molly Todd. Realtor-Antique Shop Owner, 6/22/00
Billy Davis. Service Station Owner, 6/22/00
Owner of Charlie's BBQ, 6/21/00

Priest Tire and Auto. 6/21/00
Dana Bunte. Zimmerhanzels' BBQ, 6/21/00

Stamford
Dwayne Nauert. Owner of Oil and Lube Shop, 7/26/00
Jim Ashton. Economic Development Planner, 7/26/00
Sam Tankersly. Funeral Home Owner, 7/26/00
Gary Miles. TxDOT Engineer, 7/26/00
Maxie Allen. TxDOT Engineer, 7/26/00
Joe Higgins. TxDOT Area Engineer, 7/26/00
Carrie White. Banker, 7/25/00
Ken Roberson. City Manager, 7/25/00
Fareed Hassen. Clothing Store Owner, 7/25/00

COMMUNITIES WITHOUT RELIEF ROUTES:

Anson
Tom Isbell. Mayor of Anson City, 6/06/01
Wayne Lisenbee. City Manager, Anson City, 6/06/01
Mitch Heidenheimer. President, First National Bank, Anson, 6/06/01
Lynda Wills, Employee, Gold Workers and Resident of Leuders, 6/06/01
Jean Thompson , Real Estate Agent and Resident of Abilene, 6/06/01
Pankaj Patel, Owner, Anson Inn, 6/06/01

Dayton
John J.Hebert. Jobber, Chevron Products Company, Liberty, 6/13/01
Rick Sparks. Chamber of Commerce, Dayton, 6/13/01
Carolyn Chennault. Owner of B&B in Liberty and Volunteer at Chamber of Commerce, Dayton, 6/13/01
Cindy Osburn. Owner, Buck's Pizza, 6/13/01
Robert Ewart. City Manager, Dayton, 6/20/01 (Telephone Interview)
Sam Warrick. Owner, Dayton Auto Parts, 6/22/01 (Telephone Interview)
Laura L. Wilson. Executive Director, Dayton Community Development Corporation, 6/21/01 (Telephone Interview)

Giddings
Mary Lou Ross. Director of Economic Development, 6/12/01
Lucy Lu. Owner of the Ramada Express Inn, 6/12/01
Angie Brown. Assistant Vice-President of the First National Bank of Giddings and former owner/operator of Lee County BBQ, 6/12/01
Joseph Martin Dedera, Airport Manager, Lee County Airport, 6/12/01
Paul Kipp, Mayor of Giddings, 6/12/01

Haskell
H.H.Hartfield. Realtor, 6/5/01
Randy Hise. Bank President, 6/5/01
Ken Lane. Mayor, 6/5/01
Fred Hernandez. District Manager, WTU, 6/5/01
Ruby Turner. City Council Member and President, COG, 6/5/01
Sam Bittner. Owner/Operator, Modern Way IGA, 6/19/01 (telephone interview)

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Experience

1. What was your initial impression of the bypass proposal?
2. What were the possible negative impacts that you were concerned about when the bypass project was announced?
3. What were the possible positive impacts you anticipated when the bypass project was announced?

Many towns are concerned that the bypass will impact their downtown. The following questions are aimed at downtown businesses specifically.

4. What types of businesses in the downtown area or along the former route were adversely affected?
5. In what ways did the bypass adversely affect the downtown/main street area?
6. What sort of businesses in the downtown area or along the former route benefited from the bypass?
7. In what ways did the downtown/main street area benefit from the bypass ?
8. What other issues were present that may have affected the downtown?

The following questions deal primarily with the businesses located on the bypass.

9. What businesses moved from downtown old route areas to the areas near the bypass?
10. What new businesses were created in the areas near the bypass?
11. Are the new businesses on the bypass primarily locally owned or national chains?
12. Were new firms attracted to the area because of improved transportation in the broader area?
13. Are the new firms located in the areas near the bypass as likely to purchase goods or services from local firms as forms located elsewhere in the city?
14. If national chains appeared after the construction of the highway project, do you think the same business would have located in your community without the bypass?

Overall Assessment

15. Given the benefit of hindsight, did any of your concerns come to pass? If so, do you feel it was the result of the highway project or other factors?
16. Did the city or state take any action to minimize the negative impacts or maximize the positive impacts you anticipated? If so, what actions were taken? If not, what actions would you recommend to minimize negative impacts or maximize positive impacts?
17. What was your level of involvement in the bypass project?
18. What are your current feelings about the bypass?