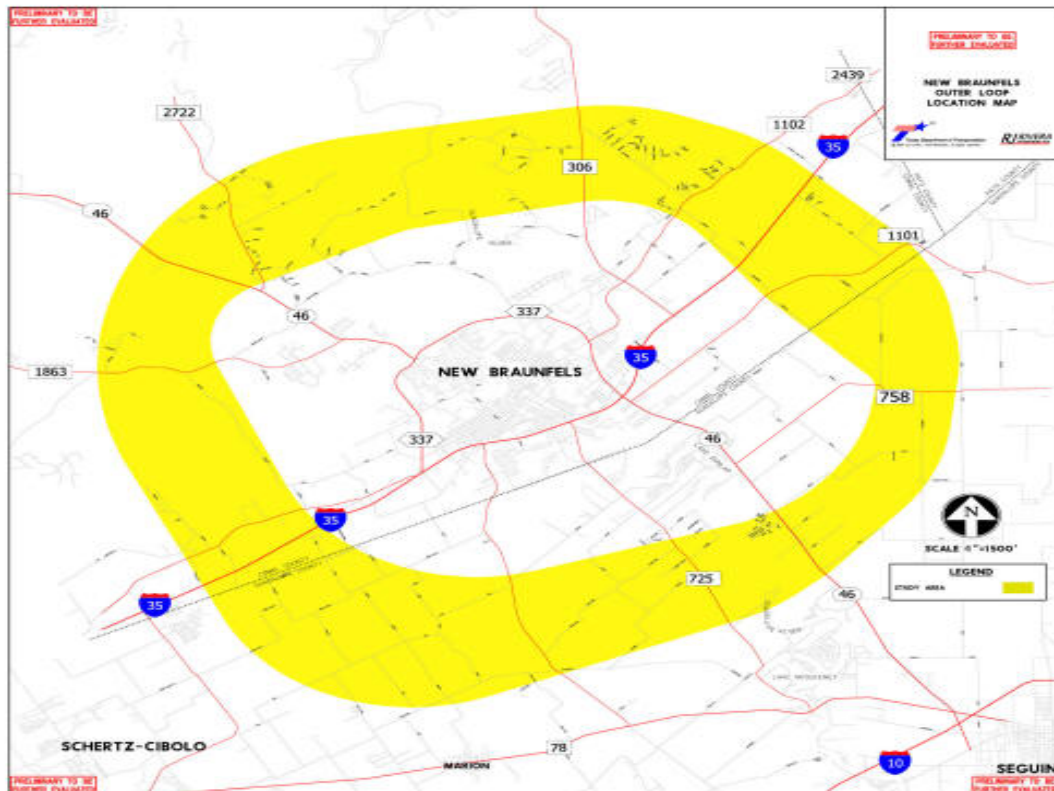


NEW BRAUNFELS OUTER LOOP



The formerly “small” Texas towns of Boerne, Bulverde, and New Braunfels have seen incredible growth in population and economic development over the past decade. New Braunfels in particular, being situated along the IH 35 corridor just 25 miles from San Antonio and 45 miles from Austin, has seen significant growth over the past several years. Updated infrastructure and roadway construction are in process on some of the major existing thoroughfares, but an outer loop around the city will be a necessity in the future in order to grow in a functional manner.

City officials and TxDOT began realizing the need and studying viable corridor options in 2005. TxDOT released the loop projection on its major thoroughfare plan in 2005, which has been altered several times since. The study area that is a 40-mile band around the City of New Braunfels encompasses portions of both Comal and Guadalupe Counties. TxDOT engineer Greg Malatek and county

officials have stated that under current Texas legislation, funding for the project will likely require it to be a toll road. Most new construction roadways in Texas are being held to these constraints.

The proposed loop will branch from IH 35 in the south around the Solms Road area and expand east towards Santa Clara, crossing FM 725, the Guadalupe River, and Highway 46. One major concern is where to cross the river and how to bypass the residents of Lake Dunlap and Lake McQueeney. The area below the Lake Dunlap dam seems to be the most logical location and has little development along the waterfront. Once the loop crosses the Guadalupe on the east it will go north around the New Braunfels Airport and then west back towards IH 35.

The so called "starter kit" of the loop project is the 1,900 acres of land along IH 35 North that will connect FM 1101 on the east to FM 1102 on the west. The property is owned by a group of real estate investors and the General Land Office, who have indicated to city and county officials that they would be willing to donate the right of way for this section of the project. Developers have estimated this portion of the project to cost upwards of fifty million dollars, but could be the first section to go under construction. Moving to the west of IH 35, the hill country topography begins to set in, causing increases in development cost and different environmental issues of concern, including the Edwards Aquifer. The proposed right of way stretches across many ranch properties before crossing FM 306, the Guadalupe River, FM 2722, Highway 46 West, FM 1863, and finally back to IH 35 just south of the Ingram Ready Mix concrete plant.

TxDOT held two rounds of public meetings in June 2007 to collect initial data and feedback from residents in the geographical area affected by the study. They were met by 300+ citizens with an array of emotions. Some people were excited with the opportunity and impact it could have on the city, and others enraged with the idea of a major thoroughfare running through their property. TxDOT has encouraged participation in a group known as The New Braunfels Outer Loop Study Community Work Group. The members of this group provide feedback on development constraints, develop alternatives, and simply give the local community a voice in the planning process of the project.

The idea and concept of the plan is to identify the potential right of way corridor and purchase the land to preserve from future development. The increase in development outside the city is just pushing the potential corridor loop farther out, so time is of the essence when analyzing the areas. Improvements identified by this study will be completed by Spring 2008, and subsequently will be evaluated by all governmental authorities. Current funding is not available and the outer loop project could take between 25-30 years to complete, but could change the face of New Braunfels and future real estate opportunities in the area.

Now with everything said, is this a good time to speculate in land purchases in the outer loop areas? Personally, I feel there are too many "ifs" in the project. The only part of the project with consistency is along the IH 35 corridor north of New Braunfels. With the 443 acres of retail going in at FM 306 and IH 35, along with the public information of land possibly being dedicated to the project from the GLO, make the area very hot for speculative purchases. The value has already made its way to the area with all the information acknowledged by the public, so room for quick flip properties and short term investments are few and far between. In 2005, commercial prices north of Highway 46 along IH-35 were between \$3-\$5 per square foot. Today, prices are between \$7-\$10 per square foot and rising, depending on the size of the tract. I would keep an eye on the area in the future and really expect to see things heat up once the Creekside development is further along.

For additional information on the project visit www.nbolstudy.com

- Jack Scanio