

WIRTZ DAM ROAD AND BRIDGE PROJECT

The Wirtz Dam Road Project begins at RM 1431 and terminates at RM 2147 W – a distance of 3.7 miles. A major component of the project is a bridge over Lake Marble Falls (Colorado River). The bridge will be generally a pre-stressed concrete beam span bridge that is 1,750' long, 44' wide, and approximately 65' above Lake Marble Falls.

Federal Law requires that the determination of federal funding allocations of certain transportation projects be performed by a local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which in this area is the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO). Burnet County is a member of CAMPO, which made the Wirtz Dam Road Project eligible for federal funding through CAMPO.

Since Burnet County is a member of CAMPO, the CAMPO Transportation Policy Board voted to fund the TxDOT-required public outreach activities that would assess support of the need for the new bridge and roadway. The CAMPO-funded public outreach program was completed in 2016. The program had record-setting public input obtained from 18 community events (public meetings, city councils, POAs, social events, festivals, etc.) and received 848 comments with 81% positive opinions in support of the project and that a new river crossing at Wirtz Dam would be beneficial. 57% of the respondents were from the cities of Horseshoe Bay, Marble Falls, and Granite Shoals. CAMPO stated this was the most successful public outreach program that it has ever conducted.

In 2018, TxDOT agreed to construct the project if CAMPO would fund the development and engineering plans. In 2019, the CAMPO Transportation Policy Board voted to fund the development and engineering plans for the project. Those funds became part of an Advanced Funding Agreement (AFA) between Burnet County and TxDOT. In August 2023, the Texas Transportation Commission included the project in the statewide Unified Transportation Plan (UTP) and in 2024 included the project in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). A requirement for listing a project in the TIP is that its state funding has been specifically identified and dedicated to the project. Upon completion of the approved engineering design component of the project, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) will construct the project and maintain it in perpetuity, provided that the engineering design complies with all TxDOT engineering design criteria, policy, procedures, and processes. The current preliminary estimate of the project is \$35,000,000 and 100% is funded by TxDOT and/or the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), therefore Burnet County will not have any exposure to the potential for construction cost overruns.

Burnet County issued a Request for Qualifications for engineering services and entered into a contract with K.C. Engineering, Inc., in August 2020, for engineering planning, design, and construction plans preparation services. K.C. Engineering, Inc. included the services of five (5) specialized subconsultants of various disciplines: 1) Cuplin Associates Land Surveying; 2) PE Structural Consultants; 3) AmaTerra Environmental; 4) Holt Engineering; and 5) Alliance Transportation Group. Federal funding of the engineering component of Wirtz Dam Road Project is provided by CAMPO.

The Wirtz Dam Road Project consists of multiple phases of development, but the engineering components fall primarily into two categories:

1. Geometric Design Schematic (Schematic)
2. Plans, Specifications, and Estimate (PS&E)

Another major component of the project is the acquisition of rights of way, easements, fencing and utility relocations. Those components must be performed by the local government.

The Schematic is used to determine the alignment of the road and ensure that all the design requirements of TxDOT are met. It also defines the footprint for performing environmental documentation for compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). The Schematic also defines the rights of way (ROW) and easements required to construct the project. According to TxDOT policy, the minimum ROW width for this project is 120'. ROW acquisition will utilize TxDOT approved agents and processes required by the Federal Highway Administration and The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act.

In 2024, Burnet County entered into contract with the Pinnacle Group to perform ROW appraisal and acquisition services in accordance with the Federal Highway Administration criteria, policies, and procedures, and in compliance with The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act.

There are 15 parcels of right of way (ROW) and 17 Drainage Easements to acquire for the project, and to-date, Pinnacle has performed appraisals for 10 of those ROW parcels.

The official project kickoff meeting with TxDOT was held June 16, 2021. The purpose of the meeting was for TxDOT to establish lines of communication and issue engineering design requirements. Burnet County has coordinated extensively with TxDOT to ensure that the development of the project complies with applicable State and Federal criteria.

The project has required extensive coordination with affected utility companies and that coordination has been ongoing for the past five (5) years. The affected utilities are:

1. Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA)
2. Pedernales Electric Co-Op (PEC)
3. Frontier Communications
4. City of Cottonwood Shores

While significant efforts have been made to avoid as many utilities as possible, certain ones could not be avoided. Those efforts ensured that none of the LCRA facilities required relocation, but there are significant relocations required for the PEC. Frontier Communications intends to abandon its facilities while a few City of Cottonwood Shores water and sewer lines require relocation.

As part of the environmental assessment performed for the project (required to comply with the National Environmental Protection Act), approximately 68 acres of land were assessed to determine potential effects of the project. The survey consisted of a pedestrian survey, shovel testing, unit excavation, and trenching.

A potential historic location was identified on the north shore of Lake Marble Falls. The identification required that extensive excavation be performed to determine if any historic artifacts were present that may be affected by the project. The excavation was performed under permit from the Texas Historical Commission (THC). The excavation revealed that the location on the north shore of Lake Marble Falls contained historic artifacts and that the site is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

Burnet County is currently coordinating with the THC to determine what measures can be taken to avoid the historic site. Since the THC has concurred that the site is eligible for inclusion in the NRHP, Burnet County proposes to recommend to the THC that the historic site be avoided by revising the bridge design such that none of the historic site is affected by the bridge. The historic site will be protected by whatever measures the THC deems appropriate. It will be proposed to the THC that the best method of avoiding the site will be to revise the bridge design and completely span over it, leaving the historic site untouched.

This method of avoidance of the historic site on the north shore of Lake Marble Falls will require substantial redesign of the bridge and roadway on the north side. The original bridge design had a pier that would have been situated within the historic site. The bridge must be redesigned such that a different type of bridge will be used adjacent to and above the historic site, ensuring that the bridge spans over the historic site entirely. The alternate bridge design requires that the north end of the bridge be raised substantially and the bridge raising will also affect the design of the remaining bridge to the south and the roadway on the north end.

Engineering planning, design, construction plans, specifications and estimate preparation have progressed throughout the project. These design functions were approximately 75% complete prior to the need for redesign to avoid the historic archeological site.

As of this report, Burnet County is working to provide the right-of-way to TxDOT so they can perform a project letting in the spring of 2026.

End of report dated March 11, 2025.