HAIRY MAN ROAD / BRUSHY CREEK ROAD SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated September 2021

1. What is the Hairy Man Road / Brushy Creek Road Safety Improvements project?

This project was a part of the 2013 Williamson County Road Bond Program. The purpose of the proposed Hairy Man Road / Brushy Creek Road Safety Improvements project is to improve safety along the rural roadway, now in an urban environment, and provide safer access to park facilities. Project limits include the Hairy Man Road / Brushy Creek Road roadway between Brushy Bend Drive and Sam Bass Road, a distance of approximately 2.2 miles. This project included a traffic study and preliminary evaluation of possible safety improvements along the corridor.

After evaluating multiple approaches, the County settled on a design which:

- Adds two-foot shoulders to the roadway
- Adds six inches to each lane width to provide 11.5-foot lanes throughout most of the corridor. This is six inches less than the typical lane width of 12 feet which will reduce the impact to adjacent trees
- Adds rumble striping along the centerline and along the edge of the roadway
- Adds left turn lanes into Olson Meadows Park and Creekside Park
- Improves park entrance driveways

2. Why is this project needed?

Between 2010 and 2019, there were 137 crashes including three fatalities (2012, 2014, 2019). This area of the road averages 14 crashes per year. It also services two entrances to two area parks, which attract young people and families. Community members reached out to former Precinct 1, Commissioner Lisa Birkman, and asked for this section of the roadway to be evaluated for potential safety improvements. She asked for a study of the road to address the community's concerns.

3. What is the construction schedule for this project?

The original project design was completed in summer 2019; however, with the design changes prompted by additional community input and engineer analysis, the design was revised and finalized in fall 2020. Construction began in February 2021 and is anticipated to be complete in late 2021.

4. Was the community involved during the study?

The project kicked-off in 2014, following voters approving the 2013 Road Bond Program. During the study, the public had multiple opportunities to provide feedback. Notifications for the initial open house included a variable messaging sign, a press release, invitations to the neighborhood associations, a post on the roadbond.wilco.org website, and a Facebook post.

An open house was held on December 15, 2014, at Brushy Creek Community Center (16318 Great Oaks Dr, Round Rock, TX 78681) with 95 attendees and 43 comments recorded with nearly 70% wanting improvements. Through public input and engineering analysis, the project team determined potential safety

improvements. Two subsequent open houses, in conjunction with the Great Oaks Drive Bridge at Brushy Creek project, were held in 2016:

- June 22, 2016, at Brushy Creek Community Center (16318 Great Oaks Dr, Round Rock, TX 78681) with approximately 100 attendees and 64 comments.
- July 14, 2016, at Fern Bluff Municipal Utilities District (MUD) Community Center (7320 Wyoming Springs Dr., in Round Rock, TX 78681) with approximately 61 attendees and 91 comments.

Following the open houses, the project team adjusted the alignment in order to preserve as many trees as possible, and the proposed lane width was narrowed from 12 feet, the typical lane width, to 11.5 feet. The project team selected a two-foot wide shoulder in order to balance the need for safety with the need to preserve trees. Despite the diminutive width, studies show that a two-foot shoulder would minimize crashes by 20% on a road like Hairy Man Road that averages 2,000 vehicles per day. These changes reduced the number of impacted trees by nearly 59%.

The project team regularly updated the Fern Bluff and Brushy Creek MUD Boards throughout the project, and gave presentations regarding the project at the annual Brushy Creek MUD Town Hall in 2017, 2018, and 2019.

5. Did the County work with the community after the study ended?

Yes, at the request of Commissioner Cook, the project team began working with the Save the Trees on Hairy Man Road steering committee in December 2019. Over the last seven months, the two groups met four times in-person or virtually to discuss the safety improvements project and further discuss ways to minimize the impacts to trees.

A Hairy Man Road corridor walk was also conducted. The project team and the steering committee walked the entire corridor, frequently stopping and examining the trees that were proposed to be impacted by the safety improvements. This walk helped the group collaborate on design changes that could potentially be made, and gave the steering committee an opportunity to voice their concerns about specific trees and areas along the corridor. Following this corridor walk, the steering committee reviewed four possible design options. Each option showed not only the number of impacted trees but also identified which trees were specifically impacted.

The steering committee chose the option that shifted the pavement one foot south and modified drainage elements in order to minimize impacts to trees significant to the corridor's canopy area. This option was able to reduce the number of impacted trees by 25%, bringing the number down from over 100 trees to 77 impacted trees. The collaboration and discussions between the project team and the community, including the feedback received during the open houses, resulted in an overall reduction of impacted trees by 69%.

During the discussion about the canopy area on Hairy Man Road, there were three trees that were of particular interest to the steering committee. The project team further reduced the lane width in this area to 11 feet. That design change allowed for one tree to be saved, one to be potentially saved during construction, and one to not be saved. As the project team was completing the final design of the safety improvements, a tree which currently leans over the road, that the project team originally thought could be saved, would now be impacted. It will need to be removed to meet vertical clearance safety standards. These standards dictate that there cannot be any overhead structure, in this case a tree limb, within 14 feet above the road. Constructing the safety improvements will cause the leaning tree to be only 9.5 feet above the road, making it a safety hazard for commercial trucks and emergency services vehicles. After these final changes, the count of trees saved remained the same. A total of 173 trees were saved from the original design.

6. Will trees be removed as part of this project?

The County has made every attempt to preserve as many trees as possible and will only be removing what is necessary to widen the pavement to provide for a two-foot shoulder and rumble strips. Through the design process and with community involvement, the alignment was shifted to the south by a foot to avoid specific tree impacts, the proposed lane widths were reduced by a half foot, or more in some areas, from 12 feet, and some modifications were made to the drainage elements. Through those changes in the design, the number of trees that are 8" in diameter or wider originally proposed to be removed has been reduced to 77 trees. A total of 173 trees were saved from the original design. During construction, the County will work with the contractor to ensure the remaining trees are protected. Impacted trees are currently tagged with a red ribbon and number on a metal plaque.

7. Will there be impacts to creek species as part of this project?

TCEQ indicates that these designs comply with the protective standards established by the Edwards Rules. Assuming the project is constructed in accordance with the Contributing Zone Plan (approved by TCEQ on December 13, 2019) and associated TCEQ terms and conditions, it is unlikely the project will result in significant adverse effects to aquatic species in Brushy Creek.

8. Why is the County widening the road instead of using speed bumps or guardrails?

Hairy Man Road / Brushy Creek Road is a County road, not a neighborhood or residential street. Speed bumps are specific to roads that have a lower speed limit and are not corridors. Additionally, speed bumps would require emergency services to slow down, reducing their ability to respond to critical situations as quickly.

Installing guardrail would require clearing a slightly larger footprint than the current proposed improvements, which would cause more trees to be removed. In some cases, guardrail is an appropriate safety tool; however, on this road it could a hazard. When a car hits the guardrail, it can bounce back, potentially into oncoming traffic.

9. Can the speed limit be reduced on Hairy Man Road?

The County has considered reducing the speed as a potential solution. In Texas, the speed limit is the maximum, reasonable, and prudent speed that can be traveled under normal conditions. Reducing the speed limit would require an engineering study that reveals 85% of traffic is driving at a lower speed than the posted speed limit, which is 35 and 30 mph in this corridor.

Research has shown that speed limits set below the reasonable speed of most drivers do not significantly reduce the number of crashes on a road. In fact, crashes may increase with unreasonably low speed limits. Experience has shown that if the speed limit is set too low, then the population that wishes to travel faster will pass the population that is traveling the posted speed, often doing so dangerously.

10. What will happen if the project isn't built?

It is the responsibility of the County to lookout for the safety and wellbeing of the traveling public on our roads. The volume of traffic on this roadway is expected to increase as the County grows. If the County does not move forward with these safety improvements, more crashes and potential fatalities are likely to occur.

11. How many traffic accidents have occurred in the study area in recent years? How many were fatalities? How many involved hitting an object?

Between 2010 and 2019, there were 137 crashes including three fatalities, which averages 14 crashes per year. All three fatalities involved hitting trees, shrubs, or landscape. Of 137 crashes, 64% were single-vehicle accidents, which involves vehicles driving off the road in some manner and hitting objects such as trees, guardrails, telephone poles, or utility boxes.

12. What is the County's role in this project?

Williamson County is responsible for constructing and maintaining safe corridors for all modes of transportation. Hairy Man Road / Brushy Creek Road is a County road and was included on the 2013 Road Bond Program.

13. Will residents and business owners be displaced?

No displacements of residences or businesses will occur as a result of the improvements.

14. What criteria were used to determine the proposed improvements?

To determine the proposed safety improvements, the County and its consultants evaluated safety concerns including number and type of crashes, the design speed and alignment of the roadway, right of way needs and cost estimates, as well as a design aimed to minimize the impact to surrounding trees.

15. How is the project being funded?

The study, design, and construction are funded with voter approved road bonds from the 2013 Williamson County Road Bond Program. The estimated cost to construct this project is $4.25 million. Over $2 million have been spent to date to study and design the project.

16. How will the trees that remain be protected during construction?

Prior to the beginning of construction, the County will work with the contractor to mark which trees are impacted and ensure no additional trees are removed.

17. Where may I go to ask questions or receive more information about the Hairy Man Road / Brushy Creek Road Safety Improvements project?

For more information about this project, please visit www.wilco.org/roadprojects. Questions or comments may be directed by email or phone to the Williamson County Road Bond Program at roads@wilco.org or 512-943-1195.

18. Is Sauls Ranch in Williamson County's jurisdiction?

Sauls Ranch is the city limits of Round Rock on the North side of Creek Bend Blvd. and within the City of Round Rock's extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) on the south of Creek Bend Blvd.; therefore, the County is limited in their control over it.

19. How can Williamson County better patrol the area for speeders?

Speed limit enforcement is a Williamson County Sheriff's Office matter, and they have been notified of the frequent speeding on Hairy Man Road. In addition to patrols, the Sheriff's Office periodically employs the use of their radar speed trailer on Hairy Man Road to raise awareness of the speed limit and inform drivers of the speed of their vehicle.

20. How many speed limit signs are on this corridor?

There are currently six speed limit signs (four 35 mph signs and two 30 mph signs) within the project limits on Hairy Man Road / Brushy Creek Road from Brushy Bend Drive to Sam Bass Road.