FAQs from Save Darden Hill

Questions received on Noise Studies

Q: Has the county conducted a traffic noise study for the Darden Hill expansion? TxDOT's analysis for RM 1826 found noise impacts at residential locations exceeding the federal 67 dB threshold.

Q: Complete a traffic noise study before advancing the design – TxDOT's own noise analysis for the connecting RM 1826 corridor found traffic noise impacts at residential locations, with predicted levels exceeding the federal 67 dB(A) threshold — and determined that noise barriers are not cost-effective. Darden Hill is a quieter road where the relative impact would be greater. Residents have a right to know the projected noise impact on their homes before the design passes the point of no return.

Response:

Hays County is aware that traffic noise is an important concern for residents living along Darden Hill Road. While federal noise regulations and formal noise analyses apply specifically to projects that receive federal funding, noise considerations are still part of the County's broader, context-sensitive design approach for locally funded projects.

Even without a federal requirement, the County evaluates reasonable measures that can help manage roadway noise, such as pavement types that reduce tire noise and other design features that can contribute to a quieter roadway environment. These options are assessed as the design advances and more details are refined.

As the widening project moves into the PS&E phase, expected to conclude in mid-2027, the County will continue to consider noise-related concerns. These will also be considered for the extension project as we move forward.

Questions on Previous Plans and Need for the Extension and Four Lanes

Q: Why does the current plan call for four lanes when the county's own 2013 and 2017 studies recommended two lanes?

Q: Has the county prepared a cost-benefit analysis comparing the four-lane plan to a two-lane alternative?

Q: Remove the planned future extension – The extension completes a regional highway corridor from RM 1826 to RM 12. The community rejected a similar bypass concept in 2015 with a 322-signature petition that forced the county to remove it from the plan. Building the same connectivity under a different name does not change what it is.

Response:

Transportation Plans are periodically evaluated and updated because of the constant changes that occur in the County, such as land-use changes, school development, safety considerations, and long-term growth projections.

According to US Census Data, since 2015, the County population is estimated to have grown 56%, including significant growth in the area surrounding the existing Darden Hill and proposed extension, including new and expanding residential developments, two new schools, and a new church. Projections indicate continued growth, with the Texas Demographic Center anticipating 68% population growth in the County by 2050, reinforcing the need for long-term transportation solutions.

Since the 2013 and 2017 studies were completed, the County and the City of Dripping Springs have adopted updated transportation plans, including the 2021 Hays County Transportation Plan and the 2021 City of Dripping Springs Transportation Master Plan. These updated plans identify Darden Hill Road as a future four-lane corridor in response to the significant growth in the area.

Decisions about the planned ultimate configuration are based on transportation planning studies, regional network consistency, safety considerations, and recent growth along with long-term growth projections for the area.

Cont.

Cont.

The extension is being designed to accommodate growth by enhancing and working within the existing transportation system to safely meet local traffic needs while including features that honor and preserve the area's rural character.

Darden Hill Road is planned to ultimately function as a four-lane divided roadway so it can tie safely and consistently into RM 150 improvements and the future Dripping Springs Southwest Connection, both of which are planned as four-lane facilities. Maintaining a consistent roadway configuration along a corridor helps reduce abrupt transitions that can disrupt traffic flow and increase crash risk.

While the long-term plan identifies four lanes, the County may consider phasing improvements. As the design of the Extension project advances, an interim two-lane configuration may be considered, with the ability to add additional lanes in the future if and when traffic conditions warrant it.

Questions on Speed Limits

Q: How does the county reconcile 45 mph traffic adjacent to school campuses with the stated goal of pedestrian and cyclist accommodation?

Q: Set the speed limit at 35 mph – Three schools sit on or adjacent to this road. A 45 mph speed limit next to elementary schoolers on bicycles and teenagers learning to drive is indefensible regardless of how many lanes are built. Sawyer Ranch Road is posted at 35 mph today, and the February 2026 community meeting summary reports it was reduced from 45 to 35 mph as schools and neighborhoods developed in the same precinct. The families on Darden Hill deserve the same standard of safety.

Response:

The current posted speed on Darden Hill Road is 40 mph, and there are no plans to increase it. A higher design speed is sometimes utilized for safety purposes, but it does not determine the final speed that traffic will be allowed to travel on the road. Roadways are often designed with a higher design speed so they remain safe if conditions are not ideal, such as bad weather, unexpected obstacles, or slower driver reaction times.

Posted speed limits are formally changed through a speed study, which considers observed and operating speeds, surrounding land use (schools, neighborhoods, driveways, etc.), crash history, and roadway geometry to ensure the roadway functions safely for all users.

In addition, this project includes replacing intersections with roundabouts, which are designed to slow traffic and are proven to reduce both vehicle speeds and crash severity.

The County has coordinated and will continue to coordinate with DSISD throughout project development. School locations are a key consideration in the design, including pedestrian accommodations such as a shared-use path on the south side of the roadway, signage, and school-zone speed limits.

Question Received on the Use of Certificates of Obligation

Why were Certificates of Obligation used to advance a project whose bond funding was successfully challenged in court?

Response:

The 2024 bond was invalidated due to a procedural issue, not the substance of the projects or the voter approval. The list of transportation projects was developed through a public process and approved by voters as part of the 2024 Road Bond package.

Following the court ruling, the Commissioners Court unanimously voted to use Certificates of Obligation (COs), a legally authorized financing tool, to continue advancing most of the voter-approved projects. This approach allows the County to maintain continuity for planned transportation improvements while meeting its responsibilities for financial stewardship and long-term transportation needs.

Questions Received on Safe Routes to Schools

Conduct a Safe Routes to School assessment,
Three DSISD campuses sit on or adjacent to this corridor. Safe Routes to School assessments are an established federal best practice for road projects near schools — funded through SAFETEA-LU, the FAST Act, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. To our knowledge, one has never been conducted for the Darden Hill expansion.

Response:

Safety for all roadway users, including students, parents, and school staff who walk, bike, or roll to school, is a priority. The Darden Hill improvements include pedestrian accommodations (a shared-use path on the south side of the roadway), signage, and school-zone speed limits. The programs referenced are different federally funded programs. This project is locally funded, and we do not anticipate submitting an application for federal funding.

We have evaluated that plans provide “safe routes to school.” These measures are incorporated into the design through engineering practices and design standards. Additionally, the County has and will continue to coordinate with DSISD to accommodate safe routes to current and planned schools on Darden Hill and in the area.

Questions on Use of a Super Two

Reduce to two lanes with turn lanes — a “Super Two” configuration

In transportation engineering, a "Super Two" — a high-quality two-lane road with wide shoulders and center turn lanes at key intersections — is the standard design for growing rural corridors. It is exactly what the county's own 2017 Character Plan specified: two 11-ft lanes with a 14-ft center turn lane in community zones. The CAMPO 2040 Regional Transportation Plan also classified Darden Hill as a two-lane road. Turn lanes solve the actual capacity constraint — intersections — without turning a neighborhood road into a highway.

Response:

Super 2 roadway configurations are utilized on roads classified as highways and are used on stretches of highway between smaller rural towns, along freight routes where passing opportunities are needed, and in transition zones.

The ultimate four-lane configuration for Darden Hill Road was identified through updated countywide and regional transportation plans to address long-term safety, mobility, and connectivity amid significant growth in the area, including new and expanding residential developments, two new schools, and a new church. Projections indicate continued growth, with the Texas Demographic Center anticipating 68% population growth in the County by 2050, reinforcing the need for long-term transportation solutions.

Since the CAMPO 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) was initially published in 2015, it was superseded by the CAMPO 2045 and 2050 RTPs, both of which identify Darden Hill as a future four-lane corridor. While interim configurations may be considered, the County’s long-range planning reflects the need for a consistent four-lane facility as growth continues.

Questions on Trucks and Freight

Establish a truck weight limit – Heavy freight has no place on a road where children bicycle to school. A weight restriction ensures Darden Hill serves residential traffic, not regional trucking. The community raised this concern in 2016: "Do not want to encourage commercial truck traffic on Darden Hill Rd."

Response:

The County recognizes that large truck traffic is a concern and will evaluate potential options as design progresses. Because Darden Hill Road connects to RM 150 and RM 1826, both of which cannot restrict truck traffic, any restrictions on Darden Hill Road would rely on enforcement and would be difficult to implement effectively.

Questions on Community Engagement

Re-engage the community before finalizing a design – The 2017 Character Plan involved 530+ attendees, 450+ comments, and 18 advisory panel meetings over three years — all resulting in a two-lane recommendation. The shift to four lanes happened without a comparable process. If the county's plans have changed, the community deserves to be consulted again before engineering reaches a point of no return.

Response:

The County will continue to engage with property owners and the public as the project moves through design and development. This will be done for both the widening and extension segments through one-on-one meetings with impacted property owners, updates shared online, and public/community meetings.

The County has conducted multiple rounds of public engagement since the 2017 Character Plan. This includes the 2021 Transportation Plan Update, which included 2,250+ site visitors, 750+ comments, and meetings with stakeholder groups across the County, and recommended a four-lane road and for the extension to connect to RM 150 near Woods Loop. The County also engaged the community in a 2023 public meeting and impacted property owner meetings to develop preliminary designs for the Darden Hill widening.

Questions on Traffic Data

Publish current traffic data

The most recent traffic count on Darden Hill Road — from the City of Dripping Springs' 2021 Traffic Study — recorded 1,600 vehicles per day using 2018 data. The county's own 2023 open house materials cited traffic growth percentages from 2010–2015 without publishing a current count. No one has conducted an updated traffic study for this road. The county should not advance a four-lane design without current data to justify it.

Response:

The schematic design process, that is just now starting, for the Extension project will include conducting a traffic study from Sawyer Ranch Road to RM 150 near Woods Loop (collecting traffic counts and analyzing traffic data to determine the level of service that is projected with the improvements).

Request Distributed at DHCS Meeting on April 14, 2026

To Commissioner Walt Smith, Hays County leaders, and members of the community: We are residents of the Darden Hill Road corridor and appreciate the opportunity to provide input regarding the proposed roadway expansion. We recognize that traffic and safety concerns in the area deserve attention, and we support thoughtful improvements that meet the needs of current and future residents.

At the same time, we ask that the County carefully consider the following concerns before advancing a final design.

Safety

- Increased difficulty entering and exiting driveways due to higher speeds and traffic volume
- With many homes accessing the road directly, a wider, faster road creates more situations where cars are crossing paths, increasing the risk of accidents
- Hills and blind curves will further reduce visibility and reaction time
- School bus safety is a concern, as buses currently stop along Darden Hill Road
- A 4-lane divided road introduces risks with left turns across multiple lanes, and medians may restrict access or require unsafe U-turns

Road Design & Community Fit

- The proposed design appears inconsistent with existing land use (rural residential, large lots, direct driveway access)
- This type of road typically functions as a regional arterial, which does not align with the current character of our community
- We are concerned this design is planning for a level of future development that does not reflect the current community vision
- We support a context-sensitive approach, where road design reflects the surrounding environment rather than only long-term traffic projections

Environmental & Water Impacts

- Increased impervious cover and stormwater runoff due to the wide road footprint
- Potential impacts to water quality from roadway pollutants

- Concerns about downstream effects on local creeks and aquifers, which are especially sensitive in the Hill Country
- Possible floodplain impacts (this is an area we would like more clarity on)
- Tree clearing and loss of native vegetation
- Habitat fragmentation and disruption of wildlife movement

Light Pollution

- Introduction of roadway lighting may contribute to light pollution and negatively impact wildlife and the night sky

If there is still an opportunity to influence the design, we would encourage consideration of a more appropriately scaled alternative, such as:

- A 3-lane configuration (one lane each direction with a center turn lane), which can improve safety while reducing speed and overall impact
- A phased approach that builds for current demand (including anticipated school traffic}, with expansion only if future conditions truly require it

Additionally, we would like to propose the following:

- Incorporate dark-sky compliant lighting (fully shielded, downward-facing, limited where possible) to preserve night sky conditions
- Implement enhanced stormwater management practices to protect local creeks and aquifers and avoid direct discharge where possible
- Conduct and share detailed drainage, floodplain, and water quality studies
- Minimize tree clearing and preserve native vegetation where feasible, with replanting using native species
- Focus targeted improvements near the new high school (e.g ., turn lanes, safe ingress/egress) to address peak traffic without overbuilding the full corridor

We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate as a neighborhood and present thoughtful, constructive input.

Sincerely,

Concerned Residents of Darden Hill Road / Driftwood

Response:

Roadway Design & Community Fit

There are many factors that must be balanced as the County identifies transportation needs and plans for improvements, such as community history, heritage, land use and context, cost, impacts on property owners and the natural environment, and current and anticipated population and traffic projections.

Improvements to Darden Hill were originally identified through the FM 150 Character Plan, which the County intentionally developed to balance transportation needs with the character of the surrounding community. Since the plan was published in 2017, growth in the area has increased substantially. As a result, the roadway configuration has expanded through updates to adopted transportation plans. Even with this change, the project retains Character Plan elements intended to reflect the area's rural context, including the use of roundabouts and a wide grassy median.

The expansion and extension of Darden Hill are being designed to ensure roadway safety, mobility, and connectivity amid significant growth in the area, including new and expanding residential developments, two new schools, and a new church. Projections indicate continued growth, with the Texas Demographic Center anticipating 68% population growth by 2050, reinforcing the need for long-term transportation solutions.

Environmental & Water Impacts

Potential impacts to drainage, floodplains, and water quality are evaluated throughout project development, with detailed analyses completed in the PS&E phase, anticipated to conclude in mid-2027. The County is required to ensure that roadway improvements do not adversely affect existing drainage patterns. The County includes drainage infrastructure in project designs and construction to maintain the existing flow of water.

The project includes water quality features required by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). To meet these requirements, Hays County is designing the roadway median as a large drainage feature that will include 15 feet of natural vegetative filter strips on each side. Vegetative filter strips remove sediment and other pollutants before the water drains to existing creeks. This design approach takes advantage of the natural drainage patterns while also considering the rural nature of the area.

Safety

This project is designed to improve overall roadway safety, mobility, and connectivity between RM 1826 and RM 12 as the area continues to grow. The roadway design manages traffic operations while maintaining safe and reasonable access to adjacent properties.

The current posted speed is 40 mph, and there are no plans to increase the speed limit.

The roadway will be divided by a wide grassy median, with median openings provided at safe, strategically-placed locations to accommodate U-turn movements. This design will restrict some driveway movements to right turns in and out of properties onto the roadway. Dedicated turn lanes with adequate queuing space will be provided to support smooth traffic flow. Medians are a proven safety practice that reduces conflicts among left-turning, head-on, and crossing traffic.

Additionally, this project includes replacing intersections with roundabouts, which typically reduce vehicle speeds and significantly lower crash severity.

School locations are a key consideration in the design, including pedestrian accommodations such as a shared-use path on the south side of the roadway, signage, and school-zone speed limits. Additionally, the County has coordinated, and will continue to coordinate, with DSISD to understand bus routing operational needs and support safe access for students, parents, and staff.

Topography, including features such as hills and blind curves, is evaluated during the design process. The County designs roadways in line with engineering standards for sight distance, stopping distance, and driver reaction time based on roadway context. Where there are hills and blind curves, roadway design incorporates safety features such as signage, grading, and realignment to smooth curves and improve visibility and safety.

Tree clearing and vegetation removal are limited to the minimum area necessary to accommodate the approved and required infrastructure. Where impacts cannot be fully avoided, best management practices will be implemented, which may include tree replacement, revegetation with native species, and preservation of existing vegetation in designated open spaces or buffer areas. These measures are intended to maintain ecological function and contribute to long-term environmental health.

With respect to habitat fragmentation and wildlife movement, while some short-term disturbance is unavoidable during construction, long-term impacts are expected to be minimized through adherence to approved plans, best management practices during construction, and ongoing compliance with environmental conditions of approval. Construction

activities will also be subject to inspection and enforcement to ensure that protective measures are properly implemented.

Light Pollution

Illumination has *not* been identified as a major need for this corridor. The County avoids adding unnecessary lighting to limit light pollution. If lighting is later determined to be necessary for safety reasons, it will be evaluated at a later stage of project development.

Alternatives

The County is planning for an ultimate four-lane divided roadway to ensure Darden Hill ties safely into RM 150 improvements and the future Dripping Springs Southwest Connection, both of which are planned as four-lane roadways. Maintaining a consistent corridor configuration reduces abrupt transitions that can disrupt traffic flow and increase crash risk.

While the long-term plan identifies four lanes, the County may consider phasing improvements. As the design of the Expansion project advances, an interim two-lane configuration may be considered, with the ability to add additional lanes in the future if and when traffic conditions warrant it.