

Central Texas Greenprint for Growth – a Tool for Balancing Sustainable Conservation Goals with Infrastructure Needs for Our Rapidly Urbanizing Region

Capital Area Council of Governments, Total Cost: \$227,764, FHWA Share: \$113,882

Period of Performance: 24 months, Dates: May 16, 2008 – May 16, 2010

AOTR: Bethaney Bacher-Gresock; Grant Project Website: <http://www.capcog.org/>

Project Goals

The Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) *Eco-Logical* grant project goal was to create a “Greenprint” for the region. The Greenprint document will help planners and transportation agencies to implement future infrastructure in ways that do not fragment, disturb, or destroy local and regional ecosystems. The Central Texas Greenprint expands upon a previous CAPCOG project, the Travis County Greenprint, by adding the other counties in the Austin-Round Rock metropolitan statistical area (one county, Williamson County, did not participate).

Project Activities

CAPCOG worked closely with local stakeholders and planners to complete a visioning process, create GIS models, and publically release the Central Texas Greenprint for Growth in November 2009. The Greenprint includes the final report, maps, data, and digital versions of all materials on its website. CAPCOG places a priority on engaging the planning community and elected officials to demonstrate the benefit of the Greenprint, as the project is expected to have the greatest effect if incorporated into local plans and policies.



Figure: Greenprint stakeholder meeting in Bastrop County. (Courtesy of Diane Miller)

Key Accomplishments

A recent Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) effort to purchase land for mitigation validates the Greenprint’s findings. The purchased parcel corresponds to a high conservation priority area on the Greenprint; and although TxDOT did not specifically consult Greenprint in its parcel selection, CAPCOG still finds the selection to be an affirmation of the Greenprint process. CAPCOG hopes to see local governments make similar decisions as the Greenprint document is disseminated.

As a council of governments, CAPCOG sees its role as providing elected officials with high-quality data that can inform policy decisions. The project team hopes to prove the value of the Greenprint to local governments and to the FHWA Division Office so that these entities will incorporate the Greenprint into their transportation planning efforts.

Challenges

CAPCOG expected opposition from property rights advocates and the business community since they have traditionally been vocal in the Austin region. However, the project team was surprised to experience pushback from environmental groups, who were opposed to identifying areas to channel growth. The project team also observed an ideological challenge in negotiating between polar interest groups. Both environmental and development advocates appeared unwilling to compromise in order to reach a middle ground. CAPCOG believes that its role in this conflict is to provide concrete data that helps the two sides achieve some common ground.

Future Steps

To support the priority of incorporating the Greenprint into local plans, Envision Central Texas, a project partner, plans to continue its ongoing outreach efforts by hosting two regional meetings about the Greenprint. Through these meetings, the group hopes to receive feedback on the Greenprint, help planners incorporate the Greenprint into planning processes, and demonstrate how the Greenprint can identify basic conservation priorities.