A group of Copperfield-area residents want state transportation planners to ditch a proposal to build an overpass at Texas 6 and FM 529, and consider their plan for improvements at that intersection as part of the FM 1960/Texas 6 study that will launch this summer.

"We are not taking a 'NIMBY' (not in my backyard) attitude. We have proposed a forward-thinking solution for making improvements at the intersection," said Jan Perino, secretary of the Copperfield Coalition, which was formed to develop an alternative solution to the Texas Department of Transportation's proposed Texas 6/FM 529 overpass project.

TxDOT officials say the FM 1960/Texas 6 access management study and the proposed overpass project are not related. The overpass project has been proposed, and is necessary, to address the high accident rate at the Texas 6/FM 529 intersection.

They say it will take time to plan and carry out any projects that are identified in the study, and the overpass project is needed sooner.

The study and the overpass project will remain separate from each other, said Janelle Gbur, TxDOT spokeswoman.

"The access management study would bear out what we have decided to do at this intersection," Gbur said. "This intersection needs an overpass."

**Solutions considered**

TxDOT will launch a study of the FM 1960/Texas 6 corridor from Texas 249 to Interstate 10 this summer. The project team will study short-, medium- and long-range traffic improvements that could be made on the road to improve safety and traffic flow.

The TxDOT proposed $12 million overpass project includes the construction of at least two through lanes in both directions on the overpass section, and two lanes in both directions to intersect with FM 529, which is to have two left turn lanes, one right turn lane and three through lanes on each side of the intersection.

The coalition’s alternative solution involves the addition of one left turn lane, one right turn lane and one through lane in each quadrant, and keeps both roadways at ground level.
Perino and Rick Scialdone, a Copperfield Coalition director, said it would make sense to take a look at the FM 529/Texas 6 intersection in the larger framework of the TxDOT study, and develop a solution that fits in with the overall roadway instead of building an overpass.

Which they say is a band-aid approach to solving problems at the intersection.

'Uphill battle'

Coalition members say an overpass would disturb nearby Copperfield neighborhoods' quality of life, and could close businesses at that intersection during and after construction.

"It would be like a freeway bridge," Scialdone said.

"There is a laundry list of negative things that happen when an overpass like this is built.

"Look at the overpass on Hempstead Highway (near the Texas 6/U.S. 290 intersection).

"There was a vibrant shopping center there before, and it has died."

Scialdone said coalition members are not against making improvements at the intersection to improve safety and traffic flow.

However, a project should not be done at surrounding residents' and businesses' expense, he said.

The coalition's alternative could have the same results as the overpass project without negative consequences.

"They are asking us to build a bridge for people who just want to get through this area quickly," he said.

Perino said coalition members are walking Copperfield neighborhood streets and talking to business owners in the Copperfield business district at the FM 529/Texas 6 intersection to get the word out about their effort, and their alternative proposal.

The group wants to recruit members, and work with legislators, to formulate a game plan to convince TxDOT officials to reconsider the proposed project, which is scheduled to start in early 2009.

"It is an uphill battle, but we are willing to do it," Perino said.

Perino said the coalition will have a meeting to discuss the TxDOT project, and the coalition's alternative solution at 7 p.m. June 6 at the Copperfield Community Center, 15409 Willow River Drive.

TxDOT speaks

Gbur said TxDOT officials have met with coalition members to discuss their alternative, and then modeled the alternative to determine if it addressed problems at the intersection.

"It simply does not do enough," Gbur said.
Gbur said the Texas 6/FM 529 intersection has one of the highest accident rates in the state. Because of those statistics, TxDOT received funding through the "Safety Bond" program to build an overpass. Those funds can only be spent on the overpass project because it has been determined to be the solution that would best improve safety conditions at the intersection.

The funds could not be used on any other project, she said.

The overpass would improve those conditions, Gbur said, because it would take the bulk of vehicles moving through the intersection on both roadways FM 529 and Texas 6 out of the equation at the traffic lights. Those lights would be reprogrammed to have longer "green time" because there would not be such a need to get the through traffic though the intersection quickly.

**Community input**

Gbur said TxDOT put together an advisory panel, with the help of the Cy-Fair Houston Chamber of Commerce, to get input from business owners, residents and coalition members. She said the goal is to incorporate their suggestions into the design in the early stages of the project planning process.

The project team has heard the coalition's concerns about the overpass, she said.

"This overpass will not be designed like a freeway overpass," Gbur said. "And we have demonstrated that the overpass will be designed to provide good access to businesses, and the lack of congestion at the intersection will be a plus not a minus."

Gbur said the Texas 6/FM 529 overpass will come back to ground level before the point where the road runs alongside neighborhoods, so noise and light impacts will not be a factor.

She said this overpass will not look like the Hempstead Highway overpass. That overpass has different height and length requirements because it is over a railroad.

"This overpass is half the size of the (Hempstead Highway) overpass," Gbur said. "The only similarity is that they are both overpasses."

Gbur said the overpass study is in the preliminary planning stage, and TxDOT would hold a public hearing at the end of the year before moving into the design phase.

For more information about the Copperfield Coalition, go to www.copperfieldcoalition.org. The Texas Department of Transportation's Web site is http://www.dot.state.tx.us/.