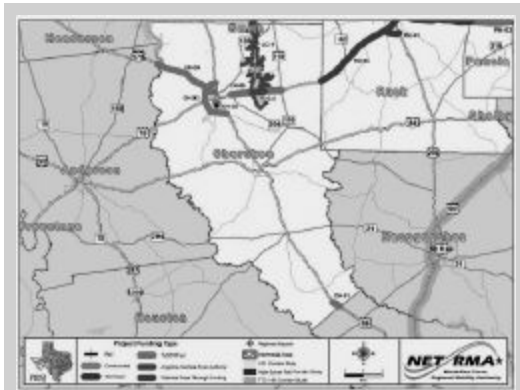


## U.S. Hwy. 69 widening lacks TxDOT funding

3-mile stretch is bottleneck during hurricane evacuations

BY GLORIA JENNINGS, Cherokeean Herald

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**MAP: PREPARED FOR NORTH EAST TEXAS REGIONAL MOBILITY AUTHORITY BY L.G. WEPELLMAN**

Barry Hughes, Cherokee County's representative on the North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NET RMA), presented his annual report to the commissioners court Monday morning.

He asked commissioners to prioritize the county's project and discuss it with him at the March 23 meeting.

A three-mile project on U.S. Highway 69 at Wells has been put on hold, Mr. Hughes said. "It is a TxDOT project and will be let when the money and the traffic justifies," he said.

"If we have another hurricane, traffic will be slowed down. I think this is something that really needs to be done," Commissioner Kevin Pierce said.

The project is slated to widen the two-lane highway to a three mile four-lane divided urban roadway. The improvements are planned to begin two miles north of FM 1247 near Wells and go to one mile south of FM 1247 in Angelina County.

Construction cost will be \$16,318,000; engineering fees, \$1,354,394; environmental costs will be \$57,130; right of way costs, \$1,582,846; utilities cost, \$815,900 and construction management, \$1,794,980. Total cost of the project is expected to be \$22,437,250.

Other county plans include a project involving U.S. Highway 69 Jacksonville relief roadway, which begins north of Jacksonville and extends 9.602 miles south of the city. A new two-lane roadway will be off the ultimate four lane facility. Cost will be \$124,250,630. A park rail spur is expected to be constructed at the Jacksonville Industrial Park.

A 10.72 mile expansion of U.S. 175 will begin two miles north of FM 855 in Anderson County to FM 347 in Jacksonville. The project will reconstruct a two-lane to four-lane divided rural roadway. Cost will be \$92,649,000. An 8.6 mile U.S. Highway 79 expansion will begin 0.1 mile east of SH 204 in Jacksonville and extend east to 0.8 miles east of SH 110 in New Summerfield for the reconstruction from two to four lane divided rural roadway. Cost will be \$119,905,000.

Lake Columbia projects include a new reservoir in northern Cherokee County along West Mud Creek; U.S. 79 1.37 mile bridge at Lake Columbia to replace the existing bridge to accommodate the lake; relocation of 5.26 miles of UP Railroad at Lake Columbia; and reconstruction of SH 135 at the bridge on West Mud Creek raising the existing 1.5 mile roadway bridge to accommodate the lake.

Total cost in Cherokee County will be \$419,286,880. No dates for any of the projects have been determined.

In other matters, commissioners approved laying of utility lines in Precincts 1 and 2. The lowering of the speed limit on CR 1616 to 35 miles per hour will be discussed at the next meeting. A public hearing will be held at the time.

A bid from Bill McRae Ford for the purchase of one or more 2009 Ford F150 Supercrew pickup trucks at a cost of \$25,678 was accepted.

One or more precincts were authorized to sell used equipment at an auction through Ritchie Brothers.

Linda Little, tax assessor-collector, was authorized to refund overpayment of taxes greater than \$500. The taxes were collected twice when the mortgage company and the property owner both paid.

Completion of public records class was accepted for Katherine Pinotti, Precinct 3 commissioner.

Monthly reports were accepted from Sheriff James Campbell, County Auditor L.H. Crockett and Precinct 2 Constable Jack White.

Attending the Monday meeting were County Judge Chris Davis; Commissioners Kelly Traylor, Pierce, Pinotti and Byron Underwood; County Clerk Laverne Lusk and County Auditor Crockett.