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Harris County Toll Road Authority to Pause Construction on the Main Pylons of the Sam Houston Tollway Ship Channel Bridge Replacement Project

Houston, TX – As of this Saturday, January 11, the Harris County Toll Road Authority (HCTRA) will temporarily pause construction on the main pylons of the cable-stayed portion of the Sam Houston Tollway Ship Channel Bridge replacement project to continue the review of the engineering design of a section currently under construction. Drivers in the area will continue to see work progressing on the rest of the project, including the approaches and casting yard, while the pylon work is paused.

While HCTRA is confident in the process and teams developing the project, the agency hired an independent consultant—COWI North America, Inc.—to conduct a complete independent review of the Ship Channel Bridge engineering design performed by FIGG Bridge Engineers, Inc. Harris County Commissioners Court approved the Engineering Services Agreement with COWI on March 26, 2019.

COWI's full independent review of the project is anticipated to be complete by March 2020. In the meantime, the consultant has identified an issue related to the design of the curved portions of the pylon legs, and briefly pausing construction will allow for the engineer of record (FIGG) to design a solution, to be reviewed by COWI, and incorporated into construction before the work progresses. When the engineer of record and the independent consultant reach concurrence on necessary design solution, work will resume on the pylons. It is anticipated that this could take approximately three weeks.

Background:

The Harris County Toll Road Authority (HCTRA) provides safe and reliable roads to assist in meeting the Houston region's traffic needs. Based on traffic study projections, HCTRA determined that the capacity of the toll road system needed to be increased on the east side, which includes crossing the Houston Ship Channel. In 2012, a request for qualifications was issued for project teams to design the section of the tollway between SH 255 and IH 10. From this process, a team was selected that included FIGG Bridge Engineers providing the long span bridge design. FIGG has served as Engineer of Record on seven of 13 concrete cable-stayed bridges built in the United States.

The project was bid and construction was awarded to Ship Channel Constructors, a joint venture between Traylor Brothers, Inc. and Zachry Construction Corp., who brought a very experienced team to this project. Their team includes T.Y. Lin International Group to provide construction engineering, a process that verifies a significant component of the overall design. The County selected HNTB to provide construction management for the project based upon their experience with similar projects.