

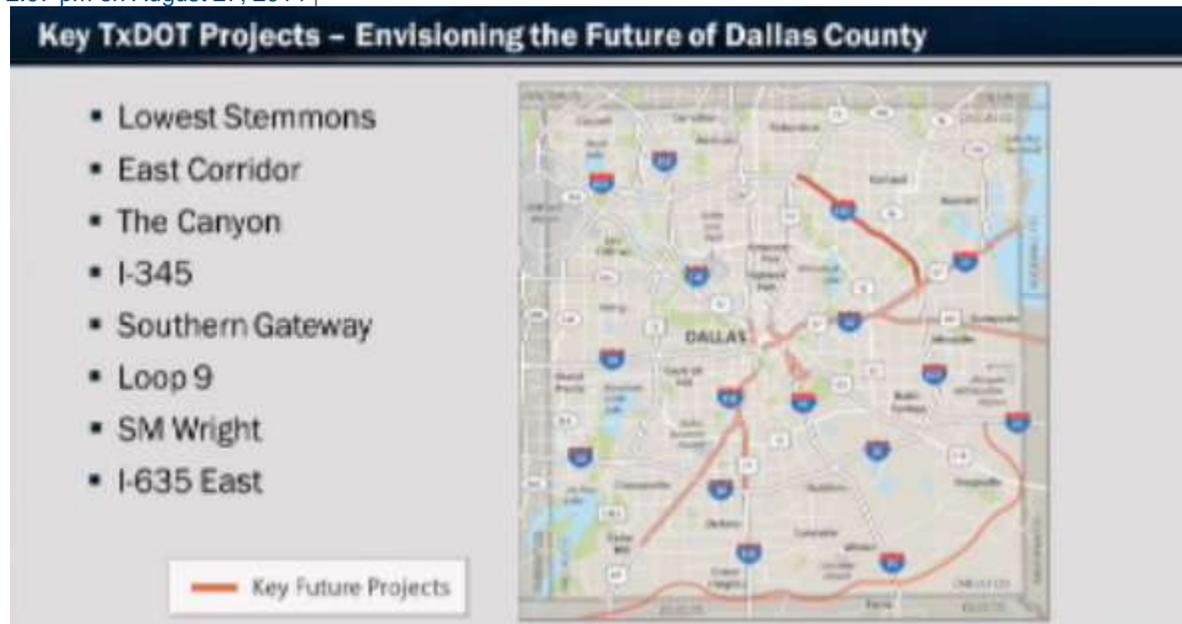
State, local transportation leaders converge downtown to talk Dallas projects



By Brandon Formby

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From today's meeting, a list of transportation projects high on TxDOT's to-do list

The [Texas Transportation Commission's](#) monthly meeting lands today in Dallas.

The commission's members are appointed by the governor and oversee the Texas Department of Transportation. They're [expected today](#) to discuss several North Texas projects, including Interstate 345, [whose fate is a roiling debate](#), and the Trinity toll road, whose [plans have divided Dallas for years](#). The two-day meeting begins at 2 p.m. today at [Union Station](#). ([Tomorrow's meeting](#) begins at 9 a.m.)

Update @ 2:30 p.m.:

Meeting has started off with remarks from local officials.

Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins, who presides over the commissioners court, said he's happy with the way studies on Interstate 345's future is shaping up.

"I like the way this study is incorporating people from the real estate council," he said.

Jenkins also alluded to a conversation with TxDOT officials who said they know how a \$200 million affects a local economy but now want to study how \$200 million invested in rail projects or the Inland Port would affect an economy.

"I think that's a smart way of looking at it," Jenkins said.

Update @ 2:43 p.m.:

Brian Barth, TxDOT's district engineer door Fort Worth, said North Texas has \$12.5 billion worth of projects under construction. Officials are working on plans for \$30 billion more.

Many of those projects are adding tolled lanes alongside existing free lanes. They involve private developers who are using expected toll revenues to finance construction costs of expansions and renovations.

Barth said the area may have "more than our fair share" of road projects, but it's because they plan smart and agencies work well together.

"We've leveraged public dollars to get a lot more projects built," Barth said.

Update @ 3:15 p.m.:

State Rep. Jeff Leach, R-Plano, reinforced Collin County officials' opposition to turning Central Expressway's carpool lanes into managed toll lanes. And he said that he and several of his colleagues in the Texas House and Texas Senate are committed to fixing the state's transportation funding woes.

"We believe transportation funding is a problem that must addressed head on in the next legislative session," he said.

But Leach didn't detail how they plan to do that considering lawmakers for decades have failed to develop substantial solutions to fund transportation. Those repeated failures begot the current influx of toll roads and toll lanes in North Texas.

Update @ 3:45 p.m.:

I caught Leach to ask him about how to pay for transportation funding without adding tolls. He said there's already movement underway to address funding problems.

Leach wants to stop diverting gas tax revenues to non-transportation other uses. He also wants to send sales tax revenues from auto parts to transportation funds. He also plans to author a bill that would send any growth in state tax revenues on car sales to transportation needs.

Leach said he currently does not support raising gas tax revenues because there is so many other ways to fund transportation without creating any new fees or taxes.

"There's a multitude of options on the table," he said.