



Highway project funding grows

Commissioners say more public money coming for I-35E expansion plan

By Bj Lewis / Staff Writer

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More public funds will soon be earmarked for the expansion of Interstate 35E, Denton County commissioners revealed Tuesday.

After a lengthy meeting Monday with Bill Hale and Michael Morris from the Texas Department of Transportation, commissioners Andy Eads and Hugh Coleman emerged with the report that more funds have been found and are going to be used for the expansion.

"It was a very informative and positive meeting," Eads said. "They conveyed to the county great news that our efforts to develop a broad coalition among state, federal and municipalities has paid off. There will be additional funds allocated toward I-35E."

Eads told the Commissioners Court that the exact dollar amount is still being determined.

He praised TxDOT for living up to its commitment to look over its projects to find any leftover funds that could be dedicated to the expansion.

Eads also touted the success of the resolution passed by the Commissioners Court weeks ago that conveyed the county's desires for the expansion project.

"TxDOT and the region realize our position and key principles," he said. "They were received, listened to and heard."

Recently the entire corridor received environmental clearance — an important step in the process once funds are allocated — and the project is ready to break ground, officials have said.

Currently, I-35E has four to six regular lanes and four lanes of frontage roads. The expansion project would widen the highway to eight regular lanes, four tolled HOV lanes and four to six frontage lanes, depending on need.

The project's current estimated cost is \$3.3 billion in construction, \$1.2 billion to purchase right of way and \$800 million for operations.

Coleman said TxDOT is getting an estimated \$2 billion in additional funding from three sources: \$700 million from the federal government, \$600 million from projects that came in under budget and \$600 million in TxDOT discretionary funds.

Denton County officials hope to receive between \$300 million and \$400 million to be applied to I-35E, said Coleman, adding that they hope to amass \$1.1 billion to \$1.4 billion in public funding.

"The good thing is [we] will be able to get it done by public financing," he said. "Then we don't need a concessionary, which means we won't be selling the road to anyone else."

The influx of funds will allow TxDOT to provide the general-purpose lane to toll-lane ratio the county desires.

A 1420 Committee meeting is set for 9 a.m. Friday in the Denton City Council chambers to discuss the latest development as well as the outlook for project construction.

"I think the process set by the Legislature is working. We got our general-purpose lanes along with the managed lanes," Coleman said. "TxDOT listened to my concerns and addressed them as best they could."

A lingering concern is revenue from the corridor staying in the corridor until the project is complete, Coleman said.

"They have addressed it and shown they have a plan to address the concern," he said.

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