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## Pegasus kaput, new sales job needed for Trinity tollway



By Rodger Jones/Editorial Writer  
[rmjones@dallasnews.com](mailto:rmjones@dallasnews.com) | [Bio](#)  
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Big things have happened to change the political landscape since the 2007 vote on the Trinity River parkway project, and it's not just the new mayor. And [not just the new NTTA report](#) that makes a good case, depending on your orientation, to keep the road between the levees.

We have a new official set of roadway priorities since Mayor Tom Leppert beat Council member Angela Hunt in a contest on where to locate a new toll road. (Recall that when the people spoke in 2007, Riverbottoms won, Somewhere Else lost.)

Part of the [essential justification for the Trinity](#) was always the need to use it as a "reliever road" while [the giant Project Pegasus](#) rebuilt the network of highways in downtown Dallas.

But no more. Pegasus is kaput, except for the portion involving new I-30 and I-35 bridges and their connector ramps. That used to be called the "Mixmaster." Now it goes by "Horseshoe" among transportation people.

And what of the rest of Pegasus -- which included a rebuild of Lower Stemmons and the Canyon? Gone.

Last year the policymaking Regional Transportation Council decided to pull all Pegasus elements except the two bridges out of its official planning document, [the Mobility 2035 plan](#). That's the official priority list for the region that the feds use to funnel money for local projects.

Only those projects with a prayer of getting funded from *somewhere* qualify for the official mobility plan. Since money from Austin is cut to a trickle for new non-toll mega-projects, the Pegasus became an ultra longshot and got lopped off the list.

The Trinity remains on, in whatever form the NTTA and City Council ultimately wish to proceed.

But now, selling the Trinity River toll road can no longer involve the explanation that it's needed as a first step for rebuilding Pegasus. It can no longer be sold as a "reliever road" that enables TxDOT to overhaul the tangle of downtown freeways. It's no longer possible to call it the first phase of anything.

The Trinity tollway has to be sold simply as a phase unto itself -- THE new highway project through downtown Dallas. There's no other.

That would complicate the sales job, for those who wished to undertake it, since they will inevitably be accused of changing the official story.

What will current Mayor Mike Rawlings' posture be on the Trinity parkway? Does he back the between-the-levees option Leppert staked so much on?

Rawlings is not saying yet.

The mayor wasn't available last week to comment on the breaking story on the new Trinity report. I talked to his Chief of Staff Paula Blackmon today. She said Rawlings is still studying the subject and will not say how he will proceed "until he can review the facts thoroughly."

Aside from the question of whether the Trinity tollway belongs where green grass now grows, is the question of whether ANY new roadway is needed in the center city.

Transpo people have said for years that congestion cannot be relieved without more roadway "capacity" of the equivalent of six new lanes where the freeways all converge in central Dallas.

It is quite breathtaking when you think of the major roads that all pour traffic into one chokepoint -- U.S. 75, I-30 from two directions, I-35E from two directions, the Dallas North Tollway and I-45. That's seven spokes leading to one miserable, outmoded hub.

The Horseshoe bridges will help some, but the capacity is still a problem, said TxDOT district engineer Bill Hale.

Unfortunately, "capacity" is not a sexy sales slogan. Neither is "we need lanes."

There's always, "Let's do something daring," a reference to the fact that a major urban highway has never been located between major flood-protection levees.

I don't envy Rawlings, should he choose to take this on. Actually, I probably should shut up right here. Someone is going to end up writing editorials on this subject, and it might end up being me. Best not put anything on the public record that you might regret.

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