

TxDOT: I-35E expansion project to receive an extra \$300 million

BY TIM GLAZE
Sun Managing Editor

The I-35E project will be receiving some more money after all.

In a unanimous decision on Thursday, April 26, the Texas Transportation Commission (TTC) voted to revise the 2012 Unified Transportation Plan (UTP), formally allocating \$1.6 billion to communities across the state using existing funding formulas.

The remaining \$400 million will be allocated to transportation projects — like the expansion of I-35E — selected by the Transportation Commission focusing on strategic partnerships and statewide connectivity.

The TTC allocations allow the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) more flexibility in doling out cash.

TxDOT intends to partner with regional transportation

agencies to accelerate the I-35E project by adding \$300 million to the existing funds, which will leverage the approximately \$1.2 billion that has been estimated to complete the expansion of one of Texas' more traffic-heavy highways.

Officials involved with the I-35E expansion have been scrapping for enough money to cover the cost of the project, which includes the addition of several regular lanes in each direction, managed lanes and toll counters from I-635 in Dallas all the way to US-380 in Denton.

Now, it looks as though they won't have to worry about the financial side of the project anymore.

Across the state, \$800 million of the funds will go toward addressing metropolitan congestion, nearly \$650 million will go toward Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) and rural connectivity, \$150 million will go to strate-

gic projects identified by TxDOT districts, more than \$200 million will go to statewide connectivity and \$200 million will go to strategic partnerships.

According to officials, TxDOT announced the availability of approximately \$2 billion in funds in February and immediately began work with local transportation leaders to receive input on options for allocating the funds and collect ideas for potential priority projects that could move forward quickly. TxDOT gathered public comments on the proposed UTP revision.

Besides the I-35E expansion, TxDOT will work in partnership with the MPO's and districts to identify projects that focus on safety, congestion, maintenance and statewide connectivity in the coming months.

"Together with our public and private sector partners, the department has previously leveraged investments of lim-

ited state resources to advance more than \$10 billion in North Texas transportation improvements," said Bill Meadows, a Texas Transportation Commission member from Fort Worth. "It is my hope that our local partners will realize the opportunity here to leverage this \$2 billion into a much greater impact for Texas communities."

According to a chart released by TxDOT, the Dallas area will be on the hook for the second-most expensive strategic projects in 2012, behind only Houston.

The new money should help, said Phil Wilson, the TxDOT Executive Director. "Our \$2 billion is expected to deliver more than \$4 billion in projects, plus additional opportunities beyond this," said Wilson. "This is a tremendous opportunity for TxDOT to work with our partners in a way that has a significant impact on our states mobility challenges."

Movie Review The Hunger Games

BY AUSTIN HAMMOND
Sun Movie Critic

Rating: PG-13
Running time: 150 min

What can be said about The Hunger Games? It became a chart-climber in the eyes of the literary arts world and filled the pockets of not only its one-of-a-kind author, Suzanne Collins, but the studio and production company that made it into a motion picture.

Said to be bigger than Twilight and on par with Harry Potter, The Hunger Games and its world has become the biggest sensation in the entertainment business since the release of the final book of the trilogy in 2010 and the release of the film in late March of this year.

As legions of fans both young and old gather to watch this movie, I ask: what makes it so special?

The super-blockbuster hit series follows the life of Kat-

niss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), the Girl on Fire, as she prepares to face a battle to the death in the arena in the country of Panem, a post-apocalyptic America under the control of a Unitarian government also referred to as the Capitol. The country is divided into 12 districts, each with a wide range of people that must sacrifice one male and one female from ages 12 to 18 called Tributes once a year, who then fight to the death for the glory of their district and a care-free life as penance for a rebellion years ago. The 24 tributes are then sent off to prepare and train as they await the danger to come.

Under close eye of the Capitol, the anxiety to return to her family and friends as well as a questionable romance between her fellow tribute, Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson), Katniss struggles not only to survive in her world of poverty and despair but to win The Hunger

Games. The problem with rating a movie like this is you want to make sure not only to pay homage to the masses of fans but stay true and honest as a reviewer to the scale and craft. The last time I gave a 4 out of 5 rating, it was to the Oscar-winning film "The Artist." However, the reasons for each '4 out of 5' are vastly distinct.

While "The Artist" is more of a film meant to be an artistic piece, Hunger Games is more of an entertainment movie, so each was given a 4 off of different sides of the spectrum. It was nonetheless extremely exciting and worth seeing while appealing to a wide range of audience, and is just downright a great movie. It has only reached a certain level in its run as a franchise for now, but maybe will one day obtain a "godhood" status in entertainment film like Star Wars, Harry Potter and various Disney films.

The only negative thing

about the movie was some shaky camera work in the early minutes of the picture and towards the final battle scene. It's understood they were trying to stay true to its reality-show camera style, but viewers come to experience the movie, not reality. Other than that, it kept language to a minimum, was conservative about how they showed any overly-violent scenes and showed zero nudity or scenes of sexuality.

The movie was 99-percent realistic to the book and gave new insight to different aspects the book could not venture into, and it didn't add anything.

The Hunger Games continues to grow and become an international sensation with its sequel, Catching Fire, expected to be released in mid-2013. The sequel is expected to repeat the same success with the same cast; if not, do better.

Austin says: 4 out of 5 stars

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