



## Residents turn out to give views on Trinity River tollway

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About 30 area residents waited in line to speak out about the proposed Trinity River toll road Tuesday night at a public hearing at the Dallas Convention Center.

Attending the hearing were 161 people, including presenters and engineers on hand to explain details of the proposed \$1.8 billion road.

The hearing was required by the Federal Highway Administration, which will decide, as soon as January, whether and where the toll road will be built. There are four proposals, including two that would put the toll road between the river levees.

Several elected officials and other area leaders gave their well-trod arguments for and against the toll road, which has been an issue since at least 1998. That's when Dallas voters approved a bond package to pay for a massive parks and recreation project in the Trinity River floodway and — importantly — a highway that was seen then as a potential reliever route for traffic into and out of downtown Dallas. A referendum to block the toll road failed in 2007.

City Council members Sandy Greyson, Angela Hunt and Scott Griggs, for instance, each replayed their arguments for why the highway administration should select a fifth option, a “no-build” choice that they say would allow the city to get moving on the park plan without having to address concerns by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers about whether the road will diminish the levees' ability to protect Dallas from a catastrophic flood.

Others, including North Texas Council of Governments transportation director Michael Morris and business leaders, spoke out in favor of the project, which they described as a careful compromise built over more than a decade of public dialogue and steady improvements to the plan.

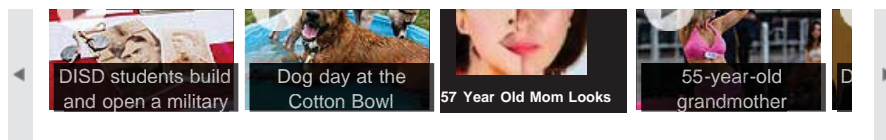
Oscar Slotboom, 45, of Dallas stepped forward to say he was for the road, a distinctly minority opinion, and pointed to the success of the Chicago waterfront, despite the proximity of Lakeshore Boulevard.

It's not clear what impact the speakers' comments will have on the final decision. The highway administration requires the North Texas Tollway Authority and the state transportation department to the host meeting to solicit the public views. Each of those comments will have to be addressed by the NTTA and its consulting engineers before the highway administration will ultimately select a route for the road.

Federal officials say they take into account the public opinion for or against the project, as well as the views of stakeholders, including the majority of Dallas elected officials who have steadfastly supported the road. Mayor Mike Rawlings announced last week he was taking advantage of the administration's open ears policy to weigh in on the project himself for the first time since being elected last year. He came out fully in support of the toll road, and for the option long favored by the city establishment — a route between the river and its eastern levee.

For Dallas resident Mary Warren, the question of the toll road aims the city backward, rather than toward the future as it should be.

“I never been anywhere in Dallas and had the thought occur to me, ‘You know what Dallas needs? Another freeway downtown. That would just make us a world-class city,’” Warren said. “This whole Trinity parkway idea is so 1950s.”



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