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News Update

NTTA considers upgrades to DNT

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Traveling through Plano on the Dallas North Tollway is not always easy, especially during rush hour when bumper-to-bumper traffic is a common sight.

Fortunately for motorists, discussions are underway regarding how to ease congestion on the five-mile stretch of the DNT between the President George Bush Turnpike and Sam Rayburn Tollway. Unfortunately, those plans will not become a reality until 2016 at the earliest, said Elizabeth Mow, director of project delivery for the North Texas Tollway Authority.



Kelsey Kruzich / Staff Photo: The ramps leading from the President George Bush Turnpike to the northbound Dallas North Tollway are packed with bumper-to-bumper traffic each afternoon. Plans proposed by the North Texas Tollway Authority could lead to an easing of this congestion by 2016.

"We are trying to increase mobility from tollway to tollway," Mow said. "We want to make getting from one tollway to another easier, while also adding capacity to the Dallas North Tollway."

On Monday, Mow briefed the Plano City Council on the two projected construction projects, which she said should enter the formal design stages in 2013 and carry estimated price tags of \$100 to \$125 million each.

The first project will alter the design of the Bush Turnpike/DNT interchange, a location of heavy traffic backups each morning and evening.

"This interchange is in dire need of capacity improvements and modifications on the north side of the interchange, a very similar situation to what we have at the George Bush and U.S. 75 interchange," Mow told the council. "The planned improvements will eliminate the weave from the direct connects through the Park entrance and exit ramps to the main lanes."

To increase capacity on the stretch of the DNT that travels through west Plano, the NTTA plans on adding a fourth lane to the existing road. Entrance and exit ramps will also be added on the north side of Windhaven. These moves, Mow said, should help alleviate peak period traffic congestion in an area Plano Mayor Phil Dyer described as a "huge bottleneck."

Funding for the projects will come mostly from the NTTA, which Mow said is planning on paying for using cash rather than bonds. She said if revenue comes in as expected, the money will be in place. However, if revenue drops or cost overruns are experienced, the project's opening will likely be delayed.

A smaller portion of the funding is coming from the city of Plano, which is attempting to secure county money to help pay for its share. At Monday's meeting, Collin County Commissioner Duncan Webb said he was working to secure dollars for unfunded transportation projects in Collin County.

The county has funded many of its recent road projects with the \$1 billion it received from TxDOT when the agency sold the construction and management rights to the Sam Rayburn Tollway. When that money was received, \$900 million was allocated to existing projects. After cost overruns were added into the cost of the original projects, about \$16 million remained for new projects.

"Five months ago, I decided that we should take control of this process and what to do with the remaining savings and earnings on these funds, and get inputs from the cities," Webb said. "We called out to all the municipalities, including Plano, and asked them for their top five transportation projects."

The county commissioners ended up with a list of 64 projects, which they rated based on various criteria including cost and stage of the project, congestion and average daily traffic. Plano's top two submissions were the U.S. 75/Bush Turnpike interchange, which was covered in the original \$900 million, and the Bush Turnpike/DNT interchange, which ranked seventh on the county's list and has not had any of the regional toll revenue money allocated to it.

Projects in Allen, Wylie and Richardson will be funded with the nearly \$16 million the county has remaining in its coffers, but Webb said additional projects may receive funding if and when it becomes available.

"I am pushing hard to find additional funding for everything that is on that list," Webb said, noting the list of unfunded projects totals \$100 million. "That list is not stagnant, and every year I imagine we will come back to the cities and ask if their prioritizations have changed; do they want to add something to the list or delete something. At that point we will reassess because I do believe there will be additional savings as additional projects are completed."

The city's third-highest priority project was the Preston Road/Bush Turnpike interchange, but Webb said that was not considered because he has been assured by TxDOT that the project is already fully funded. If the funding dries up or is not sufficient to cover the project's entire cost, Webb said it would be eligible for RTR money and said he felt it would rank highly on the list.