



## ⑥ Lake Highlands residents in Skillman-LBJ area hope for economic boost from road improvements

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As progress rumbles along on the LBJ Express highway project in North Dallas, residents a few miles east along the freeway are already plotting out their transportation future.

Construction could begin by late next year — if additional funding becomes available — on an overhaul of the confusing intersection between the LBJ Freeway and Skillman Street in Lake Highlands.

And with the potential for LBJ's massive expansion to someday extend east to that intersection and beyond, residents are teaming up with the city of Dallas and the North Central Texas Council of Governments to bolster those changes with broader neighborhood improvements.

The effort, a \$125,000 urban planning initiative, begins in earnest Jan. 17 with a public meeting to gather feedback from residents and businesses on how best to revitalize the area.

"There are some tremendous assets in the area that are underutilized," said Susan Morgan, a neighborhood volunteer who's helped spearhead the effort. "But everyone sees a lot of opportunity."

Planners have long eyed the LBJ-Skillman intersection, including it in the 2006 ForwardDallas! development plan.

The current interchange features an awkward connection with Audelia Road, and despite being one of the major gateways to Dallas from the northeastern suburbs, the area doesn't have as much commercial development as some other spots along LBJ.

It will cost around \$40 million to overhaul the intersection, realign it with a more conventional setup and make the area more conducive to bike and pedestrian traffic. So far there's about \$11 million set aside for the project, which would be managed by the Texas Department of Transportation.

That current funding, from city bond programs and Dallas County capital improvement funds, is only enough to start land acquisition and design plans. But officials and residents are pressing ahead with the separate but closely related plan to spruce up the neighborhood.

"The main goal for the community is to keep moving things forward," said Linda Koop, a Dallas City Council member and vice chairwoman of the Dallas Regional Mobility Coalition.

The area — roughly bounded by Forest Lane, Arbor Park Drive, Royal Lane and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway — already features several businesses, Dallas Area Rapid Transit's LBJ/Skillman Station and the benefit of the city's Skillman Tax Increment Financing District.

But stakeholders are confident the area can become more vibrant, perhaps building existing green space into Dallas' growing hike-and-bike trail network and incorporating elements of successful transit-oriented developments like Mockingbird Station.

Among the urban planning initiative's other goals: gathering more data on the area, maximizing access to the DART station, promoting redevelopment opportunities and identifying possible zoning changes.

"We want to take a harder look at the road alignments and the transportation, but also put forth a vision for what land-use and zoning could look like," said Tip Housewright, a Lake Highlands architect who's helping lead the study.

The study is expected to take 18 months, and residents and officials hope the Jan. 17 meeting at Forest Lane Academy will jumpstart the effort.

While the exact timeline for the LBJ-Skillman reconstruction remains up in the air, officials said community involvement, such as the planning initiative, would be key in going forward. They pointed out how such input helped shape the LBJ Express and other major transportation projects.

"In an ideal world, we should always do it this way," said Peer Chacko, the city's assistant director of development services. "These projects working together has been really beneficial."

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**GO & DO: Public meeting**

A meeting to gather ideas on ways to revitalize the Skillman-LBJ Freeway area will be from 6:30 to 8 p.m. on Jan. 17 at Forest Lane Academy, 9663 Forest Lane. All are welcome. For more information, visit [www.nctcog.org/LBJSkillman](http://www.nctcog.org/LBJSkillman).



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