



## Final public hearing eases neighborhood concerns about S.M. Wright Freeway overhaul in South Dallas

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State highway officials appear to have reached an uneasy truce with South Dallas residents over a proposed overhaul of S.M. Wright Freeway — specifically, over making the revamped road six lanes instead of four.

And a different last-minute hitch was averted at a public hearing on Thursday, when the officials said they would reconsider a plan to eliminate the northbound Pennsylvania Avenue exit on nearby Interstate 45.

“We’re not going to have that,” Dallas City Council member Carolyn Davis said of the proposal to eliminate the exit.

Backed by a growing chorus of concerned neighborhood residents, Davis told contractors and officials from the Texas Department of Transportation: “This should not — and will not — be an inconvenience to the neighborhood. We’re going to have an [additional] exit off 45.”

It appears that Davis and the others gathered for the meeting at the Park South YMCA could get their wish.

TxDOT spokesman Mark Pettit said after the meeting that solving the exit problem was “feasible.”

The \$151 million project would eliminate the infamous “Dead Man’s Curve,” where the C.F. Hawn Freeway now meets S.M. Wright at nearly a right angle. Instead, C.F. Hawn would connect directly to I-45, and S.M. Wright would be rebuilt as a city street.

Construction is scheduled to begin next year.

Much of debate surrounding the S.M. Wright overhaul had focused on what kind of rebuilt road would be best. In taking the unusual step of tearing down a freeway — one that carries more than 80,000 vehicles a day — TxDOT proposed turning it into a six-lane city boulevard.

Davis and other community leaders supported that plan, and it has received preliminary approval from the Federal Highway Administration. But some neighborhood residents have said a four-lane road would be more appropriate, since it would leave room for roadside development and encourage drivers to come to South Dallas, rather than drive through it.

A few people again voiced that desire Thursday. But most in attendance seemed content with the six-lane alternative.

The Rev. Gerald Britt, who works for City Square, a poverty-fighting group, said Davis and others had allayed his concerns about the six-lane boulevard by promising redevelopment along Hatcher Street and other nearby roads.

Eliminating I-45’s northbound Pennsylvania Avenue exit, however, stirred additional concerns. That setup, long in TxDOT’s plans, would leave the northbound Lamar Street exit and the southbound Pennsylvania exit as the interstate’s only access points to South Dallas.

Speaker after speaker said that would harm the neighborhood, further isolate residents from the rest of the city and add even more congestion to I-45.

“This would adversely affect our ability to access businesses and resources in the community,” said Terry Flowers, executive director of the St. Philip’s School and Community Center in South Dallas.

Davis eventually took the microphone and pointed to Matt Craig, a lead project engineer.

“Matt and I are going to talk,” she said, as the crowd burst into applause. “We’re going to fix that, so we can get it right.”

TxDOT officials said later that saving the existing northbound Pennsylvania exit isn’t possible, given the project’s other requirements. But, they said, adding an exit

elsewhere wouldn't be that difficult.

As the meeting wrapped up, neighborhood residents made their expectations quite clear.

"Council member Davis, we're going to hold you accountable," said 63-year-old Gloria Walls.

Davis turned to the audience so everyone could hear: "I know."

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**Michael Hale** 2 days ago

They can rebuild roads until the cow jumps over the moon but no one will ever be exiting off the freeway and stopping in South Dallas unless it's to buy drugs.

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