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IH-345 tear-out proposal: Not dead

 By Mark Lamster, Architecture Critic
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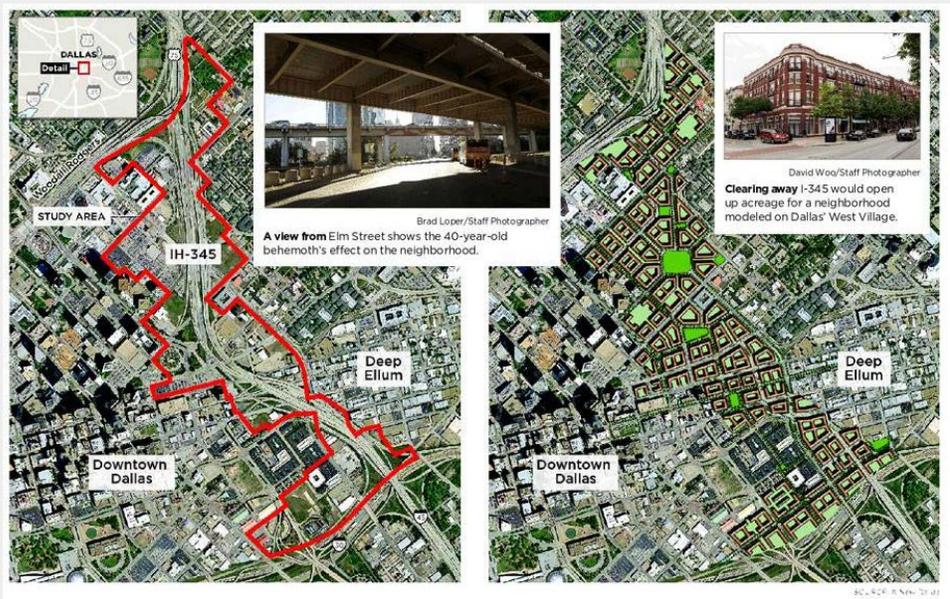
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The IH-345 tear out proposal: before and after.

"Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated," Mark Twain quipped on hearing of a premature obituary. The same can be said of the plan to tear down IH-345, the elevated highway that connects I-75 and I-30, severing Downtown Dallas from Deep Ellum and parts beyond. When TxDOT announced last week that it would rehab the road — at a cost of \$100 million — many presumed the tear-out plan was dead. It is not. As Mayor Mike Rawlings said on Wednesday, "just because TxDOT says something doesn't mean we should go along with it."

For far too long, Dallas has ceded authority to traffic planners who have no special allegiance or obligation to the city, and the results have been demonstrably catastrophic. What was once a walkable, thriving downtown is now balkanized and struggling, with high vacancy rates and a drunken checkerboard of parking lots and derelict buildings. The tear-out plan presents the city with a unique opportunity to correct this situation.

At the very least, it deserves a legitimate public hearing, a fact that makes TxDOT's out-of-the-blue,

back-door announcement especially deplorable. Remember that TxDOT promised the public a study of options for the road's future, a study that it was supposed to deliver last summer, but didn't — perhaps concerns about the tear-out option delayed matters? — and was again promised for this coming summer. But now we get no study, just a decision by fiat.

The timing is justified with the excuse that it will allow the city to begin design work on Carpenter Park, a parcel that is adjacent to the highway, and therefore dependent on its future. But there is really nothing urgent about the remaking of that park — why not instead concentrate on the development of [Pacific Plaza](#), nearby? — and certainly it should take a back seat to a coherent plan for the highway, and the city generally.

"Hey, you get a park out of the deal," is neither a reasonable nor an acceptable alternative to public accountability and review.

"The thing that set me off is more process than substance. The process isn't open," says City Councilman Philip Kingston. "I feel like I don't have a line into TxDOT. We need to be about expanding our imagination. We need to be about more than selling concrete."

The situation also points to the greater problem that is the city's ad hoc planning culture; Dallas has no shortage of plans and zoning codes — every square block seems to have its own individual rule book — but somehow floats along governed by no holistic vision. Of course, it's hard to create one when critical decisions are imposed from outside authorities.

Operating in this vacuum, Patrick Kennedy and Brandon Hancock, the activists behind the tear-out plan, have begun working to build momentum with the city's various corporate and political leaders, and also with the general public, in an effort to pressure TxDOT to reconsider its decision. Their organization, [A New Dallas](#), is now registered as a non-profit, and is taking donations to fund a study that would demonstrate the feasibility of a tear out, proving both its economic viability and that it will not create the traffic nightmare so many legitimately fear.

The city, it would seem, is willing to listen. "This is a council that is very open to new ideas when they are presented properly," says Kingston.

It's TxDOT obligation to study those ideas in collaboration with the city — before it makes decisions, not after.

—@marklamster

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Brad Lister

2 days ago

I've commented on this before and think the problem is that the tear down (and don't replace with anything) does not address potential traffic problems. Those that don't like the overhead should instead push for a compromise solution: a rebuild similar to Central Expwy - with minimal or no exits/entrances between Woodall and IH-30. Those seeking to go downtown would exit on to frontage roads that access the local street network, which needs major upgrades under any long term solution. TxDOT would listen to this option as it would address their aging bridges - they could take them down and replace with something easier to maintain. This option would also allow some of the rebuild to take place while traffic is on the existing bridge. TxDOT would be interested in this too. Problem is that it's expensive and needs some creative funding solutions (call Micahel Morris w/NCTCOG), but what TxDOT is proposing is expensive too - \$100M now and much more in 20 years... This option could provide for a park similar to Klyde Warren later too. Trust me, TxDOT and many others are not to go for the pie in the sky option presented in the article.

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Ken Duble

2 days ago

There is no need to do anything about I-345 other than tear it down. Do you think this hasn't been done in other cities? Much of the traffic is, in fact, thru traffic, and motorists simply route around the city rather than passing through it.

Each city that has torn down a downtown freeway has found the traffic effects negligible. The reason: It takes years to come up with a plan to remove a freeway, yet it only takes motorists minutes to devise a short-term solution to cope. In the weeks and months and even years that follow, motorists change their lifestyles and commuting patterns to adapt. Every city that has done this has found coping with traffic to be a non-issue.

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mdunlap1

1 day ago

The tear down advocates have extensively detailed answers on the traffic questions. The same fears have preceded all of these recent tear downs. They fail to be justified every time. People adapt.

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👍 0 💬 2



Wylie H Dallas

2 days ago

Has anyone quantified the increase in Dallas' tax base that would result from this? I have to imagine it would be a MAJOR boost to the City's fiscal health.

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👍 3 💬 0



Mark Lamster

2 days ago

check out the new dallas website. they have modeled it, and the revenues are, in fact, enormous. the highway rebuild throws money out the window. tearing it down is a considerable economic opportunity for the city.

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👍 3 💬 2

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 **C R** 2 hours ago
Because a bunch of public transit do gooders could care less about traffic concerns?
Reply . Share 👍 0 🗨️ 0

 **C R** 2 days ago
No, it does not deserve a public hearing- it is a ridiculous idea.
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 **Ken Duble** 2 days ago
That's reinforcing I-345 you're talking about?
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 **mdunlap1** 1 day ago
You sound scared. Do you live near downtown Dallas? I've yet to meet one person who does that opposes the idea. All the fear I hear regarding comes from north of the city. Obviously people who have little interest in Dallas' well-being.
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 **C R** 2 hours ago
Actually, yes I do. You clearly don't understand the traffic concerns that will result and to accuse people who disagree of not having interest in Dallas' well being is absurd quite frankly.
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 **AdamsonScott1** 2 days ago
An architecture critic wading into an arena about which he is quite unqualified. When it comes to traffic flow, especially involving interstate highways, I would trust those who are employed to make those decisions rather than a bunch of local yokels who think it would be pretty to have a park instead of a major arterial, traffic be damned.
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 **Mark Lamster** 2 days ago
no one is arguing for a park to replace the highway. experts are hired to carry out a vision that the city—not a "a bunch of local yokels"—decides is in its best interests. if you think downtown is problematic now, the reason is because those "experts" were so wrong in the past, and we are now suffering the consequences.
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 **Ken Duble** 2 days ago
Adamson offers no ideas, only negativity.
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 **mdunlap1** 1 day ago
Similarly, the last people who should be making decisions on how to build cities are state-level traffic engineers. The destruction TxDOT has done to Texas towns and cities is enormous.

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Bushwood Smithie

3 days ago

It seems some ideas truly are too stupid to die....

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2 3



C R

2 days ago

Amen

Reply , Share

1 3



Ken Duble

2 days ago

Are you talking about TX Dot's plan?

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1 1



mdunlap1

4 days ago

Has anyone asked the Carpenter family if they'd support the tearout?

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2 0



marklamster

4 days ago

Note: Rawlings's comment was made during the meeting of the City Council, not in an interview, as this article previously stated. Apologies for the error.

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