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Is I-345 tear-down proposal chance to get Trinity Tollway funded?



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This is fanciful thinking, but you know it's crossed the minds of transportation planners who are trying to find hundreds of millions of dollars to advance the Trinity River tollway project.

Under the planning aegis of the NTTA, the project got another box checked this week, with qualified federal OK to put the roadway between the downtown levees. Bigger boxes are ahead, including an OK from the Army Corps of Engineers and the biggest box of all, the money box.

The Trinity toll road isn't forecast as a huge money-maker for the NTTA, not like the Dallas North Tollway or the Sam Rayburn (aka SH 121) north of town. That creates a big hole when, and if, NTTA decides it's cleared enough debt to help finance the Trinity.

Where will the rest of the money come from? Think conspiratorially. Think traffic, because that's what the Trinity would need lots more of. Doesn't that mean the Trinity would benefit financially from the [teardown of I-345 on the east edge of downtown](#). Sure it does.

Tens of thousands of northbound commuters in southern Dallas now go around downtown in one of two ways: to the east, on I-345, or the west, on Stemmons (I-35). If I-345 were tied off, some or lots of that northbound commuting traffic might try motoring around to the west and further swamp Stemmons.

The city-backed Trinity plan came out of a major Stemmons study in the 1990s. It was the preferred way of relieving Stemmons over double-decking the roadway or using Riverfront Blvd for the ROW.

Does this mean supporters of the I-345 teardown might be courted as allies for the Trinity? That would make for strange bedfellows, since many Trinity critics have talked about the awful impact that highways make on a center city. How could you damn one highway and bless another?

There are bigger problems in this scenario than the political ones. Consider that the rush hour on Stemmons and I-345 is northbound FROM downtown in the morning. That means it's a workforce moving toward major employment areas up the Central and Stemmons corridors.

It's moving toward airports, hospitals, retail and highrise clusters. Downtown does not provide enough jobs. Downtown, for all its momentum, has empty highrises. One of the biggest commercial developments now under construction in Texas — a regional State Farm Insurance headquarters — is up the Central corridor in Richardson.

Against this reality, I think you couldn't sustain an argument for taking a free link out of the interstate highway system and force commuters onto a pay road to get to their jobs. It's called economic justice.

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