



Ⓞ Council of Governments seeks input to map Dallas-Fort Worth's future transportation needs

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By MICHAEL E. YOUNG

Staff Writer

myoung@dallasnews.com

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On the North Central Texas Council of Governments' latest maps for Mobility 2035, a screen grab of its latest transportation thinking, disconnected squiggles mark the future of travel and commuting in an era when funding is uncertain and progress arrives in pieces.

The Council of Governments is in the final stages of shaping Mobility 2035, accepting public comment for the next two weeks or so before submitting changes to the Regional Transportation Council for approval. Even then, it will be a constantly evolving work in progress that will morph in two years into Mobility 2040, a roadmap leading further into the future.

Dan Lamers, senior program manager for metropolitan transportation planning, and Chad Edwards, program manager, said the key to stretching limited dollars as far as possible is recognizing opportunities and moving quickly.

"TxDOT went out for a private-sector bid for work on State Highway 183 in Dallas, and based on the response to that bid, we realized there were other opportunities to make the project even better by including a piece of Loop 12 and State Highway 114 and a piece of 183 in Tarrant County that will help us create a really nice managed lane system," Lamers said.

"And the DFW Connector is nearly complete, adding managed lanes to 114, so we're making additional improvements onto each end — up [State] Highway 121 to Sam Rayburn on the north, and south on 121 to just south of the intersection with Highway 360," he said.

And while the massive Pegasus Project, which would reshape stretches of both Interstate 30 and I-35E in Dallas, has been in planning for years, the money hasn't been available. But there is funding enough to do the Horseshoe Project. That would tie in the managed lanes on I-30 and the HOV lanes on I-35E, and in essence become the first phase of Pegasus, Lamers said.

Most critically, Edwards added, the project will allow the replacement of the interstate bridges over the Trinity River that have already exceeded their expected lifespan.

"We don't have enough money to fully implement everything," Lamers said. "What we really focus on now is how can we stage and phase these big projects and utilize the cash we'll have available."

Sometimes, they said, that can be a tough sell. Take the Sam Rayburn Tollway, which runs diagonally from the Coppell-Lewisville line for 26 miles to U.S. Highway 75 in McKinney. It seems like it was just completed last month. So when planners talk about widening the highway, people say, "You just got it finished and now you identify it for being widened. Why didn't you get it right the first time?" Lamers said.

"We did get it right," he said. "We did the planning for a wider facility, but we made it clear to everyone we were going to stage it as money was available, as needs grow."

Planners have to look at least 20 years into the future, as federal rules require. In North Texas, it's better to look 25 years out or more, Edwards said.

So even while they're working to amend Mobility 2035, Mobility 2040 — scheduled for approval in 2015 — is right around the corner.

"Does that mean it will take us until 2035 to get these projects done?" Lamers asked. "Some of them will. But we're working on every [project] right now.

"Still, some float to the top and some fade off in the distance."

Ten years ago, all the projections pointed toward continued suburbanization, and that will still be a key part of growth, he said.

But over the last few years, the plans have been tweaked for greater growth in the urban centers, and in the emerging microeconomies that have started to pop up,

often along DART's light-rail lines. And there's more to come, with a particular focus on the TEX Rail project in Fort Worth and the Cotton Belt line in Dallas and Collin counties.

AT A GLANCE: Comment on Mobility 2035

To view the Mobility 2035 plan, go to nctcog.org/trans/mtp/2035/.

Until April 10, the public is invited to submit comments directly to NCTCOG.

Email: transinfo@nctcog.org

Fax: 817-640-3028

Phone: 817-695-9240

Mail: P.O. Box 5888, Arlington, Texas 76005

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Eric Foster 4 hours ago

Just imagine if people gave education the same level of planning and budgeting they do the highly profitable highway system?

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