

I-345 poised for fast-tracked study

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The future of Interstate 345 and a short-term study on the effects of tearing it down appear headed for Dallas City Hall.

But the fate of the elevated downtown highway could now also be tied to the future of the controversial planned toll road along the Trinity River.

State transportation officials said Thursday they plan to work with the City Council's Transportation and Trinity River Project Committee to study the feasibility of demolishing I-345. The inquiry would likely be finished far quicker than a decade-long, full-scale environmental impact analysis, Texas Department of Transportation spokesman Tony Hartzel said.

TxDOT said it will work with the council transportation committee to set the scope of the feasibility study. That includes deciding whether to look at potential economic development benefits and likely traffic complications.

But the chair of that Dallas council committee Thursday voiced staunch opposition to demolishing I-345 if the Trinity Parkway isn't built.

"There has be something to replace it and it is not surface streets," said Vonciel Jones Hill.

The Trinity project's fate currently hinges on receiving federal clearance -- and the city finding the \$1.5 billion needed to build it.

The North Texas Tollway Authority could finance the project, but it's too soon to tell whether that will happen.

"We're just not there," said NTTA spokesman Michael Rey.

Hill's comments came during a meeting of the Regional Transportation Council discussion about I-345. The RTC sets regional transportation policies and funnels several sources of government funding to area projects.

Its 43 members, including Hill, are appointed by area cities, counties and transportation agencies.

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