

Dallas council briefed on risk of Trinity toll road floods



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A 9-mile toll road proposed inside the Trinity River levees would extend about 535 feet into the floodway for much of its length and run right next to the river in some spots.

Dallas City Council members also learned during a presentation Monday that the road would include a “flood separation wall” that’s not even as high as the existing levees and would necessitate an evacuation plan in the event of a 100-year flood.

“This is the first time we got a sense of how far the road goes into the green space,” said council member Scott Griggs, a longtime critic of the plan. “And the flood wall only halfway up the levees — if you live near the levees you know why they’re as tall as they are.

“Now I am concerned about the safety of people using the road during storms.”

The revelations came Monday during a meeting of the City Council’s Transportation and Trinity Corridor Project Committee. The briefing by engineering firm HNTB was intended to bring the council up to speed on the Federal Highway Administration’s final environmental impact statement for a toll road that would connect Interstate 45/U.S. Highway 175 to the Interstate 35E/State Highway 183 interchange.

The city has been hoping since 1998 to build the reliever route, but it needs the highway authority’s approval for the \$1.5 billion toll road, as well as a sign-off from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which will release its own environmental impact statement Friday in advance of another council briefing.

HNTB vice president Dan Chapman sneaked a peek at that assessment Monday, when he told the council that the corps says it’s “technically sound to build the parkway in the floodway.” But he also reminded the council that the “no-build alternative” remains on the table.

That prompted council member Sheffie Kadane to wonder what happens to the unsold bonds from the 1998 election if that happens. Assistant City Manager Jill Jordan said the city could “do away with them” or use them to build another part of the Trinity River project, such as for recreation or environmental remediation.

Council member Philip Kingston, who, like Griggs, isn’t a member of the committee, brought the discussion back to the safety of drivers.

“I am just imagining myself in that SUV in heavy rains in the spring,” he said. “You think those flood separation walls will keep me safe?”

Chapman told him they’re at 100-year flood levels “plus 2 feet,” and that, combined with “very good forecasting,” should be enough to keep people safe. But if the walls do prove insufficient, he said, there would be an emergency plan in place.

Griggs said none of that makes him feel particularly safe, and after the meeting he pointed out that the toll road remains unfunded.

“It’ll be interesting to see what the NTTA and its bondholders feel about a road with those liabilities,” he said, “a road where cars could be washed away.”

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