



4-year redo of downtown Dallas' 'Horseshoe' highways is starting



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By TOM BENNING

Staff Writer

tbening@dallasnews.com

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Early work has begun on the so-called Horseshoe project, a four-year, \$800 million effort to fix parts of Interstates 30 and 35E in downtown Dallas.

But the 460,000 drivers who traverse Dallas' Mixmaster each day won't see major construction and accompanying congestion until late summer. And project managers hope traffic woes will be eased by a sequenced work plan and an incentive-laden contract.

That contract includes stiff penalties — around \$100,000 per hour — if the contractor closes too many lanes for too long during peak times.

"If the contractor wants to do that, he can," said Bill Hale, Dallas district engineer for the Texas Department of Transportation. "But he'll be penalized pretty heavily."

The Horseshoe project, named after the U-shape formed by the connection between the highways, has long been a priority for local leaders and TxDOT.

The driving factor behind their push is safety.

At a public meeting last week, TxDOT officials outlined the many problems associated with the interstate bridges over the Trinity River. There's been a "patchwork quilt of repairs" on the I-30 bridge, project manager Duane Milligan said, and there's a spot on the I-35E bridge where daylight is visible through a gap in the road surface.

"It's not a good thing," Milligan said, as a crowd at Cliff Temple Baptist Church in Oak Cliff chuckled in disbelief.

But TxDOT is also looking to upgrade the flow of traffic through the Mixmaster, one of the most congested spots in Texas.

Hale described how the number of lanes currently decreases as the roads get closer to downtown. Traveling east toward Dallas, for example, I-30 shrinks from eight lanes across to just six on the interstate bridge.

The TxDOT engineer said it's especially unusual that drivers have to use a city street to connect from northbound I-35E to westbound I-30 or from eastbound I-30 to southbound I-35E.

"That's about the only place in the nation where you have two interstates crossing, where you have to do that number," he said. "This will straighten that out."

The new configuration, slated to be finished by spring 2017, will be 23 lanes wide where the interstates connect under the Jefferson Boulevard Viaduct. All the lanes will be free, although HOV lanes within the project area will eventually connect to tolled managed lanes.

And thanks to the Dallas City Council — and a \$5 million gift from the Trinity Trust Foundation — the new I-30 bridge will include Santiago Calatrava-designed spans. Those elements, named for Dallas philanthropist Margaret McDermott, will handle bike and pedestrian traffic.

The I-35E bridges, however, will be a more conventional design.

The work — awarded in November to Pegasus Link Constructors, a partnership between Balfour Beatty Infrastructure and Fluor Enterprises — is initially focusing on test shafts for the new bridges across the Trinity.

Major construction will begin later this year on new bridges outside the roads' current footprint. That will allow traffic to be diverted in shifts, so the same number of lanes now available will mostly remain throughout the project's lifetime.

"Our goal is to minimize the impact for the traveling public," said Adrienne Williams, a Pegasus Link Constructors spokeswoman.

Much of the work will be done at night and during other off-peak hours. Monetary penalties, such as the \$100,000-per-hour fine, will be assessed if too much construction occurs in daylight or during special events.

The contractors have created a website about the project: dallashorseshoe.com.

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