

Dallas North Tollway to get additional lanes, new turnpike interchange

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Additional lanes are coming for one of North Texas' most traveled corridors — and one of its most loathed overpasses.

By 2017, the North Texas Tollway Authority plans to add a fourth lane in each direction of Dallas North Tollway from Addison and North Dallas to Frisco. It also will add some lanes and partially redo the tollway's interchange with Bush Turnpike.

About 145,000 people use the north-south corridor every day in North Dallas and through Collin County, according to the average daily traffic count at the Parker Road toll gantry.

Dan Ting of Prosper said an extra lane on the stretch of about 9.5 miles is welcome, though he fears its potential relief may be short-lived.

"That'll certainly help, but I don't know how long before it just becomes gridlocked again," he said.

The \$250 million expansion and redesign is the agency's largest project on the tollway since it opened the northern extension from Gaylord Parkway in Frisco to U.S. Highway 380 in Prosper in 2007. The widening and interchange redesign currently is in the design phase.

The project also includes some restriping and the moving of streetlights from Belt Line Road to LBJ Freeway.

Construction will begin next year.

The flyover bridges that connect the tollway and the turnpike along the Dallas-Collin County line are typically packed with idling cars at rush hour. Drivers jockey for any inch they can get as those trying to use the tollway, the turnpike and Park Boulevard all converge. Traffic backs up on all of the overpasses as drivers weave in and around each other in tight spaces.

"People are very aggressive drivers at times," Ting said. "Instead of doing the weave and letting every other car go, there are people that are gunning it."

'Really tough merge'

NTTA isn't planning a complete overhaul of the interchange's bridges. The agency will focus on the connectors on the north side of the turnpike. It will add one lane to the connection from the southbound tollway to both directions of the turnpike. It will also add a lane on the bridge that connects both directions of the turnpike to the northbound tollway.

Currently, east and westbound Bush Turnpike drivers have to merge into a single lane to get onto the northbound tollway.

"It's a really tough merge there," said NTTA spokesman Michael Rey. "You've got two tollway lanes coming together essentially, and it gets backed up on the ramp."

Compounding that problem is the nearby exit for Park Boulevard. Turnpike drivers merging onto the northbound tollway immediately then have to weave around tollway motorists exiting for Park, a major east-west thoroughfare in Plano. Likewise, drivers entering the southbound tollway from Park get on in the same place where tollway drivers are trying to exit for the turnpike.

Ken Cross, a freelance writer in Frisco, avoids that area as much as possible — especially as he teaches his 15-year-old son how to drive.

"I'm not taking him down there until he's been driving for a while," he said. "It's no place for an amateur."

Meetings on the way

The additional space on the tollway from Addison to the turnpike will require reconfiguration of current lanes and shoulders. The agency has little room to physically expand in that area. But the additional lanes, changes to the turnpike interchange and reconfiguration of the access points to Park likely will require some additional land on the northern portion of the project.

NTTA hasn't released a final list of property that could be affected. But agency records identify at least four parcels of which it may need portions. Those include a Costco and a car dealership on the west side of the tollway.

"It's been described to me as slivers of land for the roadway," Rey said.

The agency is planning an open house aimed at local businesses from 2 to 4 p.m. Thursday at agency headquarters. Rey said meetings for drivers and residents will soon follow.

Building ahead

Cross and Ting said the redesign of the tollway-turnpike interchange should help, but questioned why it was designed in its current form in the first place.

"It's a bottleneck that's just waiting to happen, and it does pretty much every day," Cross said.

Ting, the driver from Prosper, said the state's expected population boom will outpace its ability to add road miles as the only solution to congestion. His comments echoed statements that Joe Weber, the new executive director of the Texas Department of Transportation, made last week.

Ting said NTTA should build for such expansions ahead of time.

"From a financial stewardship, I would hope that the tollway authority would kind of design things with more long-range plans so there's not this constant construction," he said.

Rey said the agency builds projects based on demand and available construction funds.

"We build what we can afford to build with widening in the future in mind, and now it's time for that," he said.

Staff writers Christy Robinson and Avi Selk contributed to this report.

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