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Work begins on massive Horseshoe project to rebuild downtown Dallas freeways



By Tom Benning

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

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

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

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

The Horseshoe project, named after the U-shape formed by the connection between the highways, has long been a priority for both Texas Department of Transportation officials and local leaders. And the driving factor behind that push is safety.

TxDOT officials outlined Tuesday at a public meeting the myriad problems with the interstate bridges over the Trinity River. That included what project manager Duane Milligan described as a “patchwork quilt of repairs” on I-30 and a spot on I-35E where daylight is visible through a gap in the road.

“It’s not a good thing,” Milligan said, as the 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.

Bill Hale, the department’s district engineer, described how the area is rare in having the number of lanes decrease as the roads get closer to downtown. He said it’s especially unusual that drivers have use a city street, for instance, to connect from northbound I-35E to westbound I-30.

“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. And thanks to the Dallas City Council, the project will include [Santiago Calatrava-designed spans on the new I-30 bridge](#).

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 the same number of lanes currently available will remain mostly open throughout the project’s lifetime.

Much of the work will be done at night and during off-peak hours, and monetary penalties be assessed if too much construction occurs in daylight or during special events. To keep drivers informed, the contractors will soon launch a project website at dallashorseshoe.com.

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