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Editorial: A better highway plan for South Dallas

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Highway construction in urban areas rarely works out simply or cheaply, a point underscored by the project to redesign S.M. Wright Freeway in South Dallas and create a bypass directly linking Interstate 45 and U.S. Highway 175. This project, years in the planning, has provoked several contentious public hearings.

Officials have had to maintain a thick skin amid criticism and complaints, yet they've remained responsive. Dallas City Council member Carolyn Davis deserves special praise for listening to public concerns and working out a solution with Texas Department of Transportation officials.

A particular worry for residents was the proposed elimination of an I-45 exit ramp at Pennsylvania Avenue and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. The original plan would have been cheaper and far easier for TxDOT to execute, but it posed lots of extra inconveniences for South Dallas residents. It also raised the specter that two landmark South Dallas streets would be reduced in stature and that business opportunities would dry up.

That might not seem like a big deal to readers outside of South Dallas, but every such decision carries enormous, amplified importance, particularly in an area badly disfigured by S.M. Wright's construction in the late 1950s.

The freeway's redesign as a business-friendly boulevard has raised residents' hopes for recovery. The Pennsylvania-MLK exit ramp off nearby I-45 is integral because it would funnel motorists to Fair Park and the heart of a planned new commercial district.

Some might balk at the \$20 million extra expense to implement the modification worked out between Davis and TxDOT officials. This newspaper believes the expense is more than justified.

First, the five decades of damage inflicted on South Dallas with S.M. Wright's original construction was far in excess of \$20 million. It split a community in two, helped spark a mass exodus and created an island of despair for residents sandwiched between South Lamar Street and S.M. Wright. Property values plummeted.

South Dallas residents are long overdue a little extra expense to help repair some of that damage.

The North Central Texas Council of Governments has already applied for a federal grant to cover those costs.

Second, such design modifications are hardly new. Consider a similar extended-exit ramp design on Central Expressway at Northwest Highway that gives motorists access to Park Lane and NorthPark mall. Yes, it meant millions of dollars in extra construction expenses. Was the extra expense worth it? Absolutely.

Had highway officials been equally thoughtful about exit ramps off Interstate 20 to feed traffic into Southwest Center Mall, that Redbird property probably wouldn't face the severe troubles it has today.

Such decisions can have major long-term implications for a community. Davis and TxDOT officials listened to public concerns and huddled to find a workable solution. That's an example of responsive government at its best.

READ previous commentary on Dallas' north-south gap.

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Glorias Dixon 2 days ago

My question would be why would it cost \$20 million to enhance an EXISTING exit ramp. You may want to check TxDOT bid process. Something sounds fishy. This is also the northbound exit to Fair Park and should be a vital access for the Trinity Parkway development (whenever that happens).

Reply

0



Gregg Welpé 2 days ago

This is a wise investment for our city, the future taxes generated will more than pay for this modification to TxDOT's original plans. The community must be included if this is going to work for the benefit of the people!

Reply

+1



Randy McDonald 2 days ago

\$20 million is nothing to a black councilwoman and apparently to the DMN. Sure glad you aren't paying it.

Reply

[3 replies](#)

-3



T 2 days ago

It's easier just to repost what Mr. Hardt told you a few days ago:

If you don't live in Dallas Randy, keep your tea party, right wing racist GOP mouth shut! This has nothing to do with race, it's a difficult freeway interchange that causes headaches for everyone who drives on it.

Reply

+2



Bill Betzen 2 days ago

If that type planning and investment had been made 40 years ago for I-20 at Westmoreland and Southwest Center Mall many times \$20,000,000 would have been generated since then in additional sales tax revenue at the Mall. We must plan forward.

Reply

[1 reply](#)

+3



T 2 days ago

Saw you on the news a couple of weeks ago Mr. Betzen...keep fighting the good fight.

Reply

0



Raymond Crawford 3 days ago

I have found Carolyn Davis to be the best advocate for her constituents even when others did not always agree with her methods of achieving the goal. She deserves all of the great recognition for solving the many problems on this complicated issue. Congratulations!

Reply

+2

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