

Garland is more invested in LBJ project this time

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Garland has shown patience in its wait for the Interstate 635 East project, but it wants every access road, exit, frontage and sound wall upgrade that others will see.

LBJ Freeway's second-largest city will be the last to realize improvements from the rebuild across northern Dallas County. Garland's curve of the freeway makes for weird intersections with both north-south and east-west arterial streets — and is a further challenge because of what some believe is the most regrettable decision in the history of the city.

Garland didn't want LBJ Freeway a half-century ago but desperately needs it today.

"The LBJ East project is essential to the growth and redevelopment of our city," Garland Mayor Douglas Athas said. "The city of Garland has the largest industrial base outside of Dallas in Dallas County. If LBJ isn't developed, businesses will lose money and time. And we can't expect them to expand."

LBJ East brought U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx; U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson of Dallas; state transportation commissioner Jeff Austin; John Barton, deputy executive director and chief engineer for the Texas Department of Transportation; and others to Garland in April.

"The city doesn't have the \$1.5 or \$2 billion or how many billion it's going to cost to rebuild, and we also don't have the jurisdiction," said Paul Luedtke, Garland's transportation engineer. "What we can do is try to bring together the coalition of people that are going to be necessary to build it."

Garland staged its Centerville Marketplace area as the backdrop for the visit. At Centerville Marketplace, the city says, \$10 million in LBJ Freeway frontage road work has created \$26.5 million in private-sector investment.

Instead of a \$1.5 billion commitment, though, the officials talked about the LBJ East corridor as evidence that transportation funding needed to be fixed.

"You have a good story," Foxx said. "But the planned LBJ East project can't be more than a plan right now. Unless we change the way we pay for projects at the federal level, the money just isn't there."

While it is a valued partner in the political coalition, what hangs in the balance for Mesquite is minimal in comparison with Dallas and Garland. That's because of the freeway's history. Mesquite welcomed I-635 and wound up with 11 exits and a mall. Garland in the 1960s was not so welcoming. LBJ Freeway today reflects the outcome.

"We ended up with, essentially, no frontage road," Luedtke said. "That's probably the biggest issue/problem."

The I-635 tale of two cities continued in the early portion of the 21st century when Mesquite put itself ahead of all of northern Dallas County to get its LBJ upgrades finished first.

The Texas Department of Transportation unveiled its plan to upgrade Interstate 635 from Luna Road in Dallas to U.S. Highway 80 in Mesquite two decades ago.

Mesquite jumped to the front of the line by contributing \$9.3 cost through an arrangement involving the city, its Quality of Life Corp., Dallas County, the state's infrastructure bank and the Towne Centre tax-increment finance zone. TxDOT was then able to redo the area from Interstate 30 to U.S. Highway 80 a decade earlier than it would have on its own.

Nearly five years ago, by the time ground broke in North Dallas, Mesquite's \$50.2 million upgrade was completed. It increased the traffic

capacity and access to the city's retail center, Town East Mall.

So when TxDOT came to Mesquite City Hall earlier this month to update the council on the I-635 East project, the discussion focused on how to use TEXpress and Express/HOV lanes. Garland sees those as amenities, rather than a centerpiece asset.

"The frontage roads are the most important things from the Garland perspective," Luedtke said. "That's what's going to bring the retail and the mobility."

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10 hours ago

There must have been some idiots running the city of Garland back then if they didn't want LBJ then

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Bushwood Smithie

9 hours ago

Same mindset as those who want to tear down I-345.

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Randell Weatherall

8 hours ago

No, totally different.

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1DaIM

10 minutes ago

I like how Mesquite is held up as the big winner here.

Wonder how much development is going on in Mesquite today? Let's check the City's Planning and Zoning Commission agenda this month:

http://www.cityofmesquite.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/06092014-144

hmmm... not too busy...

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RVBill

2 hours ago

Garland ruined itself in the early 80's by letting DART in they should have been more like Mesquite and kept them out. They also should have kept the water park and expanded that area as an entertainment district instead of car lots...

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hockjeyinveins .

9 hours ago

So what does Garland expect the city to do ? Pay for its 50 year old mistake?

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