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Architects: Building Trinity Tollway would pass a mess to our grandkids

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As architects, leaders and volunteers, we have had the privilege of being involved in numerous planning initiatives addressing issues that are shaping Dallas — transportation, urban form, land use, preservation, open space and the arts. It is gratifying to view the great progress our community has made in these areas, offering citizens and visitors a more livable and sustainable Dallas than could have been imagined a few short years ago.

This list of accomplishments is long and includes the nation's largest light-rail system, a spectacular collection of downtown parks, soaring bridges, an Arts District without peer, an increasingly vibrant downtown and a renewed West Dallas.

Importantly, there is a communitywide consensus that we still have far to go, accompanied by a communitywide commitment to get there. Conversations about our city are occurring every day in our newspapers, magazines, airwaves and blogs. Forums at museums and universities are packed with involved citizens. And programs such as the City Design Studio and the Connected City are providing cutting-edge tools, expertise and vision to address our urban challenges.

It is important that we take a fresh look at our transportation planning. With the rate of growth expected, solutions exclusively reliant on adding lanes to existing highways, or building highways, can be sorely inadequate for, or even counterproductive to, achieving the great city we all seek.

Dallas has only recently benefited from this more expansive vision for one such highway, building the marvelous Klyde Warren Park over the canyon of Woodall Rodgers. And we are about to undo a past mistake with the conversion of high-speed, unsafe S.M. Wright Freeway into a landscaped boulevard, beginning a long-overdue repair of the damage wreaked on a once-cohesive South Dallas neighborhood by driving a highway through its heart.

Why would we now consider building the Trinity Tollway, another city-splitting barrier, one that our grandchildren will probably have to mitigate in 30 years? It is also a mistake to dismiss out of hand, as some do, the transformation that could occur by removing the aging, ponderous Interstate 345, which divides East Dallas from downtown, leaving a barren no-man's land beneath its girders.

We recognize that Dallas must provide a variety of affordable means to get to work, shop, play and learn. But this mobility is only one aspect of a successful city and can be achieved in many ways. Its achievement must be accomplished without diminishing other qualities that make for successful cities, including walkable, connected neighborhoods and accessible, usable parks. Mobility solutions must be based on the approaches of the future, relying on fine-grained, integrated transportation systems that support neighborhoods, open space, diversity and choice.

Fortunately, if highways are considered not as singular entities but as part of a larger network, the number of smart options available to address our city's required transportation capacity greatly increases. Innovative and pragmatic solutions proven to be successful in other cities can be considered that reduce the need for more highways, such as intelligent distribution of traffic to multiple smaller roads, expansion of pedestrian and bike ways, and rethinking city policies of urban form, density and land use.

We are optimistic. Because of the unsettled status of the highways surrounding our urban core, Dallas is presented with a rare opportunity — the chance to step back and consider how our mobility needs may best be addressed, not one roadway at a time but with a unified, comprehensive approach to our transportation needs of today and tomorrow.

To seize this opportunity, we recommend the following. First, abandon the Trinity Tollway as a poorly located, inappropriate measure from earlier times. Second, move ahead with the repairs necessary to keep I-345 safe and usable for the next few years, and no more.

And most important, commence a communitywide initiative to develop innovative approaches to mobility that enhance achievement of other goals of livability, social equity and environmental protection. This must involve a wide array of stakeholders — governments, civic organizations and professional groups, to be sure — but also citizens from all walks of the diverse life that is Dallas today.

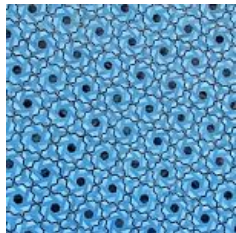
Dallas has accomplished much by looking to the future with innovation and vision. Let's not stop now by grasping at transportation solutions from the past.

We are joined in this thinking by many of our colleagues, including Myriam E. Camargo, Duncan Fulton III, FAIA; Larry Good, FAIA; Robert Meckfessel, FAIA; Marcel Quimby, FAIA; Craig Reynolds, FAIA; Dennis Stacy, FAIA.

Betsy del Monte, Tip Housewright and Bryce Weigand are fellows of the American Institute of Architects. Their email addresses are bdelmonte@transform-global.org, housewright@omniplan.com and bryce.weigand@gmail.com.

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Why is the city of Dallas so against a Rail system.... everytime i travel to the east coast I'm amazed at how a suitable rail and bus system provides an easy way to navigate the city. The money that we pour into these highways are ridiculous!!!