

County pins down I-35E funding

Design for highway expansion advances

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It's another step in the long process of the Interstate 35E expansion, but Denton County officials are heralding it as one of the biggest.

After years of meetings and work with committees and the public and back again, officials have settled on the way to fund both phases of the \$1.4 billion highway expansion.

On Tuesday, the Commissioners Court passed a resolution approving the funding strategy for the long-awaited I-35E expansion project. As part of that process, the Texas Department of Transportation presented commissioners with a ceremonial check for \$1.4 billion.

"This is a very historic day, not only for Denton County but for North Texas, that we're able to see the 35 expansion become a reality," said Commissioner Andy Eads, who has been at the center of the expansion work for years.

The plan is to add general-purpose lanes, managed toll lanes and frontage road improvements from Interstate 635 in Dallas County to U.S. Highway 380 in Denton County, a distance of about 28.2 miles.

The existing lanes of the highway will remain free. Phase 1 of the project will add an additional free lane each way from State Highway 121 to U.S. 380, as well as two reversible managed lanes from I-635 to an area around Swisher and Turbeville roads. Phase 1 also includes the expansion of the Lewisville Lake Bridge.

Funding for the project will be a joint effort between TxDOT, the Regional Transportation Council and multiple regional partners.

Eads said that in recent weeks, officials have added a variety of additional components to the projects, including improvements to intersections along the roadway. Funding for the work has been identified, which allows officials to expand the I-35E project from a basic design to a more advanced one, he said.

"These were options that were part of the original bid [from] the contractor and we wanted to be able to maximize the prices now, because construction will be cheaper now than in the future," Eads said. "It helps the whole project function better by improving all intersections while we do Phase 1, from a technical and mobility standpoint."

Additional options for the project include the I-635 interchange; Belt Line Road main lane improvements; the Dickerson Parkway interchange; the Corinth Parkway interchange; collector-distributor roads in the Highway 121/Bush Turnpike area; direct connector ramps between I-35E and Highway 121 on the north side; and the Post Oak Drive interchange.

Project construction will be done by AGL Constructors, a consortium that includes Archer Western Contractors LLC, Granite Construction Co. and Lane Construction Corp.

Eads said the contractor will soon set up a website for the public where residents can register to receive e-mail updates on construction progress and traffic alerts so they can plan travel around any closed roads or ramps or anticipated delays.

Denton County transportation consultant John Polster said he feels the project, which will begin on or before Aug. 29, will meet its 2016 completion goal.

"We have had many technical meetings with them [AGL], traffic control meetings to ensure they know what our expectations are, and we know what they need to get the project done in a timely manner," Polster said. "With that level of commitment and with AGL staying in touch with the locals, we have a high confidence level this will go well."

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