

## DFW Connector dedicated

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**GRAPEVINE** — In 2009, state and local officials were facing tough choices on the massive 8-mile [DFW Connector](#) project that was designed to ease congestion for commuters just north of DFW Airport.

They were facing the prospect of scaling back the ambitious \$1.1 billion project before they received help from the federal government.

Without \$260 million in federal Recovery Act money, the project wouldn't have been able to move forward as it was planned back in 2009. It is the largest amount of stimulus dollars spent on a single transportation project in the nation.

"We saw this as an opportunity to invest in a major project where people were supportive of it, where you could improve safety and minimize congestion," said Federal Highway Administrator Victor Mendez. "If you recall, when we made those choices, the economy was really battered. We wanted to get people back to work now, not later."

During the height of construction in 2011 and 2012, more than 800 workers were on site, officials have said.

On Wednesday, local, state and federal officials celebrated the completion of the project less than four years after the contractor was hired and about nine months ahead of schedule.

The project includes a combination of new free lanes, frontage roads and toll lanes in the median along with significant improvements to the north entrance of Dallas/Fort Worth Airport.

At its widest point, just north of the DFW Airport north entrance, it is 24 lanes wide. While the DFW Connector is essentially complete, minor road and signage work will continue into early fall. The toll lane equipment won't be installed until early next year, and the tollway will cost drivers about 16 cents a mile to use, said Tony Hartzel, spokesman for the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).

TxDOT will also install green-and-white signs with an airplane symbol to ease confusion for drivers coming toward the airport from westbound LBJ Freeway and exiting onto southbound 121 into the north entrance of the airport, Hartzel said.

### The funnel

Before the massive DFW Connector project was undertaken, the section of State Highway 114 and 121 north of the airport was dubbed "the funnel" for the way cars were squeezed as they made their way through the area.

"That was because everything was funneled down into eight lanes and you're looking at the coming together of four counties that have current populations of a little over 5 million people," said Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley. "Now, we call it the connector because hopefully we have removed that funnel part of it for at least a number of years into the future."

Besides the stimulus dollars, much of the project's cost was funded by state gas tax revenue of about \$667 million and another \$107 million from state bond funds from voter-approved Proposition 14.

While the project was viewed as much-needed relief for the area, Grapevine Mayor William D. Tate sounded a cautionary note Wednesday.

Businesses, such as TGI Friday's, Grandy's, KFC, Luby's Cafeteria and Wendy's, closed while construction was under way and other Grapevine businesses are still struggling to hang on.

Tate also told the audience that with the DFW area's population expected to double over the next 30 years, it cannot rely on road projects alone to solve congestion.

"We can beat on our chest today and celebrate. but if we don't change our lifestyle, we'll be back here very soon, sooner than we expect," Tate said. "To borrow a backwoods phrase, we'll be up a creek without paddle."

### Lifestyle change

Grapevine has been working with the Fort Worth Transportation Authority to bring a TEX Rail commuter line to Grapevine by late 2017. Tate said Wednesday it cannot come soon enough.

"The city of Grapevine has done its part," Tate said. "For the last several years, we have contributed more money to TEX Rail than any other

city. Next year, it will be \$8.8 million. We need to perhaps even look at incentives. We've got to have a lifestyle change because none of us can afford to do it again."

A new federal study that came out this week shows that Texas had the second-busiest highways of any state behind California; but since 2007 the vehicle miles traveled have consistently dropped, according to the Texas Transportation Institute.

Mendez, the federal highway administrator, said the U.S. Department of Transportation believes mass transit and improving livability are important issues. But it is also up to local government to decide how to spend federal transportation dollars.

"It's a matter of local communities deciding how they adjust and adapt to today's changing world," Mendez said.

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