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## Transportation

# Dallas council vote favors smaller Trinity road

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The Dallas City Council on Wednesday further signaled its preference for a smaller, less intrusive road inside the Trinity River levees, voting unanimously to restrict the future use of \$47.7 million in city bond money to a project of no more than four lanes.

The vote does not preclude the construction of the much larger toll road that has long been contemplated along the river, and the city will continue to pursue federal approval of that larger project. But it's evidence, Mayor Mike Rawlings said, of a growing sentiment among elected officials that smaller is better.

“We are finding common ground here that a four-lane road is the best alternative and we can do that work without upsetting the outcome in Washington,” Rawlings said, referring to the pending approval of the larger Trinity Parkway.

The unanimous vote — a rarity on almost any question involving the Trinity toll road — came on a proposal made by freshman council member Adam McGough. It said the bond money should be spent on park development, flood control and lakes along the river and for a road of no larger than four lanes.

## Parkway proposal

The Trinity roadway would roughly parallel Interstate 35E near downtown Dallas. The road would run inside the Trinity River levees for much of the way and could flood in extreme storms.



SOURCES: North Texas Tollway Authority; Texas Department of Transportation; Regional Transportation Council; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

File Graphic

That's in keeping with the recommendation of a "dream team" of design experts, who called in April for a meandering road that would serve primarily to provide access to a downtown park along the river. At the time, the council generally agreed with the suggestion but voted to continue seeking federal approval for the larger road — 6 to 10 lanes — known as Alternative 3C.

Proponents of that course of action said they didn't want to disrupt the approval process but favored the smaller version, at least as a first phase. Opponents of the larger toll road expressed skepticism, saying that what would get ultimately built would be the largest road permissible.

The money at stake in Wednesday's vote represents a small fraction of the cost of either roadway. Alternative 3C's price tag, for example, is estimated at \$1.3 billion. Still, by saying that it wants to spend its relatively small portion on a four-lane road, the council seemed to provide clear direction to city staff members working on the Trinity project.

It was the first voting meeting of the council since six new members were sworn in. Opponents of Alternative 3C picked up seats in spring elections, perhaps putting them within a vote of a majority on the issue. They initially sought to direct the bond money away from a road or lakes entirely and use it all for flood control.

Others, however, argued that halting financing for the lakes would kill any progress toward recreational development. Work is expected to begin on a small version of the lakes near downtown within a year. The excavated dirt will be used to build a bench for the road.

McGough, Rawlings' former chief of staff, proposed his compromise, saying the council had "a moment of agreement" around a four-lane road and park.

Craig Holcomb, director of the nonprofit Trinity Commons Foundation, said he hoped Wednesday's council unity would encourage governmental entities and private donors to support the park and roadway.

“It’s not controversial anymore,” he said. “This vote says, ‘We want four lanes and our money can only be spent on four lanes.’”

Council member Philip Kingston, a prominent foe of a large road, called the solution “a fantastic outcome.”

“This is not the best outcome for people who are opposed to a destructive thoroughfare through the park,” he said. “It’s not the best outcome for people who are wanting a large reliever road through the park. It is a compromise.”

Staff members reassured council members that the move shouldn’t affect approvals already granted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a roadway, lake excavation and park development.

Assistant City Manager Mark McDaniel said the bench for the road would stay the same, regardless of how many lanes were built.

Wednesday’s vote did not address the road’s speed, general design or tolls. Evaluating such questions and bringing suggestions back to the council is the staff’s focus now, he said.

The Regional Transportation Council on Thursday will discuss plans to pay for more detailed schematics, design guidelines and a computer-generated video of the dream team’s recommended version of the road. That will likely be used to get federal approval to move forward on the first phase of construction.

The RTC sets transportation policy for the North Central Texas Council of Governments, which steers federal money to local projects. The RTC has agreed to spend up to \$85 million to design the Trinity road project. More than \$31 million has been spent.

Michael Morris, transportation director for the council of governments, said the schematics and video would likely cost about \$1 million. He said federal agencies would want to see design details before approving or rejecting any proposed changes to the road.

*Staff writer Brandon Formby contributed to this report.*

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10 days ago

Be careful, DMN. That graphic makes it a little too obvious that the road is completely redundant. Better remove Riverfront from the map before your handlers give you an earful.

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**Sean Mahoney**

10 days ago

The bench stays the same, so it doesn't really matter what road gets built. The big concrete barricade will still exist, no matter the pretty pictures they keep drawing. Better to just leave it be.

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**J Dallas**

10 days ago

Right on. Leave it be and spend available funds on flood control. Improving the levees where needed and shat like that.

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**Julio Alvarez**

10 days ago

Look, Riverfront Blvd. is essentially the same exact route as the planned toll road. Why not just extend it further south, and remodel and upgrade