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George Battle III: Why tearing down I-345 matters to South Dallas — and the rest of the city

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By **GEORGE BATTLE III**

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Residents of greater Dallas might not all understand the history of Interstate 345, the southernmost extension of Central Expressway that separates East and South Dallas from the central business district. South Dallas residents, however, know it all too well.

The I-345 elevated highway is but one example of interstate bypasses — others include Interstates 30, 35 and 45 and U.S. 175, built to link Texarkana to Fort Worth and Shreveport to Denton — that eventually destroyed many historic African-American neighborhoods. These highways cut off neighborhoods from downtown, displaced homes and businesses, and severed the social and economic fabric that bonds communities together.

I-345 tore up neighborhoods and displaced people, homes and businesses from the old Elm Thicket neighborhood to State-Thomas to Deep Ellum and into South Dallas proper — once the epicenter of black business and culture. Before I-345, African-Americans felt connected to these communities. They could walk or take streetcars, trains, city buses or cars in these neighborhoods, which made them all the richer — if not in wealth, then in vitality.

As Dallas grew north, west, east and south, and whites traded urban for suburban, African-Americans were officially segregated, or redlined, to remain in the central city. To make it easier for the white population to travel between suburbia and downtown, where most of the jobs still were, these freeways were built through black Dallas, slicing and dicing neighborhoods. Central Expressway was one of the first examples.

Since the last of those highways was built, black neighborhoods have lost much of their population. Those who could afford to leave took businesses, job opportunities and the stepladder of opportunity with them. Then came decades of decay and disinvestment.

This is why I-345 matters to South Dallas. It's why I-345 should matter to all of Dallas. For the first time in Dallas' history, we have local, private developers and other professionals joining residents in standing up against the old Dallas way of doing business. Each of these groups has its own reasons for wanting to see I-345 and U.S. 175 come down and I-30 rerouted, but the common theme is that Dallas residents should determine their own fate on any economic development projects affecting Dallas neighborhoods.

I-345 matters to South Dallas because bringing these elevated highways to grade would finally do justice in putting economic development power back into the hands of local community leaders who are working to revitalize their neighborhoods.

I mean leaders such as the Rev. Richie Butler from St. Paul United Methodist Church, Terry Flowers from the St. Philip's Neighborhood Development Corp., the Rev. Chris Simmons of Cornerstone Baptist Church and the Rev. Michael Bowie of St. Luke Community United Methodist.

Ralph Hawkins, HKS Architects CEO and chairman of the Dallas Regional Chamber, last year [wrote a column](#) asking not just Dallasites but the entire region to see the urban core not for the way it is but for the potential it holds as it stretches from the medical district to Fair Park.

We who are advocating for I-345 to be razed and replaced with bustling urban boulevards do so in support of the efforts of neighborhood community leaders.

I-345 matters to South Dallas, and specifically to black Dallas, because it brings justice to neighborhoods and a community of people historically neglected, displaced and long cheated of opportunity, by bringing economic development southward. If only the flow of vitality would not be blocked or paved over by and for the few.

George Battle III, connection director for the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, is among those leading a political action committee that backs Dallas City Council candidates in support of tearing down Interstate 345. Reach him at george.battleiii@gmail.com.



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Matt Preisz

21 hours ago

The surface street grid of 16-24 lanes can more than handle the local traffic from the 8 lanes of I-345. The non-local traffic will use the many loop highways that bypass the city core. The increased traffic on the grid will bring back the businesses that were once present in the area of I-345 before it was built. This will increase property values and tax revenue, reduce urban blight, and reconnect Dallas's neighborhoods resulting in a more walkable/livable city.

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0 0



BobBarker477

4 days ago

If Dallas did this how would we know where the bad parts of town are?

Reply [Share](#)

0 0



Marty Martinez

4 days ago

I support the removal of I-345!

Reply Share

2 0



Anonymous

5 days ago

Perhaps we should investigate backfilling the entire Trinity River floodplain to reunite areas that were separated when it was rerouted and the levees built!

Reply Share

1 3



Slim Whitman

5 days ago

I disagree with Mike often it seems. However, he is right on here.

Before we even begin to get excited about removing/repurposing 345 we need some answers.

1. How much will it cost really? Patrick Kennedy's absurd notion that it can be done for \$90/\$100 million is BS and everyone knows it including him. To be fair I haven't seen PK or any of his buddies throw those numbers around in a good while so it's safe to say they've back off from them.

2. Where will displaced traffic go? PK and other's notion that drivers, "will adjust" simply isn't good enough.

3. What would be the opportunity costs and benefits of repair versus removal and repurposing?

- What can be done to improve the area if 345 is repaired in place?

-How much economic benefit will the area really see if 345 is removed?

Reply Share 1 reply

1 6



Jesse Smith

3 days ago

Here's a description of how the traffic will be displaced:

<http://streetsmart.dmagazine.com/2015/03/19/the-accommodation-of-the-grid/>. As for the cost, the one figure we do know is that if it's not taken down, TxDOT will spend \$240M to repair I-345. The cost of replacing it with blvds is probably dependent on the designs, but even if it's double or triple what PK has said, it's well worth the investment. The cost of replacement vs. repair is a wash or close to it, but the benefits are not. We know what the elevated highway option looks like and I don't think there's anything to change the fact that ppl don't want to live or play next to an elevated highway and also that an elevated highway depresses property values. With the replace option, you'll have more investment, more housing, more density, more parks, more activity on the streets, less empty lots and less parking lots, and overall a more desirable place to live and visit, and an overall increase in property values and tax revenues.

Reply Share

2 0



P.t. Moore

5 days ago

Unless there is a comprehensive plan to deal with the traffic that uses this road you will never get enough support to tear it down. It is part of the regional transportation network and every community has to deal with highways in order to have a transportation system. Building the interstate highway system was disruptive to many communities but ultimately it was necessary for the country to grow and prosper.

Reply Share

1 6



Horn

6 days ago

The truth is, the areas adjacent to South Central Expressway (now S.M. Wright Freeway, which is the flash point of the "freeways as racial divider" meme) were majority white when construction began in the early 1950s.

See the last page (302): <http://www.dfwfreeways.com/QuickView/Ex175?startOdd=True>

Funny how the Dallas Morning News doesn't point that out, even though it did in the early 1950s.

Reply Share 0 0



Zack Hall

6 days ago

Amen! Tear it down!

Reply Share 6 2



Bug Menot

6 days ago

Tearing down I-345 is a stupid idea promoted by the DMN to get clicks.

Reply Share 1 reply 2 10



OxBowIncident

5 days ago

I suppose you could say that about everything on this site.

Sports" is a stupid idea promoted by the DMN to get clicks."

Reply Share 2 0



Cheree Cargill

6 days ago

The question I've never, ever seen answered is -- where is all that traffic going to go if I345 is torn down? It doesn't take much for gridlock to take over the surface streets in the city core. Just this past week there was a fatal accident that shut down 35E during morning rush hour. It backed traffic up in all directions for miles around. Where did those drivers go? Off the highways to try to route around the back up by taking to the narrow streets in downtown. I was stuck in the middle of it trying to get to work in Uptown. And all those proposed "wide, bustling avenues" that are supposed to handle the traffic load? What's going to get torn down so they can be built? How many homes demolished and families displaced? No, for the time being, I345 is a necessary traffic route through Dallas.

Reply Share 3 replies 4 8



Jesse Smith

6 days ago

It's a good question Cheree. Here's what I've found from the information out there. Fifty percent or more of the traffic on I-345 is interstate or regional traffic and that traffic will have to drive around the city using I-20 and 635. I-345 will be replaced with multiple blvds that will allow the rest of the traffic to take more direct routes to their destinations. The shut down on I-35E isn't an apples to apples comparison because commuters didn't know about it and weren't able to adjust and more importantly because it has more traffic and isn't the problem. It's the elevated highways that cut through the city's core that are the problem and I-345 has been especially destructive.

Reply Share 2 replies 8 1



Cheree Cargill

5 days ago

The best solution I can see for the through interstate traffic is to build a dedicated freeway that does not skirt downtown Dallas (and I would imagine downtown Fort Worth as well). Probably a mid-cities route through Grand Prairie, although there you have the problem again of demolishing businesses and homes to build it. Perhaps Rick Perry's Trans-Texas Corridor had merit after all. Any way you figure it, traffic in North Texas is a nightmare.

Reply Share 1 0



Matt Preisz

22 hours ago

Well said Jesse!

Reply Share 0 0

Mike Arceri

6 days ago



I reckon that those who want to raze this highway lack even the most basic civil engineering skills.

It's a terrible idea unless you build a tunnel for those cars. I-45 and US 75 are basically the same road. Take Woodall, 30, and 35 to get around Downtown? Unreal. Think about the load on those roads!

Reply Share 1 reply

6 8



AmandaMFreitag

5 days ago

Based on the proposal, what is currently eight lanes of congestion will now be 16 to 24 lanes with more capacity plus increased connectivity.

Reply Share

3 0



biz4Liberty

6 days ago

<http://store.cato.org/books/bootleggers-baptists>

Reply Share

1 1



biz4Liberty

6 days ago

I understand why the property owners (Bootleggers) around the east side of Downtown Dallas want the highway torn down. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msQ_khFmKtU

Reply Share

2 2



John Davis

6 days ago

It matters to South Dallas? Great! Let South Dallas pay for it.

Reply Share 1 reply

3 11



Jesse Smith

6 days ago

The reason this debate has come about is that I-345 needs approximately \$240M in repairs. I-345 is going to be shut down for a significant period of time no matter what, so the question is should that money be used to maintain the status quo or used instead to remove the elevated highway, replace it with blvds and stimulate growth and investment in the area.

Reply Share

11 1



biz4Liberty

6 days ago

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bootleggers_and_Baptists

Reply Share

1 1



biz4Liberty

6 days ago

I know everybody who uses this freeway everyday thinks this is Crazy and won't happen. If you think that, you should learn how Baptists and Bootleggers work together to, in this case, make your commute a helluva lot longer.

Reply Share 1 reply

2 3



Rich74

6 days ago

A fellow once asked me if I knew how to identify a Baptist. He said a Baptist has four in the floor and a fifth under the seat.

Reply Share

4 1



biz4Liberty

6 days ago

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bootleggers_and_Baptists

Reply Share

1 1



Edward

6 days ago

Playing the race card.

Reply Share

5 6



BarryC

6 days ago

The highways mentioned in this column were built upon discontinued railway lines. This was done out of convenience/cost and not out of a desire to segregate the black communities. De-facto segregation did occur but not through intentional planning.

Reply Share 2 replies

7 5



Jim Luther

6 days ago

perhaps so, though I'm not really so sure -- if that was an area that a lot of middle class white people lived, I wonder if the road would have been built. I also thought the article may have focused a bit much on the race component. While making important points about the negative effects, particularly on the mostly black people who lived there before the original elevated highway, I think at this point that's "water under the bridge." We now have an opportunity to fix it and make it better for EVERYONE.

Reply Share

6 3



CarolAWomack

5 days ago

Yeah but if they make it about race, they can get their way!

Reply Share

0 1



mr_lakewood

6 days ago

I wonder if everyone who is for keeping I-345 would also be for an elevated highway all the way up Preston through Plano and whatever is north of there?

Reply Share 9 replies

7 9



H

6 days ago

Probably not. Just like most people aren't for the Trinity Tollroad, and wouldn't be for 345 if it were being proposed today. But it isn't being proposed. It is. And before it is destroyed, there needs to be better reasons than correcting perceived social injustices of half a century ago or, worse yet, nostalgia for communities that never were and certainly never will be again.

Reply Share 1 reply

8 5



Jesse Smith

6 days ago

The reasons are increased investment, development, retail and housing downtown and the increased tax revenues that comes with it. Uptown generates billions in tax revenue for Dallas and replacing I-345 with blvds and urban development will do the same. What's important to remember is that I-345 needs \$240M in repairs, so the choice is do we spend that money to just maintain what hasn't been working for Dallas or do we spend that money instead on replacing I-345 with blvds which has a tremendous amount of upside.

Reply Share

9 1



Jim Luther

6 days ago

interesting thought. THAT'S what people should consider. If we want to try to make our downtown appealing in all kinds of ways, including additional development -- good, safe attractive urban living

a long with offices, small business and parks (and the city tax revenue associated with them), then the existing or rebuilt giant elevated highway is NOT conducive that those goals.

Reply Share 3 replies 9 6



Anonymous

6 days ago

Except from my office in a downtown tower overlooking 345, I see all sorts of construction in Deep Ellum, and they just announced a multi-use development on the last undeveloped bit of land near the arts district (sort of behind Plaza of the Americas). 345 isn't inhibiting all development. So what will be different if 345 is blown to smithereens? I have this gut feeling that the golden city envisioned by those making this proposal is just as elitist in its way as the elitism of those who built 345 originally.

Reply Share 2 replies 8 6



Bullfrog

6 days ago

Yep. I lived in Deep Ellum for a couple years (3200 Main) and always loved that stretch of highway. A coworker that lived in Pleasant Grove was an easier pickup or dropoff when we rode to work together. And my evening running route from Undermain to DMN and back (5K) was never bothered by the highway -- the only thing I ever really thought about it is the artwork on the support columns and the shade it gives the dog park.

Developers eager to cash in are most concerned.

Reply Share 5 4



Philip Goss

5 days ago

Yes - Deep Ellum is booming after being nearly killed off by 345. It's taken this long to stabilize in spite of the highway. The boom is in no way contributed to it.

How is it elitist to want to build a city that gives people an option on how they want to get around? It is elitist to demand that people own a car and can only get around via highway/tollway.

Reply Share 2 0



SirMagick .

6 days ago

We already have a highway one block over from preston that runs in parallel.

Reply Share 5 1



Bullfrog

6 days ago

Yes. In Grapevine we have 114 which was recently widened and its freaking awesome along with the Hwy 26 and 121 junctions. Makes it easy to go places fast.

Reply Share 3 3



Bug Menot

6 days ago

As if i-345 isn't part of a major interstate. That interstate, btw, runs past Plano and is elevated at many points -- you go over it or under it.

In other words, you have made a stupid argument to support a stupid idea.

Reply Share 2 3

Alice Enland

6 days ago



Oh, and if you want to read a story about how politicians DID use highways to cut off and destroy black neighborhoods read "American Pharaoh" the bio of Richard Daley, former democrat mayor of Chicago. Daley literally wrote the book on how to do it.

Reply Share

8 3



Alice Enland

6 days ago

After reading this, I don't know what hurts more, my head or my stomach. So, the writer thinks . . . what? That 345 should never have been built? No Central? Tear down 345 and re-route it underground? And what will be accomplished once this mega million "Boston Big Dig" boondoggle fiasco comes on line? Blacks will flood back into Deep Ellum and downtown will be re-vitalized? Get real. The clock cannot be turned back no matter how evil the white overlords were when their evil genius led them to . . . build highways.

Reply Share

10 9



H

6 days ago

A trifle simplistic? More than a highway destroyed black middle class neighborhoods. In any event, it would be more persuasive if the author focused on the future - and how removing the highway would contribute to a vital, diverse central city - then recount the injustices, if that is what they were, of the past.

Reply Share 1 reply

12 3



Philip Goss

5 days ago

I think part of why this was written is to counter the Mayor's (and his ilk) argument that the Trinity Tollroad is a civil rights project to give South Dallas access to jobs. Highways do nothing of the sort - see 345. Highways cause sprawl which causes jobs to move further away from established neighborhoods.

Reply Share

2 0



joeblair18

6 days ago

I wasn't around when they built the elevator I-345. Bu I do work just south of Deep Ellum, so I guess that buys me a comment. Stand outside and watch the traffic on I-345 during rush hour, or any other time as far as that goes. Where do you think all that traffic is going to go if they tear down I-345? Haven't thought about that, have you? Or you just don't have an answer. There are consequences with everything.

Reply Share 9 replies

12 12



Orbiting Pluto

6 days ago

Yes. Well said. There are thousands of commuters all the way down to Ennis and Waxahachie and even farther south, that have jobs in north Dallas, and who depend on I-345. Not just black, but also white commuters, truth be told.

Reply Share

5 7



Jesse Smith

6 days ago

It actually has been thought through and the data is out there. Fifty percent or more of the traffic on I-345 is interstate or regional traffic and they will have to drive around the city using I-20 and 635 just like they do in America's other great cities. For the rest of the cars, they'll find less congestion moving through the area because what was eight lanes of congestion will now be 16 to 24 lanes of boulevards that connect directly to their destinations.

Reply Share 3 replies

10 5



H

6 days ago

And what is going to be destroyed to make way for these 16 - 24 lanes of boulevards?

Reply Share 8 4



Anonymous 6 days ago

You forgot to mention the unicorns.

Whoever told you that, never listen to them again because they fed you a line of bull. You have Texas A&M traffic engineering data on this? TxDOT? Or got propogandized by "Downtown Dallas, Inc"?

Reply Share 3 4



Bug Menot 6 days ago

I'm sure, since you care about great cities, you also care about the environment.

Yet you're willing to make thousands and thousands of travelers, including commuters who live in Dallas, to burn more fuel because you want a playground for yourself.

You are selfish.

Reply Share 2 6



Dunch_1310 6 days ago

You must know Michael Morris.

Reply Share 2 0



William Smith 6 days ago

The view from my office faces I345 and I can see the entire thing from woodall rogers to I30. I watch the traffic quite a bit as I ponder about this project.

What I've noticed is that the vast majority of traffic does not exit to nor enter from downtown, but is just cutting through. (My super accurate "eyeball" calculations are now starting to be verified by multiple traffic studies.) So, to answer your question -> the majority of traffic patterns will re-route go somewhere else. As for the small % of traffic that is heading towards or departing from our city center, they will enjoy less congested roads as they will not have to fight for space with other traffic that is just "passing through".

I know this is counter-intuitive and hard to conceptualize because it's never been done before in this area on this scale, but I encourage you to look at other similar projects that have been done in other areas around the country with great success. In each city there was push back just as there is now in Dallas, and in almost every case traffic actually decreased to many peoples surprise.

Reply Share 2 replies 9 6



Anonymous 6 days ago

That last paragraph is not true. Take Boston's Big Dig for example which was a complete disaster from every perspective. Massive cost overruns and engineering problems, dead driver from roof collapse, and the end result is that drivers hate it because they're now stuck in traffic in a tunnel whereas before they may had experienced traffic but with a great view of the harbor.

Let's take their strong advice and don't touch this project. As Bostonians like to say, instead of burying the highway it would have been easier and more cost effective to just leave it and raise the rest of the city.

Reply Share 1 reply 2 4



Philip Goss

5 days ago

This is apples to oranges. Boston simply took their existing highways and moved them underground. Other cities - such as San Francisco and many others - have removed highways with no replacement. There was no trafficpocalypse. The world still twirls and people still move through and around the cities.

Reply Share

2 0



Jdawgdallas

6 days ago

This has nothing to do with neighborhoods. If you look at the main force behind tearing down I-345, you will find it is people who own land on either side of I-345. If you tear down I-345 They can now charge more for this land. I would imagine they have no concerns about how people would get from east to west and diffidently would not pony up the money for a work around. As the great Greggo would say follow the money.

Reply Share 2 replies

9 8



Jesse Smith

6 days ago

That's too pessimistic Jdawg. I-345 would be replaced with 16 to 24 blvds to allow ppl to move east to west directly to their destinations w/out a major highway in the way. Replacing I-345 with blvds will bring investment and development to the area, so yes some landowners will make money, but that doesn't make it a bad idea or disingenuous movement. It's a great idea and the ppl behind the movement are a growing demographic of young ppl, empty nesters, and ppl generally who want to live in dense, urban, walkable, liveable neighborhoods, which are lacking in Dallas. This is a great opportunity for Dallas to fill that demand, reconnect our neighborhoods and increase our tax base. Let's not reject a good idea just because it might be profitable for some.

Reply Share 1 reply

13 3



Garrison Griffin

6 days ago

You are a landowner near I-345, aren't you!

Reply Share

3 4

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