

Local News South/Southern Denton County

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County awaits TxDOT's figures

08:30 AM CST on Wednesday, January 25, 2012

By Bj Lewis / Staff Writer

Denton County officials can expect the Texas Department of Transportation in the next month to spell out exactly how much money is available to expand Interstate 35E.

During the weekly update to the Commissioners Court, transportation consultant John Polster told county officials the status of the massive expansion project and what the next several weeks should bring.

“We’re waiting until TxDOT comes back and makes a presentation to the 1420 Committee about the total dollar amount of funds available,” Polster said.

The 1420 Committee is a requirement of Senate Bill 1420, which authorizes the use of public-private partnerships to fund the expansion of a 28-mile stretch of I-35E, from Denton to Dallas.

The committee had a meeting scheduled for January, but it was canceled because the final number was not known from TxDOT, Polster said. That number should be available sometime in February. The committee needs to decide who will build the roads by April.

The current highway has four to six regular lanes and four lanes of frontage roads.

The project would expand the highway to eight regular lanes, four tolled HOV lanes and four to six frontage lanes, depending on the need. The project’s current estimated cost is \$3.3 billion in construction, \$1.2 billion to purchase right of way and \$800 million for operations.

County officials are looking for funding from TxDOT, Dallas County and the North Central Texas Council of Governments, among other entities.

Commissioner Andy Eads said officials expect soon to learn how much Dallas County and TxDOT will contribute, and what the resulting financial gap will be.

“Without those two key stakeholders and partners, we only have part of the equation,” Eads said.

In recent months, while waiting for TxDOT to get its financial house in order, county officials have worked out partnerships with some area cities that have pledged to contribute what they can to the project. That resulted in the city of Denton pledging \$250,000; Lewisville, \$2 million; and Carrollton, \$5.4 million.

Other Denton County cities haven't pledged to contribute, but, Eads stressed, the expansion project is not being built on the backs of area cities.

On Monday, TxDOT sent out requests for qualifications from engineering firms to learn what the potential cost and construction details would be. Firms have until Feb. 17 to get their responses back to TxDOT.

Once the requests are answered, TxDOT will decide which firms could best build the expanded lanes as planned. The firms would be added to a short list from which TxDOT would pick the final company.

County Judge Mary Horn said the revelation of the funding amount is something the county has anticipated for a long time.

"That will give us the information we have been needing and anxiously awaiting," she said. "That, coupled with numbers that have been firmed up by TxDOT, and we'll have a better picture of how to proceed. I am optimistic that we're going to get there. I just look forward to seeing the numbers."

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I want to be a "consultant" for the City of Denton! Doesn't matter what it is. Just give me that title! (And the six figure salary.)

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