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It's official: Two-bridges project over Trinity moves ahead as state asks firms to step forward

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The two-bridge solution to improving downtown Dallas traffic, and replacing bridges over the Trinity River on Interstate 35 and Interstate 30, is moving forward.

The Texas Department of Transportation has officially invited firms to submit their qualifications for the complex and, at about \$700 million, costly project.

What will follow is a shortlist of those firms being asked to submit detailed proposals for the job. TxDOT expects to hire a firm to design and build the project by next fall.

This will be TxDOT's first pure design-build project. What that means is that the firm that wins the work will get to design the bridges and highways they way they want to -- rather than follow a TxDOT design.

They will have stay within parameters TxDOT sets, but the thinking is giving the same private team responsibility for design and construction will lead to innovations and efficiencies.

Of course in return for the projected savings, the state takes on additional risk -- in this case, the risk that the cost-savings don't turn out to be cut corners.

The project agreement will attempt to safeguard the state as much as possible. And an added incentive for the firms to do good work is that the contract will likely give TxDOT the sole right to determine after the fact whether it or the firms will be responsible for maintenance for up three five-year terms.

The thinking there is that even a private firm who wants its juice its profits will be reluctant of cutting corners on a design that it will have to pay to maintain.

The RFQ document also stipulates that the I-30 frontage roads over on the river will be designed entirely by Santiago Calatrava. By April of next year, design of those spans should be at 90 percent, the document says.