

High Five project to connect Dallas bike and walking trails to northern neighbors

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LBJ Freeway at Central Expressway has long been the end of the road for cyclists, runners and walkers heading either north or south.



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Crews are working to complete the \$4.2 million Cottonwood Trail project at LBJ Freeway and Central Expressway by May.

But thanks to a \$4.2 million project, the High Five's days as a trail obstacle are about to end.

Two path sections under the High Five, connecting the Cottonwood Trail, are scheduled to open in May, weather permitting.

"For anyone wanting to travel by bike or walking long distance, this is almost the only way to get north into the Far [North Dallas](#), [Plano](#) and [Richardson](#) area from kind of central [Dallas](#)," said Jared White, a project manager with the Dallas Park and Recreation Department.

Likewise, riders up north will have improved access to White Rock Lake and the Katy and Santa Fe trails inside the loop.

The High Five has been part of the problem for trail users since its completion in 2005, but it ended up being part of the solution.

Texas Department of Transportation engineers built a sixth level just under the \$261 million project for nonmotorized transportation. They also left room for the trail connections.

"Without that, this would have been almost impossible to do – or much more difficult," White said.

Dallas County is managing the project, which is being built with \$3.3 million from federal and regional transportation funds and \$828,657 of local money. Northstar Construction Inc. of [Fort Worth](#) is the general contractor.

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Although about eight weeks of work remain, some cyclists are already hitting parts of the path – including Marc Mumby, president of Bike DFW, a bicycle safety and advocacy group. So far, he likes what he sees.

"It's really quite cool to be able to ride your bike under the High Five," he said. "It's just amazing. It's nice and wide, it will be safe."

The newest trail sections create an oasis of tranquility, despite their proximity to one of the state's most hectic freeway interchanges, White added.

"There's almost a surreal feeling when you are on this section under the High Five," he said. "It's very peaceful. You're just cruising through there and there's all this traffic around you ... but it's kind of very nice down there."

Closing the trail gaps follows years of work and planning by public and private groups, said Gray Mayes, Texas Instruments' director of government relations.

"It was a collaborative effort between the city of Dallas, city of Richardson, DART, Dallas County and the private sector – [Texas Instruments](#) and other companies – and the community at large," Mayes said.

White said people often ask why bike paths cost so much.

"Think of it as you are pouring a one-lane road," he said. "It's 12 feet wide, just the same as a travel lane. It has to be designed to very specific specifications, due to the grade and the slope and all that. It's not quite as easy as throwing down a sidewalk."

The connector project also required stabilizing and crossing embankments and creeks.



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For bikers and runners inside the loop, the Cottonwood Trail will be one of the only ways to get to Far North Dallas, Plano and Richardson.

A 900-foot segment just north of LBJ Freeway cost about \$1 million. A 14-foot drop needed to be tamed to a maximum 5 percent grade, and retaining walls were built to stabilize the bank.

On the south side, which is yet to be complete, a bridge and retaining walls had to be built at Cottonwood Creek. Both ends of the bridge will have esplanades with benches, landscaping and grassy areas.

"I think it's very, very exciting," said former [Dallas City Council](#) member Mary Poss, an early and longtime supporter of the Cottonwood Trail who helped raise private money for the project. "These pieces that are being linked to the other trails will complete a 35-mile segment from downtown Dallas to Plano."