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Horn: Toll route good

Road extension to follow line between counties

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By Bj Lewis / Staff Writer

Denton County leaders said Wednesday the region won when the North Texas Tollway Authority chose to extend the Dallas North Tollway along the Denton-Collin county line rather than entirely in Collin County.

“This is a good regional solution — good for Denton and Collin County, Pilot Point and Celina,” said Denton County Judge Mary Horn. “Perhaps at this time Collin County isn’t looking at it like that, but I hope they will. We have worked well in the past and hope we will in the future.”

Construction on the extension isn’t expected to begin for at least a decade.

Both counties had endorsed the route along the county line in 2005, but Collin County officials changed their minds in 2008, in part because of frustration over how the Regional Transportation Council voted to split up the \$3.2 billion advance payment the tollway authority made to win the State Highway 121 toll contract.

Collin County Judge Keith Self has said Collin County should have received a larger portion of the payment.

The Collin County plan included a proposal by Celina, whose leaders promised that it would give the tollway authority every penny of property taxes it received as a result of the Dallas North Tollway — an offer it said would be worth more than \$220 million over the first 40 years after the road is built.

Horn and some board members questioned the real value of that promise.

Denton County voters have agreed to use \$20 million to help the tollway authority build frontage roads, and another \$1.5 million for design — dollars available now.

“It’s very speculative, whereas Denton County, upon the advice of our transportation consultant, had the foresight to put \$20 million in our bond election to do the frontage roads,” Horn said after the meeting. “A million and a half that we got for the design phase, ... that’s money that is available today; that’s not speculative.”

Another issue was the flood plain in the northern part of both counties. Taking the eastern route would mean five more bridges, Horn said. The county line route would require only two.

Commissioner Hugh Coleman said the tollway authority made a good decision in selecting the county line route.

“The tolls are paid for on those roads by everyone in the region,” he said. “Having it along the county line benefits both counties.”

Coleman said his lingering concern is that a good portion of the toll road would run through special taxing districts that were set up for future development.

“In those districts, we need to solve the problem of providing police and fire [service],” he said. “We’re going to work with Pilot Point on a remedy.”

Coleman said the tollway authority took a well-reasoned approach that gave all parties an opportunity to speak.

“Overall, the best decision was to have it on the county line,” he said.

Michael Lindenberger of The Dallas Morning News contributed to this report.

BJ LEWIS can be reached at 940-566-6875. His e-mail address is blewis@dentonrc.com.