

# Fort Worth mayor calls for a 'complete overhaul' of transportation

Posted Thursday, Feb. 25, 2010

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FORT WORTH -- Despite the tough economy, Mayor Mike Moncrief said the city still needs to think big and focus on redevelopment, transportation, tourism and city services.

During his State of the City speech to about 1,000 business leaders Thursday, he announced the formation of a blue-ribbon panel to investigate new sources of funding for transportation. The group is expected to come back with a series of recommendations in three months.

"North Texas requires a transportation overhaul. No more Band-Aids, no more patches -- a complete overhaul," he said.

Moncrief compared the current slump to the one the city endured in the 1980s, when a double downturn in oil and banking put most of the Texas economy in a vise. That's when Fort Worth annexed the land for Alliance Airport and began redeveloping its downtown.

Moncrief predicted that the city's budget will be a problem -- the City Council voted in the fall to lay off workers, cut programs and shut the city swimming pools to close a \$59 million budget gap.

"We are beyond the luxury of simple across-the-board cuts," Moncrief said. "This only serves to water down services, rendering them totally ineffective. As we enter the next budget cycle, our priority will be to identify those things the city must do, and do those things well."

But he said the city still needs to pay for big-ticket transportation and redevelopment projects, including Southwest Parkway and the Trinity River Vision.

The Trinity River project is a long-term plan to divert the river and redevelop the near north side. It is projected to cost nearly \$1 billion, with funding coming from state, local and federal sources.

"Like Alliance, Trinity Uptown will create jobs in an underutilized portion of our city," he said. "Does this vision require a commitment from the city, from taxpayers? Is this commitment appropriate in tough times like this? Absolutely."

Likewise, tourism can help bring money to the city, he said, pointing to the Omni Hotel at the Convention Center as proof.

"We opened the doors to the Omni just more than a year ago, and the results are clear: 150,000 guests and more than 400 new jobs," he said. "Visitors are an economic force. They support local jobs and ease the tax burden on residents and businesses. The significance of this cannot be overstated."

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