

Large N. Texas road contracts coming in fall

BY MATT JOYCE | STAFF WRITER

The Texas Legislature has voted to allow public-private partnerships to build three major North Texas highway projects, clearing the way for huge contract proposals to begin as early as fall.

The Senate and House approved Senate Bill 1420 during the final weekend of the legislative session. As of Tuesday, the bill awaited Gov. Rick Perry's signature.

The legislation authorizes the Texas Department of Transportation to sign comprehensive development agreements with private companies to build and manage the roads for a term of about 50 years. The private companies would put up most of the financing and, in exchange, would collect the revenue from managed toll lanes. The roads would revert to the state at the end of the contract.

The projects, which include expanding highways and adding a managed toll lane, are:

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■ A \$4.4 billion project on 28 miles of Interstate Highway 35E between Interstate Highway 635 and U.S. Highway 380 in Denton County:

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Vic Suhm

Executive director of the
Tarrant Regional
Transportation Coalition

way 380 in Denton
County;

■ A \$1.8 billion project on about nine miles of State Highway 183 between State Highway 161 and I-35E in Dallas and Irving; and

■ Continuation of the \$2.5 billion North Tarrant Express project, an overhaul of the Interstate Highway 820 and state high-

ways 183/121 corridor, including work on Interstate Highway 35W. A consortium of companies is building the NTE project.

Vic Suhm, executive director of the Tarrant Regional Transportation Coalition, said the success of the legislation is critical to solving transportation issues.

"With the kind of ongoing funding that's available in Texas for transportation, it's just not anywhere close to what's needed to do these kind of projects," he said. "Without (comprehensive development agreement) authority, you just can't do them. That's true for all the big projects."

Rider Scott, executive director of the Dallas Regional Mobility Coalition, said the state transportation department has been working to get environmental clearance for the I-35E and State Highway 183 projects by the of the summer and by the time the new legislation takes effect Sept. 1.

"When the environmental clearance is completed, we will concurrently with that begin working with TxDOT to develop the request for proposals so they can go out early fall," Scott said.