

Will I-35W congestion finally be fixed?

Fort Worth mayor has news for North Texas drivers

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The long-awaited extension of a stretch of Interstate 35W in far north Fort Worth, with possibly the worst [bottleneck](#) for Tarrant Country traffic, may soon be a reality.

Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price on Tuesday during her State of the City address teased big news for North Texas drivers: Texas Department of Transportation officials have promised to expand I-35W from U.S. 287 and nearby North Tarrant Parkway about six miles north to Eagle Parkway, near [Alliance Airport](#). The project would increase the number of available lanes to four, essentially fixing the current bottleneck. Final approval from the state could come as soon as next week.

“My friend [Bruce Bugg](#), who’s chairman of TxDot, has promised that we’ll have the funding in place and received for that last leg,” Price said to a round of applause.

TxDOT has had plans to extend the TEXPress toll lanes six miles to the north, but the Texas Legislature slowed the project, totaling \$762 million, a few years ago with a push to no longer use tax-supported state money on tollway projects.

Only \$18 million in tax-supported state funds is needed for the project. Most of the rest is expected to be covered by federal loans and private equity raised by the private developer that is under contract to build the project, North Tarrant Express Mobility Partners.

That money can’t be spent until the state signs off on the project and provides its \$18 million share. Price said in her address she expects final, official approval by Feb. 28.

A spokesperson for TxDot did not return a call for comment.

Improved transit and mobility has been seen as an economic driver across Dallas-Fort Worth. The success of TEXRail’s opening month has renewed energy around public transit, but the city has remained focused on improving highways as about 82 percent of Fort Worth residents drive alone to work.

Local leaders, including Price and Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley, have been lobbying TxDot to fully fund the project. Nearly a year ago, the Tarrant County Commissioners Court approved a resolution asking Gov. Greg Abbott and other statewide leaders to approve the funding and get the project going.

“(They’re) tired of hearing from me,” Price said. “But I’m not going to let up.”

Fort Worth is hoping to grow the number of people using public transit to reduce traffic and spur economic development. In January the city council approved a new incentive policy that included property [tax breaks](#) for developments near commuter rail lines that mix commercial and residential units.

TEXRail, the commuter rail line that runs from downtown Fort Worth to DFW Airport, shuttled nearly [100,000 people](#) through North Richland Hills and Grapevine in January, according to Trinity Metro. The transit authority hopes to have 8,000 riders a day by the end of 2019.

Trinity Metro officials estimate TEXRail could be [extended](#) to the medical district for about \$130 million, and to TCU for another \$70 million. The current line was expected to cost \$1 billion but actually cost tens of millions of dollars less, meaning some money may already exist to extend the line.

Price said it is her goal to see the line extended through southwest Fort Worth.

“We’ve got to have a regional approach, a creative, innovative approach, to transit,” Price said.