

YOUR COMMUTE FEBRUARY 27, 2016 4:52 AM

Beware Fort Worth drivers: Left exit closing at Loop 820, I-35W

HIGHLIGHTS

Loop 820 traffic to northbound I-35W will soon exit at right

Latest of several dangerous left-lane exits to be replaced

\$1.4 billion I-35W makeover on schedule



Traffic in a construction zone on Interstate 35W in February. **Max Faulkner** - Star-Telegram

BY GORDON DICKSON
gdickson@star-telegram.com

FORT WORTH — Say goodbye to another one of those pesky — and potentially dangerous — left-lane freeway exits.

Starting Tuesday morning, motorists eastbound on Northeast Loop 820 will no longer have to get into the left lane to go north on Interstate 35W. Instead, a new right-lane exit will open.

“The opening of this additional new direct connector represents major progress for the I-35W expansion,” said Heather DeLapp, spokeswoman for North Tarrant Infrastructure, a lead contractor.

Although many safety experts and everyday motorists who regularly use the I-35W corridor will be happy to see the left-lane exit go, it could present traffic problems in the short term.

“This opening brings a significant change in traffic configuration. Drivers don’t always pay close attention to traffic signs and end up making lane changes at the last minute,” DeLapp said.

Highway workers plan to put out signs warning drivers of the ramp change, to reduce the number of people who realize at the last second that they are in the wrong lane and are tempted to swerve in front of other cars to make a lane change.

“We strongly encourage everyone to pay close attention to the posted signage, stay alert to other drivers and slow down in this area,” DeLapp said.

**\$1.6
billion**

Total cost of Interstate 35W improvements in north Fort Worth.

The new ramp should be open by 5 a.m. Tuesday, officials said. To prepare for it, several changes will take place beginning at 9 p.m. Monday, including permanent closure of the old left-lane exit and the temporary closure of various lanes to give road workers enough room to make the switch.

The new ramp is designed to reduce stress and improve traffic flow for motorists traveling between areas such as west Fort Worth, White Settlement and Lake Worth to northern destinations such as Alliance Airport and Texas Motor Speedway.

In January, a similar ramp connecting westbound Loop 820 to southbound I-35W opened, improving traffic flow between Northeast Tarrant County and downtown Fort Worth. Although some motorists were caught off guard by the change that first day, no major accidents were reported.

Signs of progress

The new ramp is part of a \$1.6 billion overhaul of the I-35W corridor. The project is known as North Tarrant Express.

The I-35W corridor in far north Fort Worth is ranked the state's sixth-most-congested roadway, according to the Texas Department of Transportation.

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SIGNS AND END UP MAKING LANE CHANGES AT THE LAST MINUTE**
Heather DeLapp, North Tarrant Infrastructure spokeswoman

The work is being done in two concurrent phases, including the \$1.4 billion makeover being done by North Tarrant Infrastructure from Loop 820 south to I-30 near downtown Fort Worth, and a \$244 million segment being improved by the Texas Department of Transportation from Loop 820 to North Tarrant Parkway.

The work includes the reconstruction of existing main lanes, the addition of two toll lanes in each direction and modernization of ramps and frontage roads.



Outdated design

Left-lane exits have been discouraged in transportation design for several decades. Generally speaking, in countries where motorists drive on the right side of the road, it's far safer to place exits on the right, safety experts say.

Not only is the design dangerous for I-35W traffic, which must make room for merging vehicles from Loop 820 in the fast lane, but the configuration can lead to long lines of queued-up cars in the left lane of Loop 820 waiting to get onto I-35W during rush hour.

Gordon Dickson: 817-390-7796, @gdickson

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