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Five things to know about I-35W expansion

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BY GORDON DICKSON

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Motorists will spend a lot of time — probably far more than they want to — on Interstate 35W in north Fort Worth in the next three or more years.

Congestion is already chronic, especially near Western Center Boulevard just north of Loop 820. And the commuting headaches promise to get worse as the \$1.6 billion makeover of the 10-mile corridor hits high gear between now and its projected 2018 completion.

Because so many people will be spending time on the road, which connects I-30 near downtown Fort Worth to North Tarrant Parkway in the Alliance corridor, it seems worthwhile for drivers to know a bit more about the project.

Here are five things you may not know about I-35W:

1 Mussel exercise — Before road work began, scuba divers had to remove 33 mussels from the Trinity River and move them to Quannah Parker Park, about 8 miles downstream in east Fort Worth. The


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yet to come. Two toll lanes are being added on I-35W in each direction, so the highway bridge over Western Center Boulevard is being widened. Columns are already installed, but over the next few months the bridge beams will be added — and during that time, some lanes of Western Center Boulevard will be closed.

3 28th Street — During the next few months, the 28th Street bridge over I-35W, about a mile east of the Stockyards, will be demolished and replaced. Workers will take out half the bridge at a time, so traffic will continue to flow. But when the actual demolition takes place, the main lanes of I-35W under the bridge will be closed. During that time, I-35W traffic will be diverted to frontage roads — and right now the northbound I-35W exit to 28th Street is temporarily closed so workers can improve frontage roads to handle the expected crush.

4 Why tolls? — Many people wonder why it's legal to place toll lanes on an interstate highway, given that Congress banned such a conversion many years ago. The trick is, existing toll-free lanes are being rebuilt and will remain free — and the new lanes, known as TEXpress lanes, will be tolled. This is legal under state and federal law.

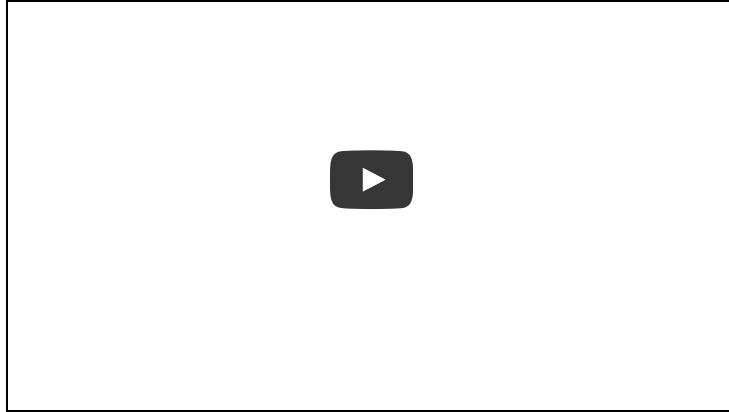
5 I-30 connection — Speaking of tolls, the contractor is negotiating with the Texas Department of Transportation to possibly build an on-ramp from Interstate 30 that will enable motorists to jump right on the TEXpress lanes, without first mingling with traffic in the more crowded general-purpose lanes. If the agreement can be reached, it may be possible for traffic to connect directly to the nearby Chisholm Trail Parkway, a new toll road from I-30 near downtown Fort Worth to Cleburne, 28 miles away.

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Contractors are optimistic they can reach such a deal with state officials, making it possible for motorists willing to pay a toll to travel from Cleburne to Fort Worth, the Alliance area, Dallas/Fort Worth Airport and on to Dallas without mingling with the more crowded free lanes.

"It's not a given," DeLapp said, "but we're confident about it."



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