

Relocation of utilities next for North Tarrant Express project

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BY TERRY EVANS

tevens@star-telegram.com

BEDFORD -- Relocating utilities will be the next big step in the North Tarrant Express reconstruction project.

And Bedford city officials are relieved that the city won't be stuck with the full bill for getting city property out of the way of the \$2.5 billion project.

At last week's meeting, the Bedford City Council agreed to reimburse Bluebonnet Contractors, the main construction firm for the project, for part of the \$2.1 million cost of moving the utilities.

"But we're expecting it to be considerably less because Bluebonnet pays 50 percent of the relocations that are in the existing right of way and 100 percent in easements next to the right of way," said Mirenda Walden, a Bedford spokeswoman.

That means that the final amount could be less than \$1 million, Walden said.

The project will rebuild the existing lanes of Northeast Loop 820 in Haltom City and North Richland Hills, as well as Texas 121/183 (also known as Airport Freeway), in Bedford, Euless and Hurst. New ramps and frontage roads will also be built.

Because Loop 820 is a federal highway, the federal government will pay for utility relocation in both Haltom City and North Richland Hills, officials said.

"The utility relocation in our city won't take place until later this year or early next year, so we have some time," said North Richland Hills spokeswoman Mary Peters. "City staff and NTE Mobility Partners are working on an agreement, and we expect to take it to council this spring."

There are 497 places in seven cities along the 13.5-mile North Tarrant Express route where gas, water and wastewater, power and communications lines must be moved, said Robert Hinkle, a spokesman for NTE Mobility Partners.

Hinkle said those amount to 533,350 linear feet of pipes and wires.

Two railroad crossings in the project's right of way must also be moved, he said.

Confirming the location of utility lines slowed completion of one of the project's most visible facets so far.

Lara Kohl, spokeswoman for Bluebonnet Contractors, said that tree stumps on Plainview Drive in Hurst won't be pulled until the company knows exactly where utility lines are located.

More tree crews are working near the other end of the project, in Haltom City.

North Park has become a lot more visible since crews began clearing the way for building an access lane to Denton Highway, City Manager Tom Muir said.

A little farther west, huge swaths of the Interstate 35W and Loop 820 medians are being excavated in preparation for new overpass lanes.

Crews are boring into the earth to pour piers that will support ramps, Kohl said.

Terry Evans, 817-390-7620

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