

html
Star-Telegram

North Tarrant Express to be finished by end of year

Posted Friday, Feb. 21, 2014

BY GORDON DICKSON

gdickson@star-telegram.com

HURST — A \$2.5 billion makeover of Loop 820 and Texas 121/183 in Northeast Tarrant County will be completed before the end of the year, at least six months ahead of schedule, a spokesman said Friday.

"We have been blessed with very, very good weather," said Robert Hinkle, spokesman for NTE Mobility Partners, the company rebuilding the 13-mile corridor. "We will finish the project at least by the end of 2014, instead of June 2015.

"We're very excited about that. I know the six cities are excited about that. I know about a million residents and businesses along the corridor are excited about that."

Hinkle provided the update Friday during the annual Northeast Tarrant Transportation Summit in Hurst. The event, organized by Tarrant County Commissioner Gary Fickes, helps residents and business and political leaders keep track of the many big-dollar road projects underway on the western side of North Texas.

After Hinkle announced the new completion date for the project — known as the North Tarrant Express — Fickes took to the podium and said, "Great job and great news. The end of the year? Wow. I'm impressed."

Motorists have dealt with narrow lanes, detours and closed bridges for more than three years, although many people understand that the project is sorely needed. Loop 820 and Texas 121/183 — also known as Airport Freeway — are key east-west commuter routes and have been above capacity for more than two decades.

The project includes rebuilding free lanes, adding two toll lanes in each direction and modernizing frontage roads and ramps. If all goes as planned, the result will be a faster, safer connection from the Alliance Airport area of far north Fort Worth to the vicinity of Dallas/Fort Worth Airport's south entrance.

With the toll lanes, motorists can decide whether to stay on the main lanes for free or pay a few dollars to buy their way out of congestion.

I-35W work continues

Although drivers can look forward to wide lanes and open spaces on Loop 820 and Texas 121/183 before the new year, many other areas of Tarrant County will have orange barrels for years to come.

Chief among them is Interstate 35W, which is being rebuilt from Interstate 30 near downtown Fort Worth to north of the U.S. 81/287 "Decatur Cutoff." NTE Mobility Partners is overseeing much of that construction as a second phase of the North Tarrant Express plan. Motorists can expect work to continue through 2017.

Another project in Northeast Tarrant County, the DFW Connector along Texas 114 in the Grapevine-Southlake area, was completed last year.

And the Chisholm Trail Parkway, a 28-mile toll road connecting downtown Fort Worth to Cleburne, is scheduled to be finished in May.

New transportation bill

Friday's transportation summit drew about 400 spectators, including elected leaders, business owners and staff members from cities such as Bedford, Euless, Grapevine and Keller.

The keynote speaker was U.S. Rep. Roger Williams, R-Austin, whose district stretches from the Austin area to Tarrant County. A member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Williams said he and his colleagues in Washington are working on a bill to authorize spending federal dollars on surface transportation, including roads and public transportation.

It was once tradition in Washington to pass a transportation bill that covered up to six years of funding. But recently, as Republicans and Democrats have fought bitter partisan battles, Congress has passed extensions covering transportation funds for only a few months at a time.

Williams said he hopes Congress can change its ways and draft a more comprehensive bill, since states need to plan their projects years in advance and, as a result, must know how much federal money they'll get.

"The surface-transportation bill is developing in a bipartisan and inclusive fashion as we work to build consensus," Williams said.

"Both parties agree this bill needs to be fiscally responsible and reduce regulatory burdens, so we can get things built on time and get things done six months early."



Gordon Dickson, 817-390-7796 Twitter: @gdickson

Looking for comments?