

# Star-Telegram

## The new braking point: I-35W remake begins

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Get ready for more orange barrels, concrete barriers and detours in Fort Worth.

A massive reconstruction of Interstate 35W from Interstate 30 near downtown to Loop 820 will begin in about 30 days and continue until 2018, officials said Thursday.

Construction on the 6 1/2-mile stretch of I-35W will begin just as several other nearby road projects are winding up. The \$2.5 billion makeover of Loop 820 and Texas 121/183, known as the North Tarrant Express, is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. And in Grapevine, construction of the \$1 billion DFW Connector ended late last year.

But for those who use I-35 north of downtown Fort Worth, the work-zone-related commuting headaches will continue for four more years.

Several elected officials acknowledged Thursday that Tarrant County motorists are tiring of road work. But, they noted, once the I-35W work is complete in 2018, the western side of the Metroplex will have enough road capacity to cover expected population and job growth for years to come.

"People are frustrated and excited about this project," Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price said.

She was among more than two dozen elected officials, business leaders and highway contractors who gathered Thursday on the northbound I-35W frontage road, north of Meacham Boulevard, to kick off the project.

"Are we going to get a lot of calls over the next couple of years? Yes," she said. "But we know what to tell them."

Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley said the Fort Worth area couldn't continue to grow without improvements to I-35W.

"This stretch of road has become in no way reliable in the last several years," he said. "As much as we have grown, it has still continued to hurt our growth because of a lack of reliability."

The \$1.4 billion job on I-35W will be performed by NTE Mobility Partners, the private consortium that is building the North Tarrant Express. Improvements will include rebuilding existing free lanes, modernizing ramps and adding two toll lanes in each direction.

For the next month or so, crews will be preparing right of way, continuing soil sampling and putting up concrete barriers, NTE spokesman Robert Hinkle said. Actual construction won't begin for 30 days or more, he said.

Meanwhile, just north of Loop 820, the Texas Department of Transportation is expanding I-35W to the I-35W/U.S. 287 split — also known as the “Decatur cutoff.”

Once all the work is done, motorists will be able to travel on a modernized I-35W from downtown Fort Worth almost as far north as Hillwood’s AllianceTexas development, which includes Alliance Airport.

Although motorists will encounter concrete barriers and detours, delays on I-35W should be minimal during construction, Hinkle said. The contractor has pledged to keep at least two driving lanes open in each direction between 28th Street and Loop 820 — the same road capacity as now.

Once the work is complete, advocates for the I-35W corridor say, they will push to expand the highway northward into Denton, where I-35W and I-35E meet.

“We will not rest until we get all of this done, at least all the way to where the two 35s come together,” said Victor Vandergriff of Arlington, a Texas Transportation Commission member.

At least by then, maybe there will be fewer orange barrels in Tarrant County.

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Link to article: <http://www.star-telegram.com/2014/05/01/v-print/5785536/orange-barrel-overdose-massive.html>