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State legislators discuss transit plans for 2011 session

BY LESLIE WIMMER

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By 2011, Far North Fort Worth residents will have a new public transportation option for commuting to and from Downtown.

At the Dec. 9 meeting of the 35W Coalition, Fort Worth Transportation Authority President Dick Ruddell announced plans for a new park-and-ride bus station just north of the Interstate 35-W and Heritage Trace Parkway interchange near Alliance Town Center.

The station will be located at 10279 N. Freeway, and will sit on about 3 acres of land. It is expected to accommodate 202 parking spaces and, based on estimations from the North Central Texas Council of Governments, 26,000 passengers annually by 2025.

The T purchased the land after planning studies, by the T and Council of Governments, showed a strong demand for public transportation options in Far North Fort Worth. Ruddell said as plans to expand I-35W in the area move forward, the station will give riders easy access to planned managed lanes on the freeway.

State Senators Jane Nelson of District 12 and Wendy Davis of District 10 also spoke at the meeting on their expectations for transportation efforts in the 2011 legislative session.

“I think transportation is going to occupy a tremendous amount of our focus [in the state legislature,] simply because if we don’t resolve our transportation problems, we can’t stimulate the job growth in this state that we need to continue to stimulate,” Davis said. “If you take a look at the I-35W corridor north, that tells all the story you need to see. It’s become more and more challenging, as Hillwood will tell you, when they bring potential employers into this community to convince them they’re going to be able to get workers back and forth efficiently on that corridor.”

Davis added that because of an expected \$14 billion revenue shortfall in the state budget, the 2011 legislature probably will not tackle spending diversions from the state’s transportation fund, one piece of the revised Texas Local Option Transportation Act area officials are hoping to gain support on.

Davis also expressed frustration with the allocation of Proposition 12 funds, adding that state law needs to be clarified to avoid punishing regions which leverage public dollars with private funds to build toll projects.

“Tarrant County got \$215,000 out of that \$2 billion pot,” Davis said. “And we did, in North Texas, fight to make that resource available. And when we talked to TxDOT about it and demanded a different solution, that very issue was thrown in our face, that we used dollars to build [toll] projects we needed to build. And, we were put at a disadvantage at getting any of that money for our community.”

Davis added that North Texas may be able to use bond funds from Proposition 14, approved by the state legislature in 2003, for the reconstruction and expansion of the I-35W and North Loop 820 interchange.