

Concerns grow over delays on north Fort Worth interchange

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In far north [Fort Worth](#), \$387 million worth of public improvements has generated a \$6.7 billion private investment during the past two decades, from companies such as Ford, Kraft and Lego.

While well over half the AllianceTexas project remains undeveloped, there are mounting concerns that the job growth -- 28,000 jobs since 1990 -- will cease if public officials don't make another investment soon in roads such as Interstate 35W.

"We've got to channel our money into areas where we can get the highest investment," Mike Berry, president of Hillwood Properties, told about 200 people Wednesday during a meeting of the Tarrant Regional Transportation Coalition.

The group met with members of the 35W Coalition, a collection of business and political leaders trying to secure more money for improvements to I-35W.

At the moment, the emphasis is on rebuilding the I-35W/Loop 820 interchange by forging a deal between the Texas Department of Transportation and a team of private developers led by Spain-based Cintra.

Last month, Transportation Department commissioners delayed approval of a \$150 million contribution of state bond funds to the interchange, saying they first wanted Cintra and other members of NTE Mobility Partners to show how much of the interchange and toll lanes on I-35W they can build with private dollars. Cintra and the others are expected to unveil their proposal for the area by May.

NTE Mobility Partners is already under contract to rebuild Northeast Loop 820 from I-35W in Fort Worth to North East Mall in Hurst, and Airport Freeway in Hurst and Bedford -- a \$2 billion project known as North Tarrant Express. It is expected to be under way by the end of the year.

Business and elected officials hope that with an infusion of \$150 million in public money, NTE Mobility Partners can also rebuild the I-35W/Loop 820 interchange to the North Tarrant Express project and finish all the work by 2015.

The next phase would likely include construction of toll lanes in the I-35W median from near Interstate 30 in downtown Fort Worth to U.S. 287 near Alliance. Existing lanes would remain free.

During the meeting, several business leaders said they believe that a \$150 million public investment could generate up to \$2 billion worth of road work, including construction of toll lanes paid for by developers.

But the delay in getting the I-35W/Loop 820 interchange on the front burner has made employers and residents of far north Fort Worth uneasy.

Neighborhood leaders said they hope to put more pressure on elected officials to find funds and to make the need for improvements of highways and city streets a higher priority at all levels of government.

"We are the reason it is the way it is. We need to start taking responsibility as voters," Mark Brast, who represents the North Fort Worth Alliance of 21 neighborhoods, told the Tarrant Regional Transportation Coalition.

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