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Cities make case for Texas 360

By Nicholas Sakelaris
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Texas 360 must be completed as a through highway within five years if Mansfield wants to avoid a traffic gridlock with the projects expected to pop up along the highway.

That's the message officials from Mansfield and surrounding cities conveyed when they met with Rep. Don Young, (R-Alaska) chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in a private meeting Monday.

The chairman is "very influential" in getting federal funding allocated for highway projects, said City Manager Clayton Chandler.

City officials from Mansfield, Grand Prairie, Midlothian, Arlington and representatives from the Texas Department of Transportation, the North Texas Council of Governments, Tarrant, Johnson and Ellis counties are looking at different ways to garner state and federal money to speed up the completion of Texas 360, connecting it to U.S. 287.

There is currently no state funding to extend the highway within the next five years, said TXDOT spokesperson Val Lopez.

"We're working with the communities and NTCOG to find ways to fund this project," Lopez said.

One of those ways is by making the future highway a toll road, Chandler said.

"Toll roads have been discussed," he said. "It has to be done ourselves because we can't wait 20 years to get the lanes completed."

Among the projects being built or proposed along the highway are two hospitals, the Big League Dreams ballpark project, the Mansfield school district Stadium and Natatorium complex and the master-planned, mixed-use South Pointe project.

The 10-mile stretch of service roads currently in place from just south of Interstate 20 to the junction with U.S. 287 would be unable to handle the projected traffic, Chandler said.

"[Texas] 360 is vital to their operation," Chandler said. "They have immediate traffic implications."

The mixed-use Grist Mill Crossing project, which will be located at U.S. 287 and East Broad Street two and a half miles west of Texas 360, will also be in full swing within two years, said Bob DeRogatis, managing partner of Waterstreet Development, which is developing the Grist Mill Crossing shopping center/residential project.

"The city did a good job making its case," DeRogatis said.

There are also plans for a third hospital across the street at the southeast intersection of U.S. 287 and East Broad Street.

Construction has started to extend the Texas 360 lanes approximately one mile south from I-20 to Sublett Road.

The \$16.7 million project will include an overpass on Green Oaks Boulevard and is scheduled to be completed by fall 2007.

But that's where the funding ends.

"Besides that, there's nothing else planned," Lopez said.

Completing Texas 360 could have even larger implications if proposed the Trans Texas Corridor ends up going on the highway. The corridor would provide quicker access to and from the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport and the Dallas Cowboy Stadium in Arlington and Austin and San Antonio.

The service roads also raise environmental issues because the stop signs create congestion that lowers fuel economy, Chandler said.

Landowners and developers were invited to a fund-raising event after the meeting to help pay for Young's visit so taxpayers wouldn't have to, Chandler said.

