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Driving on Texas 360 could be taxing

City leaders will consider toll to pay for extension

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Commuters who travel on Texas 360 may have to pay a toll if the project gets put on the fast track.

City leaders from Mansfield, Arlington and Grand Prairie are meeting Wednesday to discuss how construction of the road, which will someday lead to several high-profile economic projects and thousands more homes, could be sped up.

One way that Texas 360 could be given a higher priority is to make the 10-mile stretch of highway from Interstate 20 to U.S. 287 a toll road, said Lara Rodriguez, public information coordinator for the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

The Texas Department of Transportation currently has no funds to expand the highway into Mansfield, said TxDOT spokesman Val Lopez. He said the timing of the project would depend on traffic counts and available funding, but there are no plans to make the highway a toll way.

But that could change.

House Bill 3588, which the Texas Legislature passed in 2003, makes it possible for any new highway, such as Texas 121 from Lewisville to Frisco, to be made into a toll road.

It all comes down to how a project can be funded, Rodriguez said.

"If there was some way to accelerate funding, that could speed up the process," she said.

A toll road is one of those ways.

Texas 360 forms the eastern border of the Golden Triangle where a number of high-profile economic development projects are planned, including Big League Dreams, South Pointe, the MISD Athletic Complex and the Methodist Mansfield Medical Center.

The highway acts as a gateway for residents in Mansfield, Arlington and Grand Prairie commuting north to work in the Metroplex.

"All of those facilities get access off of 360," Melissa

Woodall, interim director of the Mansfield Economic Development Corp.

Leland Consulting Group is in the process of completing an in-depth marketing study on the Golden Triangle, the largely undeveloped 2,600-acre area bounded by Texas 360, U.S. 287 and East Broad Street.

Anne Ricker, managing principal of Leland, said the completion of Texas 360 is "critically" important to the economic development in south Mansfield. The highway needs to be comparable to U.S. 287 in order to bring people to the project, she said.

"It's another front door to the project," she said.

It could be another 10 to 12 years before the road becomes more than just a series of service roads with stop signs through Mansfield, Woodall

said.

"If we're aggressive the timeframe would be five to seven years," she said.

The only construction that has been funded is an overpass

at Green Oaks/Kingswood boulevards at the Arlington/Grand Prairie border, Lopez said. The \$12.8 million project will extend the freeway nearly a mile south to Sub-

lett/Camp Wisdom roads.

The bridge would allow motorists to skip the light at Green Oaks Boulevard, which often gets congested during rush hour.