

August 27, 2002

John W. Johnson

Texas Transportation Commission
125 E. 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Commissioner Johnson,

Thank you for visiting Fort Worth for your meeting in July. The city and the North Texas region as a whole face significant transportation challenges in the near and long term. We appreciate that the Department of Transportation is an important resource for providing transportation solutions for the state.

We are writing to alert you to a potential waste of scarce transportation resources that is being promoted in Fort Worth. It was not on your agenda last month so we did not raise the issue at your meeting, but it looms as a major expenditure over the next several years.

The project in question is known by two names: The Southwest Parkway and State Highway 121Toll (SH121T). It is proposed to connect Interstate 30 in downtown Fort Worth with Interstate 20 in southwest Fort Worth and then to proceed southward for several miles. Service roads for the highway would eventually be built to Cleburne in Johnson County. The project is in the design phase and the draft environmental impact statement has been prepared.

The toll portion of the road would only be from downtown Fort Worth to just beyond I-20, a distance of about 9 miles. That is significant because the project will tap the TxDOT program for paying for interchanges between toll roads and the interstate highway system. In that 9-mile stretch, TxDOT would pay for two major interchanges at a cost in excess of \$100 million. Of further interest is the fact that, due to ramp designs, over ¼ of the tollway length would consist of those two interchanges.

Were the proposed highway to solve traffic or congestion problems it might be a suitable, although expensive, project for TxDOT participation. That is, however, not the case. In fact, the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) traffic modeling predicts less than a 10% reduction in traffic on parallel roads when the tollway is opened. Wilbur Smith and Associates (in a study for the North Texas Tollway Authority) projects the travel time saved over existing routes to be less than 6 minutes. Furthermore, the NCTCOG models predict that the new interchange with I-30 will significantly worsen congestion on that facility on the west side of downtown Fort Worth.

We urge the Transportation Commission to review state participation in the project described above. The review should include an assessment of transportation problems proposed to be solved relative to the investment by the state. In other words, the study

should be a technical, transportation-based evaluation of the proposed tollway and TxDOT participation. To date, no study that begins with a transportation problem statement and concludes with the proposed solution has been conducted for the project. Meanwhile, significantly congested roadways in other parts of Tarrant County and the metroplex lack funding for needed improvements.

We believe that an objective review will find that the project is being promoted for transportation when it actually for land development in southwestern Tarrant County. There is not a transportation problem in that area today, nor on the planning horizon, that warrants the proposed level of participation by the taxpayers of the state of Texas. In fact, it appears that the year 2025 projected traffic for the tollway could easily be carried by a six lane arterial roadway, at much lower cost.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and for your service to the State of Texas.

Respectfully Submitted,

Benjamin Isgur

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