



**NEWS** Local News

## Dallas North Tollway's Frisco extension opens Sept. 28

Road through Frisco should help traffic in rapidly growing section

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Frisco residents will find it much easier to get to the Dallas North Tollway beginning Sept. 28.

The North Texas Tollway Authority announced Thursday that the newest segment of the tollway will run 9.6 miles between State Highway 121 and U.S. 380.

Frontage roads along the new toll lanes are already open – and heavily used, said Frisco Mayor Mike Simpson, who welcomed the news. As many as 50,000 vehicles a day travel the frontage roads, Mr. Simpson said.

"It's going to relieve a lot of congestion and improve their travel times," Mr. Simpson said. "Commuters are going to get to work faster and get home earlier."

The \$264 million construction project began nearly three years ago and will continue after the segment's Sept. 28 opening. Even so, officials said all three lanes in both directions will open that day.

Collin County Commissioner Phyllis Cole said in a written statement released by the NTTA that the road comes just in time to help relieve congestion caused by rapid development in western Collin County.

"This is welcome relief for those who live, work and commute through this fast-growing end of the county," she said.

The new tollway segment should help thin out traffic in other parts of Frisco, too.

That's good news, said Mr. Simpson, who added that the city has spent a lot on building new roads to keep up with population growth. By 2008, he said, the city will have spent more than \$300 million on local roads and roads Frisco has taken over from the state.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that Frisco's population has more than doubled since 2000, jumping from 33,000 to 88,000 in 2006. That spike followed even more spectacular growth in the previous decade, when the city's population soared about 450 percent.

Key to that growth was a previous extension of the Dallas North Tollway, which opened in 1994 and brought the road to Highway 121. Now that the road will pass through Frisco, Mr. Simpson said, northern parts of the county stand to make similar gains.

"The population here just continues to grow, even in the area north of Frisco," he said.

The NTTA is planning a fourth phase of the Dallas North Tollway, one that would stretch from U.S. 380 to the Grayson County line.

And growth in the cities to Frisco's north has gathered considerable steam. One example: The Prosper Independent School District is asking voters to approve more than \$700 million in bonds to build new schools.

There's a warning buried in those numbers that should be heard even amid the relief over the opening of the new segment, Mr. Simpson and others said: New roads alone won't be enough.

Like city leaders throughout much of Dallas-Fort Worth, Mr. Simpson supported a proposal before the state Legislature last session that would have let cities ask voters to approve sales taxes increases to expand Dallas Area Rapid Transit. That bill failed, though supporters have begun organizing for another attempt.

"We spent a year and a half on the regional rail initiative and got 106 local entities to sign off on a single proposal," Mr. Simpson said. "We will have to just start again."

Walter J. Humann, a longtime North Texas community leader who is often credited as the godfather of DART, said the campaign to get the law passed in 2009 has begun. Some business leaders have resisted the notion of increasing the sales tax, but Mr. Humann said this week's Texas Transportation Institute report on rising traffic congestion in Dallas makes the expansion of DART vital.

"We ought to think big," he said. "We are North Texas, and we have one of the truly great regions."

Thinking big, in this case, he said, means thinking beyond roads – even the good news that comes with expanding the tollway.

"We need to find ways to move large numbers of people around, especially at rush hour, and roads aren't going to be able to do it by themselves," he said.