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# Makeover of NE Loop 820 and Airport Freeway will start soon

► The North Tarrant Express is a four-year, multibillion-dollar project.

By Gordon Dickson  
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With all the talk about the \$1 billion DFW Connector project under way in Grapevine, Tarrant County motorists may not realize that an even bigger project is about to kick off just down the road.

It's the megamakeover of Northeast Loop 820 and Airport Freeway, a \$2-billion-plus job dubbed the North Tarrant Express, which cuts through far north Fort Worth, Haltom City, North Richland Hills, Hurst, Euless and Bedford.

By late October, motorists will see the beginning of work zone preparations, particularly near the always strapped 820/Interstate 35W interchange, said

Robert Hinkle, spokesman for developer North Tarrant Express Mobility Partners.

And as early as 2012, work may begin on another Northeast Tarrant project — the addition of toll lanes on Interstate 35W from I-30 near downtown Fort Worth to North Tarrant Parkway, just past the U.S. 287 split.

That phase was initially not planned for at least a decade, but on Wednesday state officials announced a tentative agreement with Mobility Partners to add the I-35W work, including a makeover of the poorly designed

interchange at I-35W and 820 and removal of all left-lane exits — and get those new lanes open by 2017.

In all, the work on Loop 820, 121/183 and I-35W could total \$3.3 billion, most of which Mobility Partners, led by Spain-based Cintra, would bring to the table.

In return, it would keep tolls collected on the project for 52 years. The toll lanes would be all-electronic, and motorists would pay them via a Toll-Tag.

Those without a TollTag would have their license plates photographed and be billed.

Public funds spent on the project would total \$773 million, including at least \$10 million from Tarrant County for right of way and utilities.

Initial work on the North Tarrant Express project shouldn't cause major traffic disruptions,

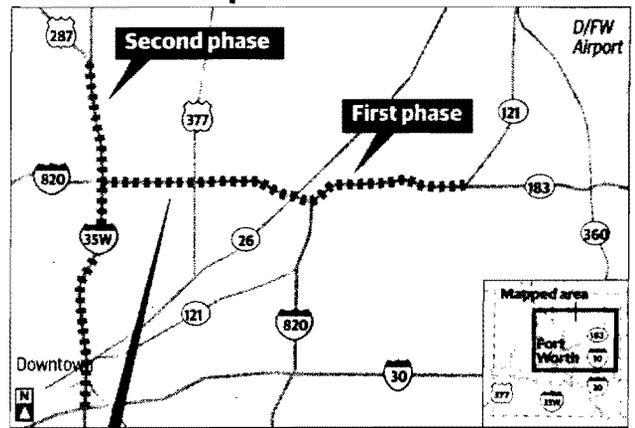
Hinkle said.

"They'll start putting the pad sites down and preparing the sites for heavy equipment and the cranes between now and the end of the year," Hinkle said.

But he said drivers probably won't have to worry about narrow lanes or other obstructions that could significantly slow their commute until late this year or early 2011.

Mobility Partners plans to invite the public to an

## North Tarrant Express



The first phase of Northeast Loop 820/Airport Freeway expansion is scheduled to begin in late October with completion set for 2015. Negotiations are also under way to expand I-35W by 2017.

open house Oct. 27 in Hurst to make sure area residents understand what to expect during an estimated four years of construction.

Northeast 820 will likely be the first area of the project under construction, during winter, followed by work on Texas 121/183 — aka Airport Freeway — probably in the spring, he said. But at different times during the next four years, several stretches of road could be

under construction simultaneously.

The project includes reconstruction of existing lanes, plus two new toll lanes in each direction of 820 and 121/183. Frontage roads, safer ramps and flyovers will also be added.

That work, which totals about \$2.1 billion, is expected to be completed by 2015.

The tentative deal for work on the I-35W toll lanes requires an extra \$135 million in public funds,

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possibly from Proposition 14 bonds backed by state gas taxes.

In October, the Texas Transportation Commission will consider the deal.

Texas has a logjam of several hundred road projects because of a shortage of state tax-supported funds. Communities that bring outside revenue to projects can expect them to go to the top of the list of state priorities, one official noted.

"I hold up the creativity in the Metroplex as an example the rest of the state needs to look at," commission member Ned Holmes of Houston said. "It's very impressive."

Transportation Department officials and some lawmakers have said the state will run out of tax-supported funds for new road work by 2012 and will then use its highway fund mostly for maintenance.

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Gordon Dickson, 817-390-7796

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## Officer who missed Lone Star Park event for funeral duty gets a refund - and more

Sunday, October 3, 2010 Dallas Morning News

A police officer working in a funeral honor guard wound up missing his family's gathering at Lone Star Park at Grand Prairie. "I was hoping you could persuade them to do a refund," his mother, Joan Fraticelli, asked Problem Solver. "It's just an awful lot of money to us."

Fraticelli, her three sons, their wives and her 5-year-old grandson all had tickets to attend the family outing at the track this summer. "We've been going there for years. I love the place and my sons do, too," she said. "This time, my son really wanted his son to see the horses."

Then tragedy struck when the son of Dallas Police Chief David Brown got into a shootout, killing Lancaster police Officer Craig Shaw and another man before he was shot and killed.

Shaw, a five-year veteran of the Lancaster police force, was the first to respond to the reports of Brown's gunfire. His death in the line of duty was a first for the city. Police from surrounding cities lined up to offer support in honoring their own.

Ramon Fraticelli has served with the Euless police force for six years and is in charge of the department's honor guard. He knew his place that Saturday was at the funeral service and cemetery.

"I told my family we couldn't make it, but they thought I might be able to show up for the later races since the funeral was in the morning," he said. In hopes of still getting together that day, his brother left tickets for him, his wife and son at the will-call booth.

But that day was long and filled with grief. The activities, including the service, escorted procession to the cemetery and graveside services with a horse-drawn carriage, began in the morning but stretched into late afternoon.

Fraticelli was OK with that and was resigned to losing the \$81 spent on the tickets. But his mother wasn't. "She asked them for a refund, got upset about it and then wouldn't let it go," he said.

She believes she was taking a principled stand. After all, her son was doing his duty. "He's very modest. He would never himself have pursued this. He would have just walked away, but it's an awful lot of money," she said. "I just felt like it was beyond his control."

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Fortunately, Lone Star Park also feels the same way. "Our admissions department employee was correct in explaining that we have a no-refund policy on our reserved seat sales," said G.W. Hail, vice president and assistant general manager. "However, this situation was unavoidable."

Hail said Lone Star would be happy to offer Fraticelli six seats in the house box at a comparable race next spring during thoroughbred season at the track. Those tickets represent some of the best seats available. The seats are at the finish line and come with wait service and bet runners. You never even have to leave your seat.

"Our mission statement is 'creating winning experiences,' " Hail said, explaining why he was offering twice the number of tickets than went unused. He then sweetened his offer even more. "We will also include a paddock tour before the race by yours truly and a winner's circle photograph of his party," Hail said. "They'll be set."

The Fraticellis think so, too. "Wow. That's a little much, but it's really great," Ramon Fraticelli said. His mother was happy to hear it, too.

"We've always liked going there. I'm just delighted. It's real nice of them to do something," she said.

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## LETTERS

### Meeting too distant

I'm not sure how many other city councils take their annual budget planning meeting out of the city, but the Eulesse council does.

For at least the last five years, the meeting has been in Kaufman, nearly 60 miles from City Hall.

This meeting, required by law to be open, is essentially closed because it is so far away.

This is a three-day event, which would make a Eulesse resident drive nearly 360 miles to observe all or part of each day's

activities. This places an extraordinary burden on anyone who wants to attend.

Not only that, this year's facility rental, lodging and meals cost more than \$6,000, which is an unnecessary expense. The remodeled Eulesse City Hall is perfectly suitable to host this meeting.

Is the Eulesse council moving this meeting out of the city to intentionally limit access?

I ask the residents of Eulesse to write or call Mayor Mary Lib Saleh to ask why.

- Darl Easton, Eulesse

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# Sales tax collections up locally, statewide

■ In Tarrant County, they rose nearly 6 percent in August compared with a year ago.

By Anna M. Tinsley  
 atinsley@star-telegram.com

Monthly sales tax collections in Texas rose 6.8 percent over the same month last year, giving some officials hope that the state's financial picture may finally be improving.

Many Tarrant County cities showed increases as well — some in the double digits and one in the triple digits — although a few showed decreases, the largest in Westlake, where sales tax collections dropped 8.43 percent from this time last year.

"This increase is significantly larger than recent monthly gains, which have been in the 0 to 2 percent range," state Comptroller Susan Combs said Wednesday. "Sales tax increases were posted across almost all sectors, including oil and gas, construction, manufacturing, wholesale trade, retail trade and restaurants."

Tarrant County overall saw a 5.96 percent increase in sales tax collections in August, compared with a year earlier, pumping an additional \$1.6 million into area city coffers.

In Fort Worth, sales tax collections grew more than 7 percent, prompting officials to say they are "cautiously optimistic" about the economic future.

"This is positive news for us," said Horatio Porter, Fort Worth's budget officer. "We might be seeing some signs of consumer spending. With two to three months of positive numbers for the city, it could suggest the worst is behind us."

The sales tax collection numbers were released as a new National League of Cities report shows that cities aren't out from under the recession and many say they are financially worse off than they were last year.

As less revenue flows into cities, officials say they are reducing spending, laying off workers, delaying infrastructure projects and modifying health benefits, according to the City Fiscal Conditions in 2010 report.

"This historic recession has forced city officials to make difficult decisions that impact the social and economic fabric of their communities," said Ronald Loveridge, head of the league and mayor of Riverside, Calif.

Westlake was among the municipalities that saw a drop in sales tax dollars, collecting about \$18,000 less than it did this time last year.

The volatility of sales tax collections is part of what prompted Westlake leaders this month to enact the town's first property tax, 16 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

"Forecasting our sales tax is difficult," Town Manager Tom Brymer said.

"There have been some swings. . . . Hopefully we'll catch up next month."

In Tarrant County, Pelican Bay saw the largest increase — 223 percent — which officials have attributed to a new convenience store opening in their small community.

Haslet saw collections grow 54.28 percent, Blue Mound's tax collections grew 38.07 percent, and Dalworthington Gardens' collections went up 37.72 percent.

Arlington, where sales tax numbers have risen since Cowboys Stadium opened in June 2009, saw a slight drop last month, but collections this month picked up 1.53 percent.

Arlington Budget Manager Mike Finley said that with the latest gain, the city expects to end fiscal 2010 with a \$750,000 balance.

That money can be used for one-time expenditures, such as public safety vehicles or technology upgrades.

Arlington will receive one more sales tax check for fiscal 2010, in November

Staff writer Susan Schrock contributed to this report.

Anna M. Tinsley, 817-390-7610

**By the numbers**  
 The amounts collected in October are based on August sales for businesses. A look at some cities in Tarrant County:

City	2010	2009	Change
Arlington	\$6.3 million	\$6.25 million	1.53%
Bedford	\$716,644	\$675,860	6.03%
Eules	\$884,735	\$810,261	9.19%
Fort Worth	\$78 million	\$73 million	7.05%
Hurst	\$1 million	\$972,892	3.24%
Mansfield	\$1.1 million	\$1 million	8.12%
North Richland Hills	\$991,164	\$873,677	13.44%
River Oaks	\$28,750	\$29,996	-4.15%
Southlake	\$1 million	\$978,270	4.97%
White Settlement	\$225,772	\$198,534	13.71%

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# A labor of love – and lamb

■ A Euless church has been hard at work to get its Greek festival ready.

By Jessamy Brown

jessamybrown@star-telegram.com

EULESS – Parishioners of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church have worked for weeks to prepare for this weekend's Mid-Cities Greek Fest.

Bakers have made pans of baklava, the popular pastry with layers of buttered phyllo dough and honey syrup. It will be served along with other traditional favorites such as gyro pita sandwiches, Greek coffee and stuffed grape leaves. An open grill will serve up octopus, sausage, fried cheese, roasted garlic and lamb on a stick. New this year is a \$30 Olympic Sampler Dinner for two, including several entrees, Greek salad and bread, and two desserts, allowing diners to try several dishes.

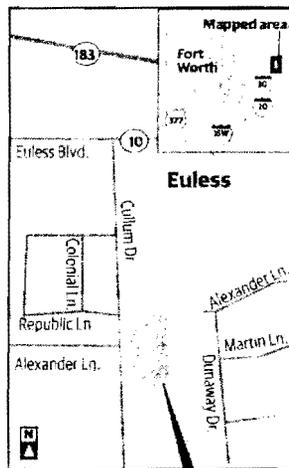
"We've been baking all fall," said Harriet Blake, the event's publicity co-chairwoman. "They started making all the items that can be frozen. This week, they've been marinating the meat. They're putting up the stage. It takes the whole community to put this on."

The festival, which begins today, will also include live music, Greek dancing and church tours led by parish priest Vasile Tudora.

The 19th annual event raises money for the church's building fund. The 200 families in the parish expect to begin construction next year on a Byzantine-style building next to the current building on Cullum Drive, Blake said.

The parish started in 1980 with 50 people who met in a local Episcopal church. It moved to the Hurst-Euless-Bedford

## Greek festival



St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is hosting a food festival through Sunday

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Chamber of Commerce building and then to its present location in 1985.

Jessamy Brown, 817-390-7326

## If you go

- The 19th annual Mid-Cities Greek Fest
- St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, 303 Cullum Drive, Euless
- Free parking and admission
- 11 a.m.-10 p.m. today-Saturday; 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday
- [midcitiesgreekfest.info](http://midcitiesgreekfest.info)



For many festivalgoers, a highlight will be the trays of baklava. The pastry is made of layers of buttered phyllo dough and honey syrup. Gyros and stuffed grape leaves will also be served.

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Fanita Limberis, left, rehearses a dance with Elizabeth Ruppel, Elise Peters and Megan Huber for the 2005 Mid-Cities Greek Fest. Greek dancing and live music are again on the schedule for this weekend's festival, which will raise money for the Euless congregation's building fund.

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